The Traveling Spark
Alice Yardley and Child-Centred Education,
The Development of Her Educational Thought, 1913-2002

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

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Acknowledgments

I’ve learned so much. About myself, about persistence, about patience and impatience. About the history of ideas, the craft of writing, and the power of the imagination. About my subject, Alice Yardley, whose vision of school as a place where children could reveal themselves in all their full-throated glory, in a process of democratic exchange, led me to her and kept me by her side during this long project.

I call my dissertation The Traveling Spark after the spark of communication lit between minds, between Alice Yardley and myself, and between all of us in the enterprise and adventure of education, through the fire of ideas and images that warm the spirit and speak of the social nature of learning, for children in school, and for adults as well. We learn in relationship. We learn in community, and so many people have been part of that community for me.

Thank you to Frank Davis whose wise direction of Lesley University’s Ph.D. program in Educational Studies, allowed me to pursue my topic with the focus and concentration I craved, and to Caroline Heller, generous spirit and my gentle guide; to Branca Ribeiro and Jo Ann Gammel, for their enthusiastic support, and for giving me a research home over the last two years, with the added gift of George Hein as my office mate. Thank you to my fellow research scholar at Brandeis, Louise Levesque-Lopman, who introduced me to phenomenological sociology, to the philosopher Jane Roland Martin, whose work on the development of educational thought was essential to my own, and to my intellectual mothers, Katherine Weiler and Lydia Smith, whose scholarship on the history of women in education has lighted my way.

I want to say thank you to my senior advisor and committee chair, Bill Stokes, who for ten years has encouraged and challenged me, exhorted and cheered me. His patient care, flexibility, high standards, and knowledge of the history and philosophy of education, were crucial to the final shape of my work. And to the other members of my committee; Sandy Langer for her encouragement and appreciation for the craft of writing, Joanne Szamreta for her careful readings, sensitivity to social context and keen eye for the stories of teaching embedded in the text, and to Karen Maloney, a special thanks. Karen saved me in these last months, meeting me every week at various coffee houses, manuscript in hand, reading and reading my work, convincing me, in spite of so many doubts, that I could do it, I could finish.

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I want to thank my family; my mother, Priscilla Baker, a passionate reader of fiction and non fiction, whose interest in people and ideas continues to energize her, and to inspire me; my children, Abigail, Rosie and Ben, and their loved ones, John, Jeff and Angie, who believed in me and never failed to support me; my sister Miranda and my brother Brock and their families, far away yet steady here beside me, and my research partners and friends in England, Morwenna Griffiths, Stevie and John Vanhegan, Dorothy Glynn and Hazel Menzies, whose help and consideration gave me a vitally important home away from home. I am grateful for financial support in the shape of research and travel grants from both Lesley University and Nottingham-Trent University.

Finally I want to express my gratitude to Alice Yardley, my muse, my lady, my research partner, and my friend. Her words and thoughts are the firm ground on which this project stands.

Thank you, Alice.
Abstract

The British author and educator Alice Yardley (1913-2002) worked in Nottingham City Schools (UK) as a teacher and headteacher between 1934 and 1961, and was instrumental in the evolution of the English Infant School for five to seven year olds as a model of progressive theory and practice in action. Between 1970 and 1974 Alice Yardley wrote a series of eight books published as the Young Children Learning Series. Each volume covers a range of topics connected to a particular aspect of the child’s life in ‘the modern Infant School’, where the teacher- child relationship is one of mutual respect, and an individualized child-centered approach to teaching encourages exploration, experimentation, and the development of aesthetic feeling and self-expression (Yardley, 1970, p.7). When first published, these books were widely read in Britain, the US, and Canada, during a period of intense interest in the British Primary School and its American manifestation in the open education movement.

Having first read and loved Alice Yardley’s books as a beginning teacher, twenty years later I became interested in the question of how the philosophical and pedagogical stance evidenced in her published work evolved in the course of her life as an educator. In 1996 I traveled to England to meet her, and in 1999 began the work of documenting her educational life story. Alice Yardley died in 2002 at the age of eighty-eight.

Based on information gathered from interviews with Alice Yardley over a three year period (1999-2002) and incorporating a number of primary sources, including her memoir, notebooks, archival documents and records, visits to places where she lived and taught, and conversations with her colleagues and students, the dissertation draws on historical and interpretive biographical methods, and a feminist oral history structure, in which subject and researcher are active in the construction of the narrative.

Setting her work in the social and historical context of a period of increased interest in ‘following the child’, I trace the development of Alice Yardley’s educational thought through her experiences in childhood, as a teacher in infant classrooms, during World War II, and as the head of three large inner city schools. The influence of these experiences, and key events – what she called ‘thinking points’- on her theory and approach as expressed in her published work is considered, and consistent themes are followed to their mature articulation in the first four books in the Young Children Learning series. A summary of Alice Yardley’s educational philosophy is also included.

This work brings into the public domain the figure of Alice Yardley, a seminal woman educator and teacher-writer in the history of child-centered education. It also bears witness to our collaboration over space and time in a joint mission of making the invisible visible, capturing an important story in the history of women in education whose often unseen work contributed to the forward movement of progressive educational practice and theory in the twentieth century.
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Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One introduces the topic and the question under study.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature relevant to an examination of the historical, philosophical and social roots of the British Primary School, child-centered education, and the development of the English Infant School. It ends with an overview of Alice Yardley’s work in the Infant Schools of Nottingham.

Chapter Three describes my methods of information gathering, and the feminist perspective that informed my methodology and relationship to my subject, as it evolved over the course of the project. It is organized to show three aspects of my method at different points in time. Section one shows how I came to know Alice, section two is a glimpse of one of our sessions together, and contains part of a transcribed interview, and section three is a description of how I organized the data for the purposes of writing the chronological narrative presented in Chapter Four. In section four I reflect further on the interdisciplinary nature of my methods, and the theories that informed them.

Chapter Four represents the heart of my work. It describes in narrative form the chronology of Alice Yardley’s educational life history, and intellectual development, from 1914 to 1961, beginning with her childhood and ending when she resigned from headteaching to become a college lecturer. Chapter Four contains the following sections:

Section One; Childhood and College

Section Two: Teaching begins: Forest Field, William Crane and Player

Section Three: Headteaching: St. Anne’s
Sections Four: Headteaching: William Crane and Brooksby

Chapter Five looks at Alice Yardley’s educational writing:

- Section One examines three notebooks she kept between 1944 and 1961 that reflect her evolving teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach.
- Section Two is an exposition and analysis of the educational thought, approach and theory that forms the content of the first four books in the Young Children Learning Series, published between 1970 and 1971.
- Section Three is an overview of Alice Yardley’s philosophy and theory of education.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and implications for education.

Sections following Chapter Six:

Appendix

Chronology of Research Trips

Dates for Alice Yardley

Documents: photocopies of original sources from notebooks, photos, etc.

References
Chapter One

Research is ‘Adventurous Living’

During my early years of teaching, I found myself returning often to the words of the English writer and teacher, Alice Yardley. Her books had been given to me by Helen Frost, our first teacher at the cooperative school I started with other young parents in rural Vermont. Helen had done her student teaching in England, and had come across Alice Yardley’s work there. When Helen left, I took over the role of teacher, inheriting, along with Helen’s child-centered approach, several small volumes written by Alice Yardley. One of these books, “The Teacher of Young Children”, I later brought back to its source, to Alice Yardley herself. This small book became an emblem of intercultural exchange, a traveling spark flying from continent to continent and back again, containing between its covers words of possibility; tangible yet intangible, object and spirit at the same time. From Alice Yardley, to Helen Frost, to myself, and back to Alice Yardley the transport of this small volume became a metaphor for the words within it; “intellectual inquiry is stimulated by the sparking off of mind against mind” (Yardley, 1971).

Teachers in Yardley’s vision of school were engaged in a project of transformative possibilities, in the process of learning from their students, and above all they paid attention to building relationships with children:

Perhaps the most severe test of personality for the teacher is the kind of relationship she makes with the children. How to influence them without requiring them to
conform to her sense of values, and how to put their needs before her own self-satisfaction, are the most difficult challenges a teacher may have to face. The relationship between teacher and child should enable the child to develop his individuality in a way which is entirely his own. He should be liberated in the relationship rather than bound by it, and, because of the support the relationship provides him, his delight in adventurous living should be intensified (Yardley, 1971, p.32).

These words of Alice Yardley’s were important to me as a beginning teacher. After I met Alice Yardley, they meant something quite different. I myself became the student-researcher, the one “liberated in the relationship” with my teacher-subject. As our relationship grew and deepened, my world broadened, and my taste for scholarly pursuit intensified; I felt a renewed “delight in adventurous living” as I kept going back to visit Alice Yardley, and to travel the many roads of her past and present. At the same time, I believe that my keen and scholarly interest in her life increased Alice Yardley’s sense of the ongoing adventure that her later years might present. Out of the blue, she found a stranger, and an American, traveling to England in pursuit of her life story.

Spilling out of the bounds of formal exchange between scholar and subject, our research relationship gave us courage. We were adventurers together, gaining understanding of each other and ourselves in the process.
The approach to learning for young children which developed in England between 1930 and 1980 in the English Primary School and the Infants' School within it, was a particularly successful and vivid manifestation of progressive educational thinking. Called "progressive", "modern", "informal" and "open"; Charles Silberman described it as not so much an approach or a method as "a set of shared attitudes and convictions about the nature of childhood, learning, and schooling." (1970). Not only in Britain, but also in Europe, Canada and the United States, this new approach to primary education brought about profound changes in how young children were educated.

The English Infants' School Movement as it developed between 1930 and 1980, had roots in the social history and intellectual traditions of English state sponsored elementary education from the beginning of the 20th century; traditions that supported the institution of separate schools for the five to seven years olds 'Infants' within the umbrella of the Primary School (Hadow, 1934), that encouraged teachers and headteachers to design curriculum (Blackie, 1971), to emphasize child-study (Isaacs, 1930) and to give a primary place to the arts in early childhood education (Read, 1945). These traditions contributed to the Infants' School as a model of progressive theory and practice in action, and to Alice Yardley's particular innovations to educational practice in Nottingham.

Though Alice Yardley's published writings described infants schools (schools for five to seven year olds) as she knew them between 1934 and 1973, the story of her teaching life
and thought had not been told. Exactly how did she develop her approach to the education of young children, first in the context of her early years as a classroom teacher, and later on, as the head of two large infant schools, and a third primary school? How did her teaching practice influence the mature articulation of her theory and approach as they are expressed in her published work?

This dissertation represents the results of my search to find the answer to this question, based on information gathered from interviews with Alice Yardley over a three year period (1999-2002) and incorporating a number of primary sources, including a memoir, her teaching notebooks, and my conversations with a number of her colleagues and students. It presents an account of the development of Alice Yardley’s educational thought, starting in her childhood and culminating in her authorship of the Young Children Learning series, published between 1970 and 1973.

Theoretical grounding and research design

The theoretical grounding of my research draws from the interdisciplinary fields of educational studies, women’s studies, and biography. Within educational studies, my work has been informed by the study of the history, philosophy, and psychology of education, in relation to the development of progressive educational theory and practice since the middle of the nineteenth century. Within women’s studies, qualitative research in the social sciences has provided a theoretical framework for the methodology I used for my study of Alice Yardley, and recent work on the historiography of women teachers
(Crocco, Monro & Weiler, 1999, McBeth and Horne, 1998) by feminist historians, using both oral history and archival sources, has also informed my work. I have also made use of Denzin’s work on interpretive biography, in which procedural steps in creating a biographical account involve the construction of the subject’s “life course stages and experiences” in a chronology organized around key stories or epiphanies” (Denzin, 1989a, as cited in Creswell, 1997, p.51).

My methods of information gathering have included review of historical documents, interview, (taped and untaped) use of historical documents belonging to Alice Yardley and her colleagues, and school records from the city of Nottingham. I have also used ethnographic methods in spending time in Nottingham city primary schools, a primary school in Keyworth headed by a former student of Alice Yardley’s, and in the same university setting where Alice Yardley worked as a lecturer for Nottingham College. I traveled to places where she had lived as a child and as a college student. Conversations with several of her colleagues and friends, interviews with two students of Alice, and a headteacher of a large school on the old William Crane Estate in Nottingham also added to my research sources.

Contribution to the Field

Alice Yardley had published short stories, a novel, articles, and many books on various aspects of early education, but, to my knowledge at the time of beginning this research
project, in 1999, she hadn't published an autobiography. Much later, and only after she had died, I did discover a detailed and extensive memoir she had written shortly after her retirement from teaching at Nottingham College. She never told me of the existence of this memoir. Whether this was a deliberate omission or not, it seems to me now that, in a later stage in her life, my research project gave Alice Yardley the unexpected opportunity to join me in a collaborative reconstruction of her life and thought, and its relation to the development of the English Infants' School.

In the area of educational studies, the lives of individual teachers continue to be the subject of current exploration by feminist historians of education. Joyce Antler’s feminist biography of Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1987), and Kathleen Weiler’s study of country schoolwomen (1998), examine the lives of female reformers and educators in the US since the mid-nineteenth century. In Essie’s Story a collaborative oral history records the life work of a Shoshone teacher and elder, Esther Burnett Horne (Horne and McBeth, 1998). Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobold, in their cross-cultural study of women teaching in English-speaking countries over the last two centuries, note that "historians have recently begun to examine teachers' history through the eyes of its female subjects" with an insistence on "understanding historical women on their own terms" (1991, p.14). Karen Maloney and Connie Titone have reintroduced students of education to Women's Philosophies of Education (1999). The work of these scholars has illuminated the sometimes hidden but always active role of women as change agents in educational reform.
Through my work on Alice Yardley, I hope to add to the current scholarship on the history of progressive education in the twentieth century, and the often neglected work of women teachers who, in their individual contexts, were instrumental in implementing innovative child-centered practices. Alice Yardley was a teacher, thinker and writer who helped shape the infant schools of Nottingham into unique institutions geared to meet the needs of young children. The story of her teaching life and the development of her educational thought is part of the untold history of teachers in classrooms throughout the world. My hope is that it will bring renewed appreciation for the relevance, vitality and coherence of Alice Yardley’s child-centered philosophy of education, and her approach to the teaching of young children.
Chapter Two

Historical and Philosophical Roots of the British Primary School

In the spring of 1970, before I had any experience as a classroom teacher, I read Joseph Featherstone's articles in the New Republic describing the "informal ways of working" he found in primary schools in England. At the time I was a graduate student doing research on non-graded schools. Featherstone's descriptions filled me with enormous excitement and wonder at the miraculous existence of these child-centered environments, which were supported, approved and celebrated by Her Majesties Inspectors - in other words, they were public schools in the American sense, not private "independent" schools. In Featherstone's articles, subsequently published under the title *Schools Where Children Learn*, he wrote of schools where children were in charge of their own curriculum, free to make choices about projects they wished to pursue and to pursue them on their own time-table uninterrupted by the arbitrary arrival of the next subject (a concept which came to be known as the integrated day), schools where children worked independently and creatively with an abundance of open ended materials such as clay, fabric, paint, sand and water. Children wrote their own stories without the constraints of conventional spelling, worked in mixed-age groups, and might spend hours absorbed in making a model, playing home-made instruments, choreographing drama and "movement”, or experimenting with wheels and pulleys. In addition, often these groups of children were very large, thirty to forty in a room. Halls
and corridors were used, and there was a freedom of movement from the indoors to the outdoors; what Lillian Weber in her year long investigation of English infant schools, came to call "in- and- outness".

Ten years later, when I began classroom teaching for the first time, I found inspiration and strength in the words of Alice Yardley, a lecturer at the University of Nottingham, and the author of a series of books on the education of young children published in the early seventies. Her description of infant schools, and of the teachers and children within them are imbued with trust in children and teachers as growing, learning individuals who will find their own way, in a carefully prepared, nourishing environment, to realizing their full and unique potential. Central to Yardley's thinking is the nature of the relationship between teacher and child. In her book *A Teacher of Young Children* she describes the role of the teacher in this way: "The adult who stimulates thought and speech in a child, and then listens while he attempts to communicate thought in the shape of words, is the child's most effective educator. The teacher who can stimulate questions on the part of the child, and then listen to him when he tries to think aloud in search of answers to his own questions, is the most powerful intellectual challenge the child can have." (Yardley, 1973, p. 46) Implicit in her attitude towards the nature of these school environments is a degree of respect for the individual differences between teachers, and institutional support for experimentation on the part of new teachers which I found tremendously reassuring. Yardley's books were given to me by a friend and teaching colleague, Helen Frost, who had spent time in England as a student intern, and who was my daughter's first teacher. Helen's gentle authority in the classroom
was informed by her belief in the organic character of children's learning as she had seen it at work in an English primary school.

What were the reasons for the success of these informal methods in the English primary Schools? Innovations such as multi-age groupings, a process oriented, "workshop" approach to teaching writing, individualized reading programs, and systematic use of mathematical apparatus to teach concepts which have now become current in some of the more progressive US public elementary schools had been part of English public education for several decades, though, admittedly, the inroads of the last twenty years since Margaret Thatcher's arrival as Prime Minister have been felt in England in an increased focus on 'accountability' and standardization.

In any event, in 1970 in this country most innovative schools using similar informal methods that I knew about were found only in the private sector (Shady Hill here in Cambridge being one of them), and seemed to be looked on with suspicion by only those but the most "progressive" parents. In spite of the emphasis on learning through experience, on giving children "practice in democracy", and of the natural integration of subjects in the mind of the learning child articulated by the American philosopher John Dewey (ably demonstrated through his documentation of the success of the "project method" at the Chicago Laboratory School in the early 1900s), progressive "informal" approaches until very recently remained on the fringes of public education in this country.
By 1970 in England public elementary schools reflected the revolutionary changes called for by Whitehead in his essay, written in 1912, entitled "The Aims of Education":

Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling. Scraps of information have nothing to do with it. A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth. .....We have to remember that the valuable intellectual development is self-development. In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call "inert ideas" - that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. (Whitehead, 1929, p.1)

Recognition of the value of exploration through "activity of thought", of what Whitehead termed "self-development", and of learning through active participation in real experiences, found official expression and government sanction in the words of Sir Henry Hadow, Chairman of The Consultative Committee of the Board of Education, the government's 1931 Report of the Primary School; "We are of the opinion that the curriculum of the primary school is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience, rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored," and it continues:

Primary education would gain greatly in realism and power of inspiration if an attempt were more generally made to think of the curriculum less in terms of departments of knowledge to be taught, and more in terms of activities to be
fostered and interests to be broadened. The essential point is that the curriculum should not be loaded with inert ideas and crude blocks of fact, which are devoid of significance till related to some interest in the minds of the pupils. It must be vivid, realistic, a stream in motion, not a stagnant pool (Hadow, 1931).

This philosophical stance in favor of activity and experience over learning "inert ideas" and "blocks of fact" draws from a continuity of thought which found expression earlier, not only in Whitehead's work but also in the English philosopher Bertrand Russell's *On Education* (1926). His aim here was to turn the minds of teachers away from the imparting of sterile facts to the development of character and personality. He was against the classical tradition of education because, as he wrote, "this tends to produce a kind of cold correctness in which originality is replaced by authority." (quoted in Clegg, 1971, p.29). According to Sir Alec Clegg, "Russell believed that every child should have the joy of success; that each child should work at his own pace; that the infant's urge to work is so strong that all we have to do is to provide the opportunity...... He believed that vitality, courage, sensitivity, and intelligence are the four great components of character and that their development should be the main target of the educational process. There is no doubt whatever that these views are held by all good teachers of infants and juniors in England today and are strikingly exemplified in their schools" (Clegg, 1971, p.29).

Along with this tradition in educational philosophy, which gave a rationale for a new and revolutionary view of the proper purposes and means of genuine learning,
purposes counter to those of "classical education", there were a number of other factors which influenced the development of informal methods of teaching in England. Some authors I have read emphasize the particular disruptions caused by the Second World War as significant in "shaking up" the educational system. Multi-age or "family groupings" of students as they were called in England came about because children were forced together under emergency conditions, and teachers found that good things happened under these circumstances. Lillian Weber also mentions wartime circumstances in the development of a holistic view of the child, when she writes:

wartime evacuation, involving teachers in caring for children in a very total way, made vivid for them the significance of "home" to a child. Teachers could understand with more sympathy both the parents' burdens and impatience, and how within any or all of their impatience they gave tremendous and necessary support to their children. Almost every head I met had, as a young teacher, or as a young girl prior to training, lived with children in evacuation conditions... The teachers sympathetic understanding of the parents' role and of home life was broadened so that they were more willing to include parents closely in the working of the school and to incorporate into school life aspects of home experience. Thus, their conception of what school life could and should be, and of the inextricable wholeness of a child's life and his responses, was extended, as was their conception of their own role. (Weber, 1971, p.166)
In this way, recognition of the importance of continuity between home and school became another aspect of what gave English primary schools their informal, welcoming character.

Another effect was that the men and women coming back to teaching after returning from the war attended "vacation" courses organized by the Department of Education to receive quick and intensive training in the 'new' methods. As described by Sir Alec Clegg, author of the booklet *Revolution in British Primary Schools* (1971), and Chief Education Officer of the West Riding of Yorkshire (superintendent of schools for over 200,000 pupils) the Bingley Course on Primary Education taught by a painter, dancer and headmaster in 1948, had a very profound effect on its participants, who initially "wanted to know what changes had occurred in education while they were away and how to put them into operation. They expected that chalk and talk would tell them "how to do it." Instead, they were required to dance and to paint. They were skeptical, and at times ribald....Almost despite themselves, the course participants became absorbed in what they were doing" (Clegg.1971, P.35).

In designing the Bingley Vacation Course in order to have its participants experience making and doing things themselves as children might in an ideal environment, Clegg had been inspired by his visit during the war to the Steward Street Primary School. Here, head teacher Arthur Stone had created a school of hope in the slums of Birmingham. Clegg describes the school and its effect on his thinking: "they were so short of space in this lamentably inadequate building that there were children in
the cloakrooms painting on sheets of paper spread on the floor. There were children "acting" in the hall, having dressed themselves up in all kinds of odd garments and pieces of cloth. But the thing that struck me about this school was that the children were utterly engrossed and absorbed in what they were doing. This quality of absorption has been the criterion of efficiency in teaching to which, from that day onward, I have attached the greatest importance" (Clegg, 1971, p.32).

Just as the children at the Steward Street School had inspired Clegg to set a new educational standard for himself - the "quality of absorption" - one of the participants who subsequently became the head teacher of an exemplary primary school described in a letter to Clegg how the Bingley Vacation Course had revolutionized his view of teaching:

"I realized too that all my art and craft teaching had been based on wrong principles. I had imposed my own interpretation of a subject on the child, leaving no opportunity for him to interpret it in his own way...Bingley made me realize how much we had imposed ourselves on the children and stifled creativeness...In art we had shown them how to do it and they had copied... In craft they made models out of cardboard to our instructions. In drama we had made talking marionettes of them. We had supplied the language for them in written English...In most other subjects we rammed the facts home. Since, we have tried to give the child more guidance, more opportunity to express himself in a variety of ways, and with imagination, to observe and to search for himself, to give out
more as well as to take in, and to establish a personal and sensitive relationship with his teachers, his fellows and the world around him." (letter to Clegg from Mr. Gordon, p.37-38)

The Education Act of 1944 established primary education in England after the war, and changes brought about in many schools by inspired teachers and head teachers such as Mr. Gordon began to gain attention. In 1966 many of these schools achieved national recognition and support when the Central Advisory Council published their massive three year, two-volume report of some 1,200 pages, *Children in Their Primary Schools*, the direct successor to the earlier Hadow Report of 1931. The advisory Council at this time sat under the presidency of Lady Bridget Plowden and the report has become know as the Plowden Report. It is indeed, as Sir Alec Clegg describes it in his book *Revolution in the British Primary Schools*, a "full and forthright account of the whole primary scene as it existed" at that time. In Lady Plowden's own words:

When the Plowden Committee was set up we didn't know very much about what was happening as the best practice in primary schools. And indeed, it was extremely exciting to see what was happening; We found a liberation of children's learning which, if one hasn't seen it, is a most exciting happening.

The new thinking really started after the war and started moving in various school systems. The new practices were kept quite private, they weren't very well publicized, and the schools just went along doing what they wanted to do. Perhaps
our greatest initial discoveries were what remarkable people primary education teachers are and what great progress they have made with their varied abilities.


The progress which Lady Plowden and her associates documented in the word of primary teachers was due, in large part, to the fact that teachers in England were granted the authority by the force of government handbooks and official documents to practice an extraordinary degree of autonomy, at least by American standards. As early as 1918, in the Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers were the words; "the only uninformative practice that the Board of Education desire to see in the teaching of the public elementary schools is that each teacher shall think for himself, and work out by himself such methods of teaching as may use his powers to the best advantage and best suited to the particular needs and conditions of the school. Uniformity in detail of practice is not desirable (except in the mere routine of school management), even if it were attainable. But freedom implies a corresponding responsibility in its use." As Maurice Kogan pointed out in his booklet The Government of Education this statement makes clear that the British system "emphasizes the school as primarily existing to provide learning and teaching, and not as being an outpost of a public administrative system". (Kogan, 1971 p.14). The official attitude then, as early as 1918, was that schools should be free to make their own way:
British education is characterized by the freedom of the schools to create their own curriculum, modes of internal grouping and organization, and style and attitudes in their relationships with children (Indeed, the freedom is most of all directed to establishing relationships with children.) The system of educational government and accountability is therefore strongly influenced by an acceptance of the right of teachers to pursue their own professional intuitions and knowledge. That freedom is sometimes exaggerated and misunderstood. But it is real, and in comparison with that of any other major educational system, emphatically unique. (Kogan, 1971 p.13)

In the booklet *The Teacher's Role* (one of a series published by the Anglo-American Primary School Project in 1971) four teachers in informal schools tell their stories. These teachers speak of their own growth and development in this "new way of teaching": they speak with passion about how vertical grouping and a free-flowing integrated day allowed them to really see each child as an individual. From their accounts, it appears that bureaucratic constraints at this time were few; until children left primary school (when they took the dreaded 11+ exam) there were no formal record keeping requirements, or tests that the children had to pass. It is clear that, as stated in the introduction:

No prescribed curriculum is followed. Any activity or material which involves a child or group of children, and leads to an extension of knowledge, is considered appropriate. The teacher, together with the head, sets the atmosphere of the
classroom. All (of the teachers) regarded education as a dynamic process in
which they were always learning from the children. While each teacher
interviewed operated within this general framework and could agree on
fundamental points, there was extraordinary diversity in specific approaches. ....In
short, there is no pre-packaged formula - no "correct" approach. Not only are
there differences between schools working in an open way, but there considerable
diversity of style between teachers within the same school setting." (A. Cook and
H. Mack, 1971, p.9)

Kogan argues convincingly that the English emphasis on informal open ways of
learning (in 1971) stemmed from the reality that English authorities, at both a national
and local level, believed that teachers working with children are the prime agents in
educational decision making. It is only because this was so, that the governmental
structure was "relaxed" and allowed for considerable autonomy for headteachers,
teachers, and individual schools. He makes the point that: "If, on the other hand, the
educational system assumes that children are best educated through a series of prescribed
tasks leading to a series of prescribed "outputs" (rote learning of arithmetic leads to
identifiable computational skills, for example), the authority structure will be such as to
ensure that procedures, content, and results can be laid down by the system itself and are
not the result of an individually created process between teacher and child" (Kogan,
1971, p.12).

The 1912 injunction from the handbook that "each teacher shall think for
himself" finds its most intense expression in the power given to the head teacher in British Primary Schools, the American equivalent of the "principal". That "Mr. Gordon" was able to put his new theories and conviction directly into practice in his school after the war was a result not only of the persuasive force of the ideas themselves, but also of a long and well-established tradition in England of expecting headteachers to be the pedagogical leaders of their schools, and to shape their schools in individual ways.

Though there were regulations including a minimum number of days of school, beginning with an act of worship and providing religious education, headteachers in England in the nineteen seventies were free to determine relations with pupils and parents, the use of time and space, and to decide what concepts of the teaching and learning processes would govern the work of the school (Kogan. p.28). One head teacher spoke of the nature of his authority in this way:

As a head, I am given absolute autonomy to run my school in whichever way I think I want to run it. This is one of their reasons for appointing me. To give the head a defined, restricted role would mean that the authority would lose his essential personality. This is one of the reasons why I work in this county: because there isn't a system. If there were, I don't think I'd be interested in staying here. The only thing I must do is to keep school open for a certain number of days each year, I must keep it warm, and we must have an assembly every day. These are the things I must do. And, of course, I must be in school." (A.Cook and H.

Headteachers in England in the nineteen sixties and seventies, as shown by these publications and testimonies, seemed to define their supervisory role in regard to their teaching staff as more supportive than evaluative. Often headteachers taught alongside of classroom teachers, introduced a new piece of apparatus to a small group of children in their office, or helped beginning teachers set up the classroom and get started in the morning for several months at the start of the school year. They were regularly involved in teaching courses at local institutes, visiting other schools, and encouraging their own staff to apply for headships. There were many "teacher centres" set up with the encouragement of headteachers in England where ideas were exchanged, materials discussed, and curriculum developed. Differences between teachers were nourished and welcomed just as teachers respected the differences between individual children, and this respect for difference extended to whole schools as well.

The dissemination of the "entity" (Lillian Weber's term for the idea and the practise of "informal" schools) also was an important aspect of the work of the inspectorate - the men and women who performed the function of Her Majesty's Inspectors. These government officials are appointed directly by the Queen and are independent from the "state" administration. Inspectors serve an advisory as well as a supervisory role, and at the time of the collection of data for the Plowden Report, were also primarily responsible for processing applicants for headship, and for maintaining the
quality of the head's work after employment. These H. M. I.'s, as they are called, were committed to supporting the individual efforts of headteachers in their schools, and in communicating ideas from school to school:

By sharing all the good examples they saw, they stimulated a constant process of new implementation of the common idea. In short, they were very much part of the mechanism for spreading the idea of informal education and a significant force creating similarities within the freedom of practice. They encouraged the work of the headmistress, supporting experiments to further clarify and implement the basic idea. They fostered the trying-out of interesting variations of the idea, carrying news of all this work in their reports and in conversations with heads. The experiments themselves served as models which inspectors then suggested to others for visits and observation. In fact, though the function of the inspectors had originally been an evaluative one when the system of "payment for results" was in place between 1870 and 1900's, the inspectorial function had by 1970 more and more restricted itself to a suggesting, advising, persuading role." (Weber, 1971, p.155)

In the supportive setting created by the work of the inspectors at the government level, and advisers at the county level, headteachers who were willing to "experiment" had the freedom, the encouragement, and most importantly, the time to achieve depth in the model schools they developed. In contrast to the existence in the United States of what George Woods calls "the legislated excellence movement", in England at this time
there has been only minimal legislative prescription of practice. As a consequence, the
Hadow and Plowden Reports "have a dimension and significance for English education
that cannot be weighed in terms of enacted legislation or administrative ruling. Their
influence is as synthesizer and collector of the best existing practice in the schools, and
such reporting constitutes recommendation, creating the permissive frame for further
extension of exploration. In addition, as mentioned, the preparation for the report is itself
a stimulating process, helpful in perfecting the method, and not merely a process of
passive collection" (Weber, 1971, p.159).

Another reason for the success of these schools was a well-developed rationale
which drew from current research in psychology, social work and the tradition of
centering the work of primary teachers in child study, which was very much a part of the
education of English teachers. The Hadow Report of 1933 had pointed out that child
study was the basis of good teacher education, that the best teacher would "be one who
had made a careful study of the physical and mental development of children. So much
importance is given to child study that the student is encouraged to work with babies in
private homes, in institutional settings etc., either prior to entrance into college or at some
point along the way" (Weber, p. 150). In the teacher training institutes and colleges, the
cognitive developmental theories of Piaget were intensively studied, particularly after the
war, as well as those of Susan Isaacs, an English educator and psychologist whose work
emphasized meeting the individual needs of children through careful observation and
assessment. Froebel's recognition of the importance of children's play, and the work of
Montessori on the careful preparation of the environment to allow self-discovery were
also important forces in the training of teachers. John Dewey's works were widely read.

Students of education in English institutions also learned about the English social reformer Robert Owen who in the early 1800s had been responsible for creating public institutions for nursery education. His commitment to preserving childhood for the children of working mothers in a rapidly growing industrial economy had fostered recognition that the development of intellectually and materially rich environments for very young children was of the utmost importance, and that the state should be involved in designing and providing them.

The Plowden Report (1967) categorized "good" schools visited by H. M. Inspectors as falling into three categories; those of outstanding quality (one percent of the total primary school population), those termed "a good school with some outstanding features (9 per cent), and thirdly "good school (s) in most respects without any special distinction (23 percent)." Though not in the majority, according to Plowden, "One third of the children in primary schools go to schools which are clearly quite good," where there is "an unmistakable recognition of children's growth and needs as they are known." (p.101). Evidently these "good" schools were prevalent enough in England at this time to create an atmosphere of new possibility, and were embraced by the government inspectors who visited them as places where there had been a "liberation of children's learning" which reflected current knowledge about child development. Indeed much of the enthusiastic rhetoric of the period on both sides of the Atlantic spoke of these changes in the way children learned in England as a revolutionary movement which would
liberate children, teachers, and parents from the autocratic "formal" tradition of classical education. Behind this revolution, so well expressed in the Plowden Report, was a commitment to putting the child first:

At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him. (Children and Their Primary Schools, 1967, p.7)

The necessity for "disciplined planning toward worthwhile objectives" and maintaining high expectations for children, according to Clegg, is essential for this "new way of teaching". As Weber has noted, there was a sense that English educators had high standards - such as Clegg's "quality of absorption" - without looking for the "standardization" of methods and curriculum more commonly found in this country.

I believe that not only wartime conditions but also the psychic effects of war may have contributed to changing views about the aims and purposes of education. After two world wars in "civilized" Europe resulting in tremendous loss of life, perhaps it became clear that the principles of "classical" education had not prevented people from killing each other: it was time to try something different - to follow children into their own fields of interest and absorption. After the defeat and horror of fascism perhaps there was greater openness among Europeans to a theory of learning which put the autonomy of the individual at the center. In Piagetian terms, it is the individual who constructs his own
education, and makes sense of his own experience. In this paradigm developed by Piaget, Montessori, and Dewey in their different ways through careful observations of how children actually learn, sense is not given to individuals by a higher authority, but created by them through their own activity and experience.

In conclusion, I have tried to answer the question of why progressive "informal" methods in state supported primary education were so much more successful, accepted and celebrated in England in the late sixties and seventies than they were in the U.S.A. during the same period. The broad outline of an understanding of the factors at work in nourishing this plant on English soil is clear.

This unusual educational "plant" developed within a tradition of social reform and concern for creating suitable environments for young children, informed by a knowledge of child development based on careful observation. This might be seen, in a metaphorical sense, as one of the roots of the "entity". Another was the philosophical tradition of honoring the integration of learning in the mind of the developing individual as expressed by Russell and Whitehead - a rebellion against "inert ideas". Holding the plant upright was the stem and structure of the entity: the autonomy and authority of teachers, and ultimately the head teacher, whose self-described role was clearly that of a pedagogical leader and master teacher among teachers. Clearly the "liberation of children's learning" celebrated by the Plowden Report was nourished by teachers and headteachers who had the means to implement it, and without them, nothing would have happened as it did. The crowning accomplishment of the endeavor was the flourishing
life of children in these primary schools, bursting into bloom in the vivid individuality and colorful textures of children's minds at work, described so eloquently in the work of Yardley, Clegg, Weber and Featherstone. Perhaps there is also something in the English character which allowed the harmonious coexistence of forty children in one space, and made it possible for them to use an environment "bursting with invitations" wisely and well. And overall, throughout this period, the encouragement given by Her Majesty's Inspectors and their reports, like the English rain, gently and effectively spread the seeds of thought from teacher to teacher and from school to school, and allowed the dissemination of this new way of teaching to take firm hold.

Finally, some words from the Plowden report on Children and Their Primary Schools:

Children need to be themselves, to live with other children, and with grownups, to learn from their environment, to enjoy the present, to get ready for the future, to create and to love, to learn to face adversity, to behave responsibly, in a word, to be human beings. (p. 189, 1967).

Alice Yardley the teacher, 34 years before she became 'Yardley' the author, to whom I have referred on these pages, had stepped into her first position as a teacher of a large inner city school in the city of Nottingham. Her work there and in the subsequent schools where she taught and was a headteacher, formed an integral and seminal part of this English tradition described here. First in the city of Nottingham, and later, through
her writing, Alice Yardley moved forward the work of child-centred education, in the context of an organic and informal approach to primary education.
The Roots of Child-Centered Education

Alice Yardley and her colleagues in the 1930’s and 40’s developed ideas that were rooted in tradition, not only of the British Primary School, but going back to Rousseau, Comenius and Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, authors she had studied in college, and to whom she often referred in her writing and in our interviews. She also read about the work of John Dewey and his project method. As a beginning teacher Alice Yardley and her contemporaries were also strongly influenced by the work of Susan Isaacs, who had been trained as a psychologist before she ran an experimental school between 1924 and 1927 in Cambridge based on Froebelian and Deweyan principles. Each of these educational thinkers had led Alice Yardley and her fellow students, in her words, in a clear direction towards “following the child” (Yardley, 2000).

From Rousseau came the understanding that childhood was in itself an important moment in the life of the individual, that children were inherently ‘good’ and in tune with the natural world. Children had rights to freedom and happiness, and to an education especially suited to their stage in life. In his book, Emile, (1762) Rousseau prescribed a radical and naturalistic education, one that took place in the out of doors, and allowed the child-student Emile considerable control over his own education. Momentum for learning was provided by the natural growth of the person: the role of the tutor-educator was to facilitate opportunities for learning. In the right environment, children would learn playfully, and put effort and meaning into self-chosen activities. (Emile, 1762, as cited in Yardley, 1978, p.28)
Rousseau influenced another Swiss educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Pestalozzi, a writer and teacher, embraced Rousseau's central position that children were naturally good, and that it was not children, but men's institutions, that were corrupting: "All is artificial; we must return to nature. Man is bad by institutions, not by nature" (Pestalozzi, 1801/1894, xxvi).

When he looked back on his own education, with the new perspective gained from his reading of *Emile*, Pestalozzi felt indignation at the schoolmaster's "fondness for discipline, drill, and mechanical methods", which had thwarted the "natural free development of tender minds" (Pestalozzi as cited in Downs, 1975, p.15). He wrote in an early work that:

"The schoolmaster seems as if he were made on purpose to shut up children's mouths and hearts, and to bury their good understanding ever so deep under ground. That is the reason why healthy and cheerful children, whose hearts are full of joy and gladness, hardly ever like school... (Pestalozzi, as cited in Downs, 1975, p.16)

Pestalozzi's aim was to create schools that children would love to go to. He not only wrote about education, but was active in founding educational institutions for children, including the very young. His first effort had been to build and run a residential farm school for orphan children, left destitute by the ravages of the Napoleonic wars, where they could learn a trade as well as reading and writing. In contrast to Rousseau, who believed that only the upper classes needed education, Pestalozzi was passionately
I did and do wish to make the learning of the first beginning-points easy for the common people, who are forsaken and left to run wild; to open the doors of art, which are the doors of manliness, to the poor and weak of the land; and if I can, to set fire to the barrier that keeps the humbler citizens of Europe, in respect to that individual power which is the foundation of all true art, far behind the barbarians of the south and north, because, in the midst of our vaunted and valued general enlightenment, it shuts out one man in ten from the social rights of men, from the right to be educated, or at least the possibility of using that right. (Pestalozzi, 1801/1894, p.104)

Pestalozzi, and Comenius before him, in their writings and teachings emphasized the need for universal education for all people, regardless of class. Both educators put their energy into creating schools where from a very young age, children of the poor could be educated.

Comenius (1592-1670) whose writing was eclipsed for two centuries and only rediscovered in the 19th century, was a bishop of the Moravian church, (in what used to be Checkoslavakia) a Protestant church. He devoted much of his life during the long Thirty Years War (1618-16480) to trying to establish schools for all children, in hopes that a liberal education would foster international peace and understanding. He followed
Martin Luther’s principle that free public schooling should be provided to all in order that every man should have the means to read the bible and obtain a religious education. He also advocated the formal educational of women, a radical idea at the time, and a holistic concept of education; he believed that the process of spiritual and emotional growth and learning were inextricably linked. His philosophy of Panosophism, meaning “all knowledge”, attempted to incorporate theology, philosophy and educational into one (www.comeniusfoundation.org).

Another principle of progressive education articulated by both Comenius and more than a century later, Pestalozzi, was the educative value of hands-on, direct experience in service of the students’ inherent motive to learn and understand. Both of these writers understood that students must be actively engaged in investigation of their own questions.

Comenius, recognized the ‘primacy of action’; that ‘authentic knowledge and understanding depend upon self-discovery’ (Stokes, p. 2) while Pestalozzi coined the phrase ‘self-activity’, in describing what happens when young students seek to explore and investigate questions on their own, according to their spontaneous and natural motivation to learn. Pestalozzi believed that activity that begins in the mind of the student is more apt to lead to true and meaningful learning: for him the good teacher encourages the “free play of the child’s individual thought” (Brooks, 2003).

One of the enduring fruits of Comenius’ work was the development of the first picture books for children, in accordance with his view that texts should be designed for the
developmental stage of the learner. Younger students would learn more rapidly when concepts and stories were demonstrated in visual form.

Pestalozzi went a step further, replacing the ‘illustrated’ text that made ideas more vivid for children, with direct experience of the real world of things and ideas, and with study of the object itself. Based on the premise that young children learned with all their senses through what he called ‘Anschauung’, (sense impression) he developed a pedagogy whereby students gained understanding and descriptive language through direct experience with what they were studying, through what came to be called the ‘object lesson’. Thus children studying the structure of fruits would be given a real apple to observe, handle, and dissect. In a Pestalozzian school, children were taken into the fields to study insects and plants, and enticed to hike up mountains to observe rocks and distant views. At the same time Pestalozzi developed a step-by-step scheme for teaching reading, and well-structured systems for learning mathematical principles. He also believed in integrating the study of art and music into the day’s lessons.

‘Father Pestalozzi’, as he was often called, was seen by his pupils and many of his disciples, as a benevolent paternal figure, who spent much of his life in the company of children. He relished the role of father more than that of ‘master,’ and throughout his life worked to create schools that established a home-like environment. His most influential book, Leonard and Gertrude extolled the skills of the homemaker Gertrude in educating her children in humane and loving ways, and his appreciation of the educative function of the mother’s role was further illuminated in a later work, How Gertrude Teaches Her
Children (1781, 1801). The following letter, written while Pestalozzi was running an institution at Burgdorf makes clear that for him school and house should share common ground:

Our house had, in order to attain its aims, to become a place of fatherly education, rather than one of public instruction. Cheerfulness, child-like devotion, open trust, refuge in the arms of the teacher as in the mother’s arms, and the training of all forms of obedience, of perseverance, and of self-control to be achieved in their cheerfulness and through their devotion; on these we wished to lay the foundation of our house----in contrast to the opinion of the world which at present judges every educational institution primarily on the results of its instructional methods. (Pestalozzi, as cited in Downs, 1975, p.82)

Building trust and affectionate relationships between children and their teachers, was the foundational principle of the Pestalozzian school. Children learned obedience and self control because they were ‘devoted’ to their teacher-parents, through ‘fatherly education’, not through authoritarian and formal structures. Instructional method was less important than meeting the psychological and emotional needs of the students.

In this country, Pestalozzi, whose work was translated in English by the mid 1800’s, exerted a strong influence on the reform minded Horace Mann, the founding father of the ‘public school’ in this country. The American scholar Kirkpatrick makes the following claim for the influence of Pestalozzi:
It seems safe to affirm that the great remaking of American education from 1830 to 1860 came directly or indirectly from Pestalozzi, much of it by way of Prussia. From this source came our first normal schools. From Pestalozzian influence the American schools took on geography, music, art, gymnastics; arithmetic teaching was remade to be understandable to children; the word method of teaching reading supplanted the cumbersome old alphabet method; whipping was increasingly abolished. (p.xi, Kilpatrick)

Bronson Alcott, the American educator and thinker, and with Elizabeth Peabody founder of the Temple School in Boston, called his first school in Cheshire, Connecticut, "The Cheshire Pestalozzian School" (1827-29), modeled on his interpretations of Pestalozzian methods. Children at Cheshire "learned geography not from maps of the world but by making a map of their own schoolyard, arithmetic ...by assembling beans and blocks of wood, rather than from figures on a blackboard", reading was taught by relating pictures to words, and both boys and girls were taught gymnastics (Bedell, 1980, p.17-18). Though its experimental nature led to its closure after only two years, at the time it was called by a visiting educator, "the best common school in the state – probably in the United States" (1980, p. 18).

Another important figure in the development of progressive approaches to the teaching of young children was Friedrich Froebel, (1772-1852) founder of the kindergarten. Friedrich
Froebel as a young man had gone to visit and teach at Pestalozzi’s well known school in Yverdun:

There he saw at first had how much children benefited from the social experience of being a member of a group, how interested they were in their natural surroundings, and how their earliest words could be vitally connected to concrete experience. And in their spontaneous play, he saw the “self-active representation” of their developing selves. (Smith, 1985, p.49)

Froebel further refined Pestalozzian theory on learning from first hand experience, direct observation, and the ‘free play of the child’s individual thought.’ Believing in the sacred nature of the child, and the child’s closeness to God and therefore to perfection, Froebel brought a fresh appreciation of the place of spontaneous play, fantasy, and imagination in children’s lives. ‘Play’, he wrote in Education of Man is the highest phase of child development... (it) is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage’ (1887, p.55). Children’s playful activity could lead them to understandings and learning in a fashion unique to their particular inclinations and stage in life, and in harmony with the natural world. Froebel expressed himself in the following words, reflecting on his aims in developing the ‘kindergarten’:

Because I find that one of the basic causes of defective childcare is the unsatisfactory consideration of the activity drive of the child, I have endeavoured to create an institution for this very purpose, an institution under the motto:
"Come let us live with our children", which has the task of giving into the hands of parents, families, educators and teachers a coherent system of play activities. These games not only nourish the inner activity drive, but they also teach the use of the child's immediate environment as a means for play and occupation and as educational aids. (Friedrich Froebel 1844, translated by J Liebschner, edited by B Watson)

Pestalozzi had established schools where ‘all children could be educated’. Froebel went further in developing methods that responded to his perceptions of how children learned in their early formative years, before the formal age of entering elementary school, usually at age six. According to W. T. Harris, in a preface to the 1887 edition of Education of Man, Froebel had created:

‘an efficient means for securing the development of the child between the ages of three and six years – a period when the child is not yet ready for the conventional studies of the school – a period when he is not mature enough for work, and when there is no temptation on the part of the parent to employ him at any labor. The child has, by the beginning of his fourth year, begun to outgrow the merely family life, and to look at the outside world with interest. He endeavors to symbolize life as it appears to him by plays and games. The parents are unable to give the child within the house all the education that he needs at this period. He needs association with other children and with teachers from beyond
the family circle. Froebel’s invention is the happiest educational means for this symbolic epoch of infancy. (1975, p. viii)

Froebel’s ‘kindergarten’ invited children to play with pleasing materials which would help them heighten perception and deepen knowledge. He devised a set of six “gifts” for little children which would symbolize and teach the unity and diversity of the universe: soft balls of colored wool, cubes divided into smaller cubes, cylinders, rods and the like would both amuse the child and also demonstrate abstract attributes of shape, size, color, and material. For older children he devised what he called ‘occupations’: using abstract geometric designs pricked into cards, or folded out of paper, children embroidered, drew or cut out. Activities were designed in graduated series; each was matched to a particular stage of the child’s sensory and cognitive development (Smith, p. 49). Singing games, songs and dances as described and illustrated in his Mother’s Songs, Games and Dances were also a daily part of children’s activities in the Froebelian kindergarten.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Froebelian kindergarten methods had begun to take hold in England, and in some areas, had begun to replace the ‘monitorial system’ of infant education, which had primarily used rote methods and systematic drill (relying on student ‘monitors’ as instructors). Vestiges of this system remained in place into the first decades of the twentieth century however. Tension between what was to become the ‘developmental tradition’ and the earlier ‘instructional tradition’ continued to be felt throughout the next century. It was not until the work of the Hadow Report on Infant and Nursery Schools of 1933, that an attempt was made to synthesize these two traditions.
Towards the end of the century, Froebelians had begun to set up training colleges with demonstration schools, and to work towards providing free kindergartens for poorer children. The 1892 Code recognized the private Froebel Certificate as an acceptable qualification for infant teaching, and in the next two decades it became clear that, though Montessori had her advocates, it was the "Froebelians (who) were entrenched in the English educational world "as the experts on the education of young children, acknowledged alike by government, training colleges and public opinion" (Whitbread, 1972, p.59).

At the same time American interpretations of Froebelian kindergarten came to the attention of British educationists. A collection of John Dewey’s essays, edited by Professor J. J. Findlay of Manchester University and published in 1906 brought the latest American pedagogy to their attention. In The School And Society (1899), Whitbread writes, "Dewey had interpreted Froebel on play and ‘the instinctive, impulsive activities of children with a simplicity that extracted the educational application from his symbolism and freed the kindergarten from dependence on the original exercises and occupations.” (1972, p.85) Froebelians of the new century were moving towards giving up the formalized ‘gifts and occupations’ in favor of ‘activity methods’ and a more integrated curriculum, and in the first decade of the twentieth century at Froebelian teachers colleges, the new generation of students were “reinterpreting Froebel’s principles in the light of John Dewey’s work” (Ibid, p.85).
As a crucial component of change in curriculum, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey, also shared the conviction that, in a new era of concern for children and their way of learning, the authoritarian school master or school mistress would be superceded by one who practiced ‘pastoral care’, and who expressed affection, genuine interest and respect for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the child.

By the turn of the century then, a number of important thinkers and educators had laid a foundation for public recognition of the unique needs of young children as learners, in a special period of life, and “that trained teachers and nurses should build their efforts on an understanding of children’s natural interests and activities” (1985, Smith, p.48).

Century of the Child

In her book, the Secret of Childhood, Montessori looks back at the first decades of the 20th century, as the beginning of the ‘century of the child’. She points to the decrease in infant mortality as a significant factor, along with the discovery of the psychological effects of deprivation in childhood, in creating greater awareness of childhood as a period worthy of serious study and attention (1939, p. 8-9). The world was turning towards an appreciation and understanding that children deserved education and health care specifically designed to meet their particular needs. In a parallel development, the American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman published Concerning Children in 1900, in which she advocated for professional training for mothers and those who worked with very young children, beginning in infancy. Here she introduced the radical idea that the
ideal child-care might take place in a especially equipped ‘baby garden’, where infants
could freely and safely explore a rich environment, unimpeded by the obstacles and
limitations of a typical middle-class home, in an interesting complement to Froebel’s
‘kindergarten’ for the older child.

Dr. Maria Montessori, (1870-1952), the first woman to graduate from medical school in
Italy, had trained as a pediatrician and was interested in improving children’s health and
welfare. Beginning in the 1900’s, she worked in clinics with defective children, and after
finding them capable of learning to a greater degree than any had expected, she set to
work among the poor and handicapped in Rome. In 1907, in the neighborhood of San
Lorenzo, she established what she called a house for children, ‘Casa dei Bambini’.

Like Froebel, Montessori thought that a study of childhood would illuminate
fundamental questions pertaining to the psychological and spiritual nature of man, and
hold the key to improving the whole of society. She writes:

…no one could have foreseen that children had concealed within themselves a
vital secret capable of lifting the veil that covered the human soul, that they
carried within themselves something which, if discovered, would help adults to
solve their own individual and social problems. And it is this which can lay the
foundation of a new science of child study that can have an important influence
on the whole of society. (1939, p. 8)
The 'new science of child study' corroborated, in Montessori's view, that children learned through direct experience and interaction with a carefully prepared aesthetically pleasing environment. For Montessori, the 'environment' was the child's first teacher, and if well prepared, could mitigate against the lack of well-trained teachers, thus allowing a larger number of children to benefit from coming to her schools. She believed that under the right conditions, given liberty of movement, and choice of carefully structured materials, children would develop intellectually, physically, and spiritually. Montessori's commitment to the education of poor children, beginning as toddlers, and to their right to education as an aspect of their physical and mental health, also echoed the work of nursery school pioneers Rachel and Margaret McMillan in England in the early 20th century.

The McMillan sisters were social reformers who as young women had joined the Christian Socialist party. When, in 1894, Margaret was elected to the Bradford School Board, she proclaimed, 'I was elected to fight... the battle of the slum child.' Rachel and Margaret were both involved in a number of reform efforts. They were especially appalled at the lack of opportunity for the poor children of the industrial cities to play, to experience the outdoor environment, and to live free of the threat of disease, malnutrition and neglect. In 1908 they set up the country's first school clinics in Bow and Deptford serving a number of schools in the area. The clinic provided dental help, surgical aid and lessons in 'breathing and posture'. A Night Camp provided a place 'where slum children

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1 In England, however, what they perceived as Montessori's reliance on 'mechanical' apparatus, and her apparent mistrust of teachers' ability to use their initiative aroused the suspicion of Froebelians (Whitbread, 1972, p.59).
could wash and wear clean nightclothes’, free of the danger of infection from closed and cramped quarters in their own homes. In 1914 the sisters decided to start an Open-Air Nursery and Training Centre in Peckam. It served thirty children ranging in age from eighteen months to seven years (www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WmcmillanR.htm).

Susan Isaac, one of the first women to earn a doctoral degree in psychology at Oxford, turned her attention not only to the physical and mental health of children, what Whitbeck calls the ‘social rescue and physical welfare’ model of early education, but also to the question of the relation of children’s psychological well-being to their cognitive development. In 1924 she answered an ad for the head of an ‘experimental’ school in Cambridge, and her work over the next three years, at the Malting House School, was documented in her first book, a seminal study of children’s behavior and thinking, *The Intellectual Growth of Children*, and its sequel, *The Social Growth of Children* (1930, 1933). At the Malting House School, Isaacs and the staff had kept detailed records over a three year period documenting the behavior, speech, and imaginative play of the ten children who attended, between the ages of three and ten years old. She had been a student of Froebel, and Dewey, and inspired by Dewey’s example, her interest was in studying the application of his educational philosophy to the very young. (Smith, 1985, p.75). It was from this extensive ‘qualititave data’ that she drew. Lydia Smith points out in her study of Susan Isaac’s life and work, *To Understand and To Help*, the singular nature of the Malting House School Study, which was one of

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"Nursery schools, in her view, should be open shelters set in garden playgrounds. Here poor children would be helped toward a better life and better health, a good way of growing up." (Weber, 1971, p.29)
the first to study children’s growth and development under carefully planned circumstances, and with a view of making a contribution to the understanding of children’s educational psychology:

A large amount of useful data, of a kind that no other student of child development was producing at that time, was accumulated. Gesell used one way glass, Burt administered mental tests, Charlotte Buhler described the minute by minute behavior of infants, Piaget talked with and asked questions of children one by one, and Bridges devised a developmental rating scale. But only at the Malting House were extended observations made of children interacting within an environment specifically designed to stimulate their powers of inquiry and imagination, to provide considerable verbal freedom and the company of other children, and to include adults who dealt with them according to a deliberately planned technique. (1985, p.76)

Susan Isaacs felt that in contrast to a large scale statistical study, or psychological experiments and mental tests carried out in artificial surroundings, that the value of the data collected “resided in the complete picture of children at work and at play that emerged”(Smith, 1985, p.76).

Isaacs’ book was singular in its careful attention to the significance of children’s spontaneous activities and conversations, and described the students at the Malting House school as they talked and played during their school hours. It was written in a manner that
made it accessible to beginning teachers, thirsty for a new perspective on the psychological aspects of young children’s growth and cognitive development. Isaacs was interested in Freudian psychoanalytical theory as well, and was equally sensitive to the often hidden emotional life of children as she observed them in the Malting House school environment.

At the Malting House School, there was a large main room for general purposes, including make-believe and dressing up, and dancing (to Susan Isaac’s piano playing), a room for quiet occupations, one for carpentry and scientific pursuits, and another for handicrafts, painting, modeling, and drawing. Equipment was carefully planned and included the first ‘jungle gym’ in Britain and real easels, double handed woodsman’s saws (so the children would have to learn to cooperate with each other), and a real typewriter. In the garden was a sandpit, and a water spigot, a tool shed with real tools, animals for whom the children were responsible and room for each child to have his or her own plot. Inside there was were child sized tables and chairs, rugs and cushions for sitting on the floor, and a variety of materials including:

Scissors, paper, and paint, plasticine and clay, crayons and chalks and blackboards, all kinds of construction supplies like raffia, beads, thread, cloth, cardboard pieces, and boxes, as well as hammers, saws, shovels and spades, wooden and glass containers in various sizes for measuring, shells and beans often arranged in different-sized groups, pins and needles and sewing equipment, tape measures and rules and pulleys and scales, lengths of rope and string, a
magnifying glass, maps of Cambridge and environs, a big box of old clothes and dressing-up materials – in short, all the kinds of manipulative materials that children love to use and explore. (Smith, 1985, p.65)

While children were free to engage in a great variety of activity and discussion, and adults helped them, this was not a ‘laissez-faire’ situation. There were what Susan Isaacs called ‘limits and negative conditions’ to their freedom, and clear rules established for the benefit of all. Children were responsible for planning the dinner menu each day, and must take into the time needed for the cook to order the meal. One day when the children had forgotten, they went to the cook to see what she could give them: “She happened to have some extra eggs in stock; they helped to make toast while she scrambled the eggs, and all sat down to a rather frugal meal. They seldom forgot again” (Ibid, p.68).

For Susan Isaacs, the ideal school would not only provide for the child’s bodily, social and expressive development, but also “open the facts of the external world (the real external world, that is, not the school subjects) to him in a way that he can seize and understand them” (1930, p. 20). School should not remain, “A closed in place, a screen between the child and his living interests’, but rather a “point of vantage” in the child’s efforts to understand the real world and adapt himself to it:

It should be a place of shelter for him; but not in the sense that it shuts the larger world away from him. Its task is to bring the world to him, in ways and at a pace fixed by his needs and interests. The school, the teacher and the teaching alike are
simply a clarifying medium, through which the facts of human life and the
physical world are brought within the measure of the child's mind at successive
stages of growth and understanding (Ibid, p. 21-22).

The teacher's job was to make the actual world around the child clear to him, the world
of people and things, of his own inner and outer responses. As Smith describes, the
Malting House School, "was unique among progressive schools of the time in that
"finding out about things" and feeling and fantasy were never separated, but equally
provided for and enjoyed in ways that relied for direction primarily upon the children's
own expressed needs and interests" (1985, p. 67). Susan Isaacs recorded innumerable
examples of children engaged in the process of 'finding out'. Here is a discussion among
between them and their teacher, Mrs. I., (Susan Isaacs) about the nature of time:

1.7.26. The children had to wait twenty minutes for something, and asked, "Will
it be long?" Mrs. I. replied, "It will be twenty minutes. I don't know how long that
will seem to you." Dan said, "Will you show us on the clock?" Mrs. I. did so. He
then said, "How many is twenty? Will you count?" She counted from one to
twenty. This was done once or twice. Christopher (5:9) said, "What is counting?
That's not twenty minutes." Mrs. I. replied, "Oh, no, I counted faster than the
minutes go." They then said, "Will you show us how long one minute is?" They
sat still for one minute. (Isaacs, 1930, cited in Smith, 1985, p.80)

This kind of conversation, in which the adult teacher responds with sensitivity and
imagination to children's questions, was typical at Malting House. Just as they might be
in a large family, children are not dealt with 'en masse', but as John Dewey would want
to recognize them; as 'intensely distinctive beings'. Yet in Dewey's view even the best
home could not offer the ‘rich social life’ of the school. His view on the social aims of education were clearly expressed in *School and Society*:

It is simply a question of doing systematically and in a large, intelligent and competent way what for various reasons can be done in most households only in a comparatively meager and haphazard manner. In the first place, the ideal home has to be enlarged. The child must be brought into contact with more grown people and with more children in order that there may be the freest and richest social life, Moreover, the occupations and relationships of the home environment are not specially selected for the growth of the child; the main object is something else, and what the child can get out of them is incidental. Hence the need of a school. In this school the life of the child becomes the all-controlling aim.(1899, p. 35-36)

Dewey’s articulation of the role of the school in providing ‘the freest and richest social life’, and where the ‘life of the child’ was at the center, had influenced Susan Isaacs, and helped to shape the growing rational for infant school education: the infant school provided the best kind of ‘community’ in which children could learn and grow.

When Alice Yardley came to Homerton College in 1932, the Malting House School was no longer in operation, but its power as a model of a progressive, humane and child-focused school was strongly felt by her and her college classmates. Though not part of the college curriculum, Susan Isaacs books were disseminated and read by Homerton
students, and undoubtedly influenced their ideas of what might be possible in the 
education of young children.

The challenge for Alice and her contemporaries was how to replicate the experience of 
children at the privately funded Malting House into the large urban classrooms of the 
infant school, where the children of the poor were housed in classrooms of up to fifty 
children, and where the vestiges of the monitorial system were still in place.

In summary, many of the principles that were to come to define a ‘child-centered’ 
approach had been defined by earlier thinkers including the following:

Children are inherently worthy of our respect; they are naturally curious and motivated to 
learn. (Rousseau)

It is through activity and experience that learning takes place in the young child. 
(Comenius and Pestalozzi)

Children’s spontaneous ideas and play are valuable, and constitute the work of the child 
in understanding and making sense of his world. (Pestalozzi, Froebel)

Learning happens in the context of good relationships between children and their 
teachers; in a spirit of collaboration, not of dominance. (Pestalozzi, Isaacs)

The environment is crucial to learning: a carefully prepared environment will invite 
directed experimentation and observation: well-designed educational materials ‘teach’. 
(Montessori)

The right education of children comes about from the intersection of practice and theory; 
from the work of observing and learning from the children themselves. (Isaacs, 
Montessori)

Children respond to and need an aesthetic environment where their individuality is 
encouraged through opportunities for all forms of self-expression. (Montessori and 
Isaacs)

The community of the school provides experiences important to the full development of 
the individual in society. (Pestalozzi, Dewey, Isaacs)
History of the Infant School

The first infant school in Britain was opened in 1816 at the New Lanark cotton mill by the Welsh manager, Robert Owen, who had visited the schools of Pestalozzi and his disciples, and who wanted to use education as an instrument of social change whereby a new form of socialist society would replace the existing competitive, class-structured one (Owen, 1813). At the mill, he ended the system of using pauper children from five to ten as 'apprentices', and provided them instead with a place where they might learn social training in an educationally stimulating environment suited to their age and interests. This infant school 'can justly be called the first in the developmental tradition of primary education', according to Whitbeck, and by contemporary standards, would be described as child-centered (1972, p.11). In his autobiography Owen explained the instructions he gave to two untrained teachers at the school:

They were on no account ever to beat any one of the children, or to threaten them in any manner of word or action, or to use abusive terms; but were always to speak to them with a pleasant countenance, and in a kind manner and tone of voice. That they should tell the infants and children (for they had all from one to six years old under their charge) that they must on all occasions do all they could to make their playfellows happy...The schoolroom... was furnished with paintings, chiefly of animals, with maps, and often supplied with natural objects from the gardens, fields and woods – the examination and explanation of which always excited their curiosity and created an animated conversation between the children and their instructors... (as cited in Morton, 1962, p.103)

The New Lanark Infant School attracted many visitors, and by 1824, the London Infant School Society was formed with the object of training infant teachers. In Glasgow, David Stow opened the Drygate Infant School in April 1828, and began training infant teachers.
He advocated simultaneous class instruction but stressed understanding rather than rote memorizing, and made use of the playground with climbing apparatus and wooden building blocks. He anticipated Froebel in his appreciation of spontaneous play. Samuel Witherspoon promoted infant schools, but with an altered emphasis to Owen’s original intentions of preparing infants for religious instruction and for the monitorial system that they would meet at age 7; ‘simultaneous instruction was a feature of all infant schools, but this meant firm discipline and rote learning’. However, though by the mid nineteenth century the Owenite concept of infant education was eroded:

.... the idea of a separate infant school for children under seven became accepted as philanthropists realized that these young children were at risk in the industrial slums. And despite their weakness the new infant schools were more humane than monitorial schools or many dame schools. (Whitbread, 1972, p.16)

During the following decades partly due to restrictions on child labour, and the fact that working mothers would not send their older children to school without their younger siblings, almost 20 percent of children between the ages of three and six were attending public elementary schools.

The huge influx of younger children into the elementary schools became a cause for concern, and soon Inspectors made the recommendation that the under sevens be divided into two classes, the five to seven year olds, and in a separate room, the ‘babies’ class’.
In 1870, partly to ‘obtain time for education without trenching on the time for gaining a living’, since children of the lower classes left school to work at ten, the compulsory age for attendance at provided state schools was set at ‘not less than five years’. This broke with the practice of the Voluntary Society schools, which had regarded seven as the starting age, and ‘thus the Act formally included the upper infant stage within elementary education’. (Whitbeck, 1972, p. 41) This policy of earlier compulsory attendance age in Britain, at age five, was distinct from that of Europe and America, and contributed to the establishing of the English infant school as a separate entity within the elementary school.

Yet setting the compulsory attending age at five did not stop the flow of younger children coming into the elementary schools on a voluntary basis. An independent survey of school provision in 1870 showed that three to six year olds accounted for a third of all children then attending school, and that the usual practice was to form two classes of children under seven, the ‘babies’ class for the under five whose curriculum ‘consisted of learning to speak clearly, to understand pictures, to recite the alphabet and to march to music’ and the ‘infant class’ of five to seven-year-olds which followed a program based on the 3R’s, simple manual tasks and sewing. In terms of age divisions, therefore, “a nursery and an infant stage were already defined by 1871” (Ibid, p. 41).

Fees for school attendance were abolished in 1891, and there was a remarkable increase in school attendance: the number of three to five year olds in school more than doubled by 1900. By this time infant education from three to seven was recognized in practice by the public, teachers and the inspectorate as the first stage in elementary education (p. 50).
While Pestalozzi and Froebel had advocated that younger children remain at home with their mothers, they had not been faced with the exigencies of mass infant education in the conditions prevailing in the industrial towns in England, where economic necessity required so many mothers to work, nursery schools were expensive, and the infant school often provided the only safe place for their children to go. As Whitbeck notes, however, an appropriate educational theory to accompany the reality of infants in school did not evolve until the next century (1972, p.50).

By the early 1900’s the English infant school had evolved as a unique institution. The system of payment by results had been abolished and a more flexible approach became possible. Pressures for early formal education had been further reduced by the extension of statutory education to fourteen years. The English ‘new ideals’ movement brought pressure for reform, as well as the American ‘progressive education’ movement from the later 1920’s. The presence of younger children in the ‘babies classes’, who came on a voluntary basis, and as, noted, the fact that that compulsory education began at five, forced English educationists to “consider some of the implications of research findings in the development of young children” (Whitbeck, 1972, p.83).

A government circular Suggestions for Teachers, issued in 1905, advocated that in regard to infant classes general principles of ‘recognition of the child’s spontaneous activity’, and ‘love of movement’, should be recognized in the curriculum. Yet where there were large babies and infants’ classes of sixty to eighty, formal teaching continued to be reinforced as the only practical solution to problems of class management; heads of
school in London for instance, were reluctant to appoint Froebel-trained teachers to their infant schools for fear they would be unable to cope with large classes. Whitbeck describes a class in such a school:

A typical infant classroom in the early 1900’s was still fitted with a fixed, tiered gallery in which fifty to sixty or more infants sat in rigid rows. According to one inspector, the curriculum still consisted largely of the three Rs taught by mechanical drill methods necessitating much rote learning. All were required to learn to write with the right hand, the left being firmly folded behind their backs. Letter cards were used for word-building, which was done through sequential numbered stages. Kindergarten exercises and ‘occupations’ usually had a place in the time-table, but the routine method of teaching the whole class to fold paper, stitch, assemble wooden cubes or lay out sticks in number patterns was quite contrary to Froebel’s original intention and principles. ‘Object lessons’, with a visual aid from the store cupboard placed on the teacher’s desk, could provide opportunity for informative discussion in the hands of a lively and imaginative teacher, but were often merely exercises in stereotyped questions and rote answers from the teacher’s manual. On occasion the class was allowed to draw and crayon a picture of a duck, a flower or a sailing boat – provided that all did this correctly so that the finished results were as nearly as possible identical. These were then displayed along the rear wall, behind the gallery. Drill and marching, sometimes to martial music, took place in the playground or central hall. (1972, p. 84)
In some of the more progressive schools the babies were allowed a period of controlled movement on the level floor space, and there were sessions of free play in the hall where a variety of toys were made available – wooden toys on wheels, hoops, skipping ropes, dolls and dolls’ houses, drums and even a rocking horse. Where there were large numbers, two year olds spent much of their time penned in fixed seats along the wall, while others used the space in the middle for freer activities. Formal class instruction in the 3R’s continued to be the rule.

Though common practice was slow to change, belated realization of how inappropriate the old formal instruction was for children under five who constituted over a third of the infant school population in 1900, and still accounted for nearly a quarter in 1920 began to push the curriculum towards a more child-centered view. New and freer attitudes were spreading, fostered by the inspectorate and the training colleges. Attention was focused on the general social and psychological needs of these youngest pupils, opening the way ‘to a reappraisal of infant education above the statutory age of five years’ (Ibid, p. 87). What teachers saw and understood about children at three and four brought experience and insight into the nature of learning for children as they progressed along the developmental continuum, at five, six and seven.

In 1911, Edmond Holmes, who for many years had been the chief inspector for elementary schools, wrote in his influential book, What Is and What Might Be, that “the atmosphere of the good infant schools is...freer, more recreative, and truly educative than that of the upper schools of equivalent merit” (1911, 87). Thus we see that the
developmental tradition at this time was strongest in the state infant schools, where it had
the least opposition from the instructional elementary tradition inherited from the
monitorial system (still in place for children after seven), or the preparatory tradition
which dominated the private sector intent on training their children for the exams leading
to places in exclusive grammar schools.

Progressive Movement and the New Education Era

Edmond Holmes, who called himself a ‘neo-Froebelian’, supported the work of
Montessori, particularly after visiting her school in Rome. With other progressive
thinkers, he formed the New Ideals Group, which worked for educational reform, spread
their ideas worldwide and founded progressive schools with “messianic enthusiasm”
(Smith, 1985, p.53).

This group included Bertrand Russell and Percy Nunn, who had written what some called
the ‘progressive’s textbook’, *Education: Its Data and First Principles* (1920) 3, and
Homer Lane from the American ‘progressive education’ movement inspired by Dewey.
In 1915 this group came together at the Conference of New Ideals in Education, held at

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3 A famous passage: “That freedom for each to conduct life’s adventure in his own way
and to make the best he can of it is the one universal idea sanctioned by nature and
approved by reason...it offers the one sure foundation for a brotherhood of nations, the
only basis upon which men can join together to build the city of God...Though our
children cannot build a fairer world on any other foundation than our own, yet they are
not bound, unless in our folly we will have it so, to repeat for ever our failures...they
have in them a creative power which, if wisely encouraged and tolerantly guided, may so
remould our best that, as the dark shadows pass, ‘the life of the world may move forward
into broad, sunny uplands’ and become worthier than any we have yet seen.” (Nunn,
1920, p.17)
the instigation of the Montessori society. The conference characterized the new spirit in education as ‘reverence for the pupils’ individuality and a belief that individuality grows best in an atmosphere of freedom’ (as cited in Whitbeck, 1972, p.87-88).

Over the next decade many of this group founded schools “that embodied their faith that only a right education could reform society and bring about a better world” (Smith, p.53). Especially after the horrors of the First World War, and the concern of the progressives for fundamental change, a variety of private schools that professed the New Education were founded, among them Homer Lane’s Little Commonwealth, open from 1913-1917, and A.S. Neil’s famous Summerhill in Suffolk in 1927. Then of course, there was Susan Isaacs’ Malting House School, founded in 1924. Several of these progressive and experimental schools cut across the age divisions that became established in the state sector, and consequently did not contribute specifically to the new concept of the infant school. They did, however, exert an indirect influence in favor of a more informal and permissive atmosphere, and infant teachers “found much to interest them in the writings of A. S. Neill, in particular” (Whitbread, 1972, p.90). Neil’s frankly Freudian approach differed from that of Dewey’s laboratory school, both of whom had inspired Susan Isaacs, but as a group the progressives shared “a common concern for the wholesome growth of the child into a rational, expressive adult, and based their work both on psychological studies of childhood and on their own liberal, optimistic hopes for the progress of society” (Smith, 1985, p. 55).
The theory and practice of John Dewey publicized by the Progressive Education Association from 1920, and W. H. Kilpatrick in his further development of Dewey's 'learning by doing' into the 'project method' were beginning to gain ground in the American public elementary school system, and in the UK. Susan Isaacs, as noted, in her Malting House School, developed the logic of Dewey's theories for infant and nursery education, 'to which he himself paid relatively little attention since six was the usual starting age in American schools' (Whitbeck, 1972, p.90). Her books, and her influence as a co writer of the Hadow report, and her position as head of the Child Development Department at the London Institute of Education, ensured her influence on infant education. As Gardner notes, she made a 'bridge' for teachers between the work of educational theorists and classroom principles and practice' (1969, p.169).

Though the adherents of the New Education began somewhat on the outside of educational debates and reforms, gradually their influence was felt in training colleges. Further and continuing government support for progressive child-centered principles was expressed in the Hadow Report on Primary Education, issued in 1931, which contained the famous passage cited previously that 'the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored' (Hadow 31, p.75). The report recommended separate infant schools for children under seven, and two years later was followed by a second, also chaired by Sir Henry Hadow, Report on Infant and Nursery Schools (1933). The effect of these reports, and one issued three years earlier by the same commission. The Education of the Adolescent was 'destined to change the whole face of English education' (Blackie. 1971, p. 4). The net
effect of their most far reaching recommendation was that the old elementary school, which had previously had an age-range of 5 to 14, should now be split into two divisions:

The younger part, with children of 5 to 11, should be called the Primary school, and the older part, 11 to 14, the Senior Elementary School. This reorganization which had already taken place here and there by L.E.A. initiative, gathered speed after 1927 and by 1939 had affected about one-third of the children in England. (Blackie, 1971, p.4)

In this way, and over the course of the next 25 years, the old elementary school was replaced by the primary school. In the country and in small schools generally, primary schools were single schools under one head teacher, but wherever the schools were larger, they were divided into two departments, juniors and infants, each with its own head teacher. The English Infants School, therefore, continued to develop along its own lines and, as noted by Blackie, it was here that most of the educational ideas which by the late 1960’s had spread upward into the junior school, were first tried out. (1971, p. 6).

After recommending the separate status of infant schools from junior schools, the Hadow Report of 1933 advocated strengthening the emerging child-centered focus of the state infant schools for five to seven year olds. It considered the curriculum for infants under

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4 Susan Isaacs and Cyril Burt jointly contributed a memorandum to the Hadow Report, “The Emotional Development of Children Up to the Age of Seven Plus,” which became the basis for one of the chapters in the body of the Report itself. The chapter recommends ‘quiet encouragement’ and emphasis on ‘what to do and how to do it’, as being more effective than scolding or punishment, and shows the results of Isaac’s psychoanalytic
three broad headings - 'natural activities' including play, 'expression training' including handwork, and 'formal instruction in the three Rs'. It concluded that the three Rs' had no place in infant classes for children under six but that for the 'top infants' – the seven year olds – the curriculum should be equally divided between the three areas, apart from religious instruction which was governed by legislation. Rigid time-tables were condemned in favor of allowing the individual teacher discretion to allocate time flexibly 'according to the children's interests', which should not be unnecessarily interrupted.

The report encouraged incorporating both Froebelian and Montessorian approaches in the new infant school. Whole class instruction was recognized as inappropriate for much of the infant program. Instead, a mixture of class teaching, individual work and teaching in small groups was advocated, with the provision that individual records be kept, as they were in nursery schools. Though formal reading was not begun till after six, children might begin to learn to read as soon as they were interested. According to Whitbeck, the Report brought together the developmental and instructional preparatory tradition in a critical reappraisal of both:

The spontaneous unfolding of certain inherited powers that accompanies growth in natural surroundings is not the only aspect of mental development, nor of itself will it carry the child far. Mental development also includes the acquisition of training on the effects of hostility and shame on young children, studies of the family, and her educational investigations into the nature of childhood. The chapter, though it touches on the matter of inherited intelligence, focuses on explanations of small children's great need to be understood and wisely handled through all their intense and confusing early experiences (Smith, 1985, p.58).
certain forms of knowledge and skill that are neither natural nor innate. In particular before an individual can take his place in the civilized world, he must acquire the use of certain instrumental subjects. Among these the 3 R’s are the key to all the rest. (Hadow, 1933)

The 1933 Hadow Report reflected the great progress that had been made in infant education during the previous ten years or so. When the new child-centered approach was at variance with the older mass instruction approach, and Froebelian and Montessorian theories also seemed to conflict, the Report ‘put forward a new synthesis in the developmental tradition with due attention to the instrumental significance of the basic skills at the infant stage’ (Whitbeck, 1972, p.98).

By the end of the next decade, except for in small village schools, where the arrangement would be impractical, 75 percent of five to seven year olds were in separate infant schools. This growing number facilitated the evolution of a ‘special infant school ethos’ unhampered by downward pressure from more formal junior schools. Since many infant schools also had nursery classes, this contributed to the view of education as a continuum from three up to eight years old. In some infant schools, children were grouped vertically in parallel classes instead of chronologically, and in small schools, there was often only one infant class for a mixed age group of all the five to seven year olds (Whitbeck, 1972, p.99).
While the older buildings had previously housed children from 5 to 14 in the old elementary school model, the new infant schools, built in the later 1920’s and 1930’s, and often in council estates:

...were designed as modified open-air nursery schools; one storey only, opening onto a play-ground with a flower border, they were light, colourful and airy, furnished with portable desks or tables and chairs. But classrooms were still self-contained and often too small for really free activity and lacked the space needed for ambitious project work, for the Board of Education decreed that infants required only nine square feet each instead of the ten square feet allowed older children. (Circular, 1325, 1924, as cited in Whitbeck, 1972, p.92)

The urban infant school where Alice Yardley first came to teach in the fall of 1934, at the Forest Field School, was in an old neighborhood, in a building which previously had been an elementary school. The following January, however, she was transferred to the William Crane Infants’ East School, a new building that had many of the characteristics that Whitbeck described above. It was one of a complex of schools that provided for children 5 through 14, infants through senior school age. Its design was undoubtedly meant to encourage child-centered approaches, characterized by attention to individual needs and differences and teacher-child relationships, and with easy accessibility to the outdoors. Yet this was difficult to implement in overlarge classes, and much of the old instructional tradition remained. As Whitbeck notes, in general “the new infant school was slow to supersede the old, and there were still many where children sat in serried
rows of desks, though no longer in galleries”. While William Crane was a new school, the push and pull of old and new approaches certainly was played out during the decade between 1934 and 1944, when Alice Yardley taught there. Tension between Alice Yardley’s growing commitment to child-centered approaches, and the formal instructional approach largely still in place in the school, became an underlying theme energizing and informing the shape of her educational life story.

During the course of this decade, due to the work of Alice Yardley, and other teachers in infant schools throughout England, a steady movement towards more child-centered practices continued. By the beginning of the Second World War, the English infant school had begun to acquire, in the western world, a reputation as a unique and distinct educational entity.
The Hadow Report and the Infant School

Following the recommendation of the Hadow Report on Infant and Nursery Education, (published in 1933) in many parts of England and Wales, primary schools for children age five to eleven, began to replace the old elementary school. These new schools were further divided into several departments, each with its own headteacher. The newly configured primary schools were often established with separate schools within them; the primary school as a whole would often contain a school for 'mixed infants', where both boys and girls, aged 5 to 7, attended together, and two separate junior schools, one for the girls and one for the boys. This reorganization led to revision of the curricula of primary schools, and experimentation with a more flexible, individualized and informal approach to the instruction of young students than had previously been the norm. (Blackie, 1971).

When Alice Yardley arrived in Nottingham in 1934, she stepped into this space of experimentation in the infants' school with force and energy. Coming into the profession in the early thirties not long after women had gained the vote, she was among a group of women teachers for whom "education provided... both the tools and space to become active subjects in history" (Crocco, Munro, and Weiler, 1999, p.2), and for whom the city was emblematic of professional and personal independence in a new era of liberation for women. As well as making a good salary, moving to Nottingham, and into her own flat,
Alice Yardley demonstrated her love of independence in a number of ways. She was a strong cyclist, and in her early twenties traveled between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, often by herself. She once bicycled eighty miles in one day on a trip to Ely cathedral. Alice also pursued her interest in dance during this period, participating in a display of "Greek Dance" (1939) as part of the Nottingham Y. W. C. A. team. She spent a summer with her sister at a gymnastic camp and bought herself a caravan. Alice relished having money of her own, and later on, felt lucky that her salary and the little house she had bought allowed her to invite her parents to Nottingham to live with her when they had fallen on hard times.

A Legacy of Possibilities

In her book Still Missing, Amelia Earhart and the Search for Modern Feminism (1993), Susan Ware defines Earhart's quest for independence and accomplishment as the quintessential mission of post-suffrage feminists. Earhart's successful solo flights were proof that women were capable of extraordinary individual feats of courage and skill. Like Earhart, Alice Yardley felt herself the fortunate heir of a legacy of possibilities for women in the world, and like Earhart, was eager to make her mark as an individual in an environment that supported the activity of women in educational innovation.

While the environment of Nottingham offered Alice Yardley the liberal and lively society that allowed her to act with power and agency, the inequities of class and circumstance evident there offered her challenge; to bring quality education to "the poorer schools in the overpopulated parts of the city" (Yardley, 2000). Following the lead of Maria
Montessori and the McMillan sisters, for whom "the slum child constituted the main focus of their practice" (Wollons, 2000, p.61), Alice Yardley wanted to contribute to the greater good of society. Throughout her career, Alice Yardley defined herself as a teacher of inner city children, committed to creating school environments that brought a wide variety of experiences to children and families of limited means.

During the years between 1934 and 1961 when she was worked in the city's schools, Alice Yardley's work contributed to the evolution of Nottingham as a city interested in improving primary education for inner city populations, often housed on public estates. She worked as a teacher for 13 years and a headteacher for 14 years. While the head of three large inner city schools, she developed an integrated curriculum approach, an arts program, physical education and movement classes, writing programs, hands-on math curriculum, and other innovative teaching practices. In 1961 joined the faculty of the newly formed Nottingham College of Education in 1961, where she taught until 1975.

**Educational Writing**

With the publication of her books in the Young Children Learning series in 1970, Alice Yardley's educational work came to the attention of early childhood educators not only in England, but in Canada and the United States as well. After retiring from the college, she continued to travel extensively to give workshops and summer courses in Canada and the United States, and abroad, and to work with local groups such as the Preschool Play Group Association in Nottingham. In 1992, at the age of 79, she and a friend started a
group called "Past-carers" that organizes trips to visit medieval sites in England. Since 1967, she lived in Keyworth, outside of Nottingham, where I visited her five times over the course of our research project, between 1996 and 2002.
Chapter Three: Method

Finding Alice

“...when the social researcher assumes a learning role...Hypotheses, measurement, samples, and instruments are the wrong guidelines. Instead you need to learn about a world you don’t understand by encountering it first hand and making some sense out of it” (Agar, 1986 p.12).

First Contact

Sitting in my living room on a dark and wintry Sunday morning in 1996, I had a flash of insight and determination. In the midst of a research project on the British Primary School approach, I had reread Alice Yardley’s books in the Young Children Learning Series, and been struck again by the power of her writing. I understood what I must do. I would try to find Alice Yardley herself. All I knew about her was printed on the back cover of her book, “one of the best-known authorities in the field of primary education.. has had extensive teaching in infants schools.. a Principal Lecturer in Education at the Nottingham College of Education”.

Several weeks later, after many phone calls and internet searches, a moment of despair
when I realized that Nottingham College no longer existed, and one of exhilaration when, several calls later, I was told by a friendly voice that it had merged with another institution, I finally talked to Stan Antonourris, a member of the faculty who knew Alice Yardley. When he told me that Alice Yardley, now in her eighties, was "still active" and living nearby in the village of Keyworth, outside Nottingham, my adventure had begun.

It was the spring of 1996. I picked up the telephone, punched in her number, and listened in apprehension, the sound of my own thumping heart beating in my ears. I was experiencing one of the central defining features of ethnography; "the risk and the moments of the research process which cannot be planned (and) are situative, coincidental and individual" (Luders, 1995, pp.320-1). After many rings, a lively voice, colored with the slight burr of a Yorkshire accent, answered "Hello!" "Is this Alice Yardley?" "Yes, it is." Alice was pleasantly surprised to hear that I, a stranger and an American, admired her work and would like to come and visit her. She was agreeable to the idea, and we made tentative plans, later confirmed by letter, that I would travel to her village of Keyworth, near Nottingham, and meet her in August that coming summer.

First Meeting

I arrived in London and rode the train up to Nottingham, while busy executives talked on their cell phones and tapped on their lap tops as we whizzed through the sheep-dotted English countryside. On the appointed day I took the little bus out of town to the small village of Keyworth. Alice was waiting for me as it came to a stop, dressed in pale green
pants and top, tall and smiling, her long hands clasped around a sturdy walking stick.

She soon led me across the town green to her small bungalow in Crantock Garden. Alice made tea in the tiny kitchen and then we settled in her living room overlooking a small garden with a birdbath, apple trees and perennial beds. After tea, we walked to the local pub for lunch, then, at her suggestion, on to the nature reserve surrounding the village. We climbed one by one over a turnstile and down a narrow path to a little pond. Though bent from osteoporosis, Alice climbed over the gate without hesitation, handing me her cane as she did so.

As I have since realized, our shared appreciation for walking on the land and for the natural world in its many manifestations was established on this first visit, and continued to be a binding interest as we got to know each other better.

Interviews and Pilgrimages

Three years later, as a beginning doctoral student at Lesley University, in August of 1999, I wrote to Alice Yardley about my plan to focus on English Infants’ Schools and her contribution to their development in Nottingham. I told her that I hoped to visit her that summer and spend some time interviewing her. She wrote back agreeing to be interviewed during three weeks in August, and perhaps to travel with me to the village where she had spent her childhood. With elation, I went ahead and bought my ticket, making plans to stay, at Alice’s suggestion, at “Laurel Farm”, a rustic bed and breakfast
establishment only a mile or so from where she lived.

As it happened, however, my visit coincided with a difficult period for Alice; she was recovering from complications resulting from a hip operation. This "set back" as she called it, rendered her essentially chair-bound. My hope that we could travel together to the seaside village of Mablethorpe where she had grown up proved impossible.

In spite of her chair-bound condition (she had almost told me not to come, she confessed), and her worry that she didn’t feel “normal” as a result, we spent many pleasurable hours together. On our first visit, Alice told me at the outset that, because of her recent medical problems, that she “couldn’t promise anything”, that she didn’t know how she would feel the next day, and would rather not schedule many interviews in advance. She told me that she would do what she could but that we would have to “take things as they come.” At first I was somewhat dismayed at this, but soon, after one or two interviews, I realized that it was going to be alright. Each time as the hour came to an end, she brought out her small leather bound diary and asked me when the next session would be; then carefully penciled in my name in the page marking the day.

During our interviews Alice seemed to come to life intellectually and emotionally. Though during this first visit she was reluctant to let me use the tape recorder or video, in every other way she was an enthusiastic “subject”. Alice seemed to enjoy preparing for the upcoming interview. Often when I arrived for a “session”, as we came to call them, she would have something ready to show me; a book of photos, her teaching notes, or a
list of dates penciled on a small piece of paper. At first she would often start the session asking me what I had in mind for a topic of the interview; but soon, after a first question or two, the interview would become free ranging, open-ended and, as Reinharz characterizes this type of interview, “semi-structured”. By the end we might have some questions left for the next session; perhaps she needed to check on a date, find a book I had asked about, or consult her little leather bound diaries in order to answer. In this way we found natural points of ending, which then became our starting point for the next session. In our collaborative quest to document Alice’s life story, we developed our own methodology - one that was driven by the subject matter, not by particular research methods. We were in fact engaged in the “multimethod feminist research” that Reinharz describes in her book, Feminist Methods in Social Science Research, “using any method available and any cluster of methods ... to answer the questions” that were of interest to us (Reinharz, p.213). Over time, our interviews also became more wide ranging, while sometimes we might dwell longer on a particular subject. I grew bolder in trying to pin Alice down on occasion, or to press for more details.

We shared deep feelings. Alice told me about the death of her much younger brother Terence, from meningitis She was home alone when she received a telegram. His body in a little white coffin arrived by taxi, her parents distraught. She was overcome, she told me, and walked up to the cliffs looking over the sea, watching the waves, comforted by the wildness and relentless surging of the ocean below her. The next day, Alice and her father had to physically restrain her mother from jumping in the grave with the small wooden box.
Alice also showed me a number of small books she had put together; photographs of children climbing on play equipment she had designed, and of children absorbed in activity throughout an integrated day program. She described events in her early life on the farm in Mablethorpe with particular enjoyment. During this visit, I had hoped to take her to visit Mablethorpe, but her condition didn’t allow it. Alice wanted me to go though, and gave me her own map, marked with a route she thought I would most enjoy; one that took me through some beautiful farm landscape, tiny villages, and the lovely “wolds”\(^5\), the soft rolling hills of her childhood. I found the Rutland Road where her father had built “Sylvia Bungalow”, her childhood home, and the brick school she had attended nearby, with separate entrances marked for boys and girls. The churchyard where Terence was buried was only a few blocks from her family’s bungalow, and in the other direction lay the vast expanses and high dunes of the North Sea where she had climbed after Terence died. Her itinerary then sent me inland to the dense market town of Louth where she had won a scholarship to the King Edward VI grammar school. I toiled up the hill from what had been the train station, following her daily route.

These pilgrimages gave me insight into how deepening layers of shared understanding are possible when experiences become common between researcher and “subject”, and of how just such a sense of the ‘intersubjectivity’ allows a further exploration of territory only suggested before (Minster, p.36). Having been to Mablethorpe and Louth I could understand so much more, therefore she could tell me more.

\(^5\) A term used in England for small rounded hills.
Following Alice

When I was home again I sent Alice a hand made book of photographs of my journey in her footsteps as she went to school everyday. I called it “Following Alice”. I also sent a collation of the information I had gathered from all the notes I had taken. She responded with corrections in her penciled hand, the printing carefully balanced over my text in her characteristic small letters. I hoped through this process to show her that I would be attentive to her feedback and give her editing power.

Alice seemed delighted with the mini-biography, “Following Alice”, which I noticed on a later visit, she kept it in her basket by the window. Somehow this act of identification on my part conveyed to Alice a depth of commitment which moved her. As Reinharz has observed, this aspect of my research implied a feminist critique of distancing, neutrality, and objectivity while reviving identification as a methodological principle: I was “identifying with” in order to “know” the other (Reinharz, p.233). The two communications I sent Alice in the fall of 1999, following my first extended visit with her - the chronological narrative and the photo book - were both important in establishing my legitimacy as a scholar in Alice’s eyes (and my own), and my identification with her as a person. I had moved forward to a dialogic relationship with Alice that defined her both as a partner in the project, and as someone I cared deeply about, both as my “subject” and as a person.
Epiphany

I was at the end of a three week visit to Alice in November of 2000. During one of our last sessions, a young relative came to see her unexpectedly. As we chatted over tea, Alice explained to her niece in an animated voice, “Pebble and I are writing a book together!” This was the first time I had heard her describe our “project” in quite this way, and the first time she had defined her active collaboration in it so clearly. Her words seemed a reflection of what Ann Oakley calls an “ethic of commitment rather than a scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and subject”, and I felt the power of this shift in her perception of the nature of our project. I was filled with a sense of responsibility. This declaration by Alice felt to me like another definitive moment, one that signaled a shift in our research relationship to a level beyond and more complex than the more formal professionalism of our first encounters.

Stages

My relationship to Alice Yardley has gone through a series of stages. At first I was an admiring devotee of her educational writing, wanting to meet her in person. The second stage began when I came back for a second and longer visit in the summer of 1999, three years after our first meeting. This time I came as an accredited researcher, beginning a doctoral program with a plan of writing about Alice Yardley’s work in the larger context of the English Primary School and Infants’ School movement. After spending a week with her however, I realized that my focus had shifted from a concentration on her
educational work to her life as a whole; her childhood, schooling, professional and writing career. What I now realize is that this shift represented a third stage; I had begun to think of my work on Alice Yardley as an ethnographic and feminist biographical study.

When I came back later for a longer visit, in November of 2000, I focused in our sessions on particular questions about her personal and professional life brought to my attention by feminist concerns, issues related particularly to how her gender affected the kinds of support and choices she made. At this time I was also housed at Nottingham Trent University, on the grounds of the old Nottingham College where Alice had taught, as I had received a fellowship from the Research Department of the School of Education there, through the agency of feminist philosopher Dr. Morwenna Griffiths. I had use of the library and an office at the University, and gave a presentation on my research on English Infants’ Schools and Alice Yardley’s contributions, to the weekly research seminar. John Makin, the research librarian, pointed me towards several of Alice Yardley’s colleagues who still taught at the University, and I interviewed two of them, as well as two of Alice Yardley’s former students.

By this stage, my resources as a scholar of Alice Yardley’s work and world had broadened. It seemed that the contacts I had made on my own with colleagues and scholars in Nottingham bolstered Alice Yardley’s confidence in the seriousness of my purpose, and our collaborative project on her life as significant. As I learned more about her life as a teacher at Nottingham College, while actually inhabiting the same spaces that
she had, I created a scaffold for her to build on; we had established a foundation of intersubjectivity. Now she could share memories of this part of her life with someone who was not a stranger to that life, but someone who in some ways was participating in that life.

The biographical project I had embarked on with Alice seemed to grow with us and around us, as our methodologies included more kinds of data; a pub meeting with colleagues that Alice brought me to, photos she gave me, journals she kept as a teacher, the original manuscript of her unpublished novel. Our project became a kind of independent organism. As Alice got to know me, and I got to know her, I realized I had developed, in the effort to make sense of her world, what Michael Agar describes as among the requirements of an ethnographer, including “intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, (and) an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher’s making”. (Agar, 1986).

Using the terms of feminist philosopher Helen Longino (1999), the knowledge I had gained stemmed in part from my personal “subjectivity” and “situatedness” in relation to my subject, from the fact that I had spent many hours next to Alice Yardley, sitting near her, chair by chair, in her small living room, looking out at her garden. As the “romantic biographer” Richard Holmes had in his geographical pursuit of Mary Wollstonecraft (Holmes, 1985), I had followed in Alice Yardley’s footsteps, visiting places where she lived and taught. I had produced the data, not as an objective outsider,
but moving from a groundwork of nonbiographical questions to what feminist biographer Kathryn Kish Sklar a "final layer", reached when she "recognized a personal relationship between the author and her subject" (1992).

The final stage of our relationship was characterized by my acceptance into Alice’s world of colleagues, friends, and family. On my side of the Atlantic, the concern of my family, friends and colleagues for Alice in her last year made it clear to me that everyone close to me, personally and professionally, knew about Alice. After our last extended visit in November of 2000, we had established a routine of talking every Sunday afternoon. I would call at 1 p.m. exactly and she would be ready for my call. I imagined her where she always sat, in her chair by the window overlooking the garden, telephone in its cradle by her side. (As I heard later from her friends, she made it clear that this time on Sunday afternoon was one she kept free for my call). Usually I would have a prepared question or two which she would answer, and we would talk for close to an hour, unless, as happened occasionally, she wasn’t feeling well.

There was no answer

Then one Sunday in December of 2001 I called and called and there was no answer. I learned from her good friend Dorothy Glynn that Alice had suffered a bad fall. Several months later Alice reluctantly moved into Belvoir Dale, an assisted living facility near Keyworth. She was eighty eight years old.
On my final visit, in April of last year, I knew that Alice had decided to sell her bungalow. She instructed me to come and take from the bungalow whatever documents and artifacts I might need to continue my work on her life history. When I found myself hunched in the small attic on Crantock Garden, poring through trunks of children’s paintings, posters, and typed manuscript pages, I realized how intimately entwined I had become in Alice’s world. Now I was to inherit some important pieces of it.

The last time I saw Alice was at the end of that visit, after a long day packing artifacts from her archive to send back to my home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I had come to say goodbye to her at Belvoir Dale, sitting by her side in the small bedroom, my chair pulled close up next to her chair. She was thin and frail, but her face still peeked out from her crumpled body, luminous and expressive. She told me I was very kind to visit, and wished me a good journey.

Later that year, in August, 2002, Alice Yardley died. She was eighty eight. At her funeral in Nottingham, which I attended, many colleagues and friends were there, and many of them knew of my work. As we gathered in a nearby pub, I felt a strange mixture of sadness and elation. Thirty years ago, her words had drawn me into her world. Since then our speech had mingled. We had inhabited the same spaces. We had come to know each other well. Now I was left again with only words and texts, photographs and journals, a vast data field to find my way through. My journey as an ethnographer had taken me far, with my subject at my side. Now I had to look back, and then go forward on my own.
A Stopping Place: One Interview

July, 2000, First Taping

When I had amassed a number of bulging notebooks containing all the information I had gathered from over twenty hours of interviews, since our first in August of 1999, I had begun to despair of ever gaining Alice’s permission to tape record. However, by this time, and perhaps partly because I had been such a faithful recorder of her words, she understood that I was seriously committed to the project, and that I also cared about her on a personal level. Indeed, the two went together in my mind, as my respect and fondness for her grew as I got to know her better, and over time she seemed to have more trust in the long term nature of my commitment. For this reason, perhaps, she was able to set aside her natural reserve, and let see her life as worth exploring together with a sense of growing personal attachment to the project, if not investment. We had moved to a level beyond and more complex than the responsible professionalism of our first encounters. Through our interview process, Alice and I had reached a place where, I as the researcher felt what feminist sociologist Ann Oakley describes as the “contradiction between “scientific” interviewing requiring objectivity, and feminist research requiring openness, engagement, and the development of a potentially long-lasting relationship” (cited in Reinhart, p.27).
So it was that after my first two visits, and, as described in the previous section, after I had sent her notes for her revision and the photo book, ‘Following Alice’, on my third visit in July of 2000, Alice allowed me to use a taperecorder. One day when I stopped in to see her, I had the taperecorder with me from a session with the local headteacher she had sent me to interview, and I just quickly said, ‘Would you mind? I just need to do this for my notes.’ Somehow, after many hours of watching me scribbling, she said yes, and after that my trusty taperecorder bore witness to each of our subsequent interviews. Only on two or three occasions did she ask me to turn the taperecorder off, and that was typically when she felt she had been critical of someone.

My growing sense was that our work was going forward as a form of intergenerational sharing, that we were participating in a ritual of passage from one generation of women teachers to the next. For Alice, I was a representative from another country, yet a shared inhabitant of an international culture of women teachers of young children. Through me, Alice might pass down the stories of teaching that would otherwise have been entrusted to her daughters or nieces, the story of her intellectual journey, as well as the more purely personal stories. In this way, our work fell within the model of collaborative ‘Life Story Telling’, first brought to my attention through the work of Native American teacher Esther Horne, a Shoshone ‘elder’, and Sally McBeth, an anthropologist. McBeth tape recorded Horne’s experiences and insights during a long career teaching in Native American boarding schools, and together, over many years, they refined and edited the final text which brought to public light the educational history of this wise and respected Shoshone ‘elder.’ As defined by Linde, life history or life story, is first of all a folk
notion of sharing ‘what events have made me what I am’ More technically, as she argues, ‘life story’ can be defined as ‘stories and associated discourse units’ – explanations and chronicles – told by an individual over their life that make evaluative points about the speaker. (Linde, p. 20) Life stories, then, are eminently ‘tellable’, and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time, to different people at different times in one’s life.

While the particular aspect of Alice Yardley’s life that I was most interested in, her work in education, was always at the forefront of my focus as a researcher, the totality of her experience, in all its contexts and shapes, including the ‘associated discourse units’ became of increasing interest to me. Quite soon in our work together, I found myself telling her, when she would hesitate to stray from the path of her educational career, “I’m interested in your whole life, your childhood, everything you experienced.” Once she accepted this, the flow of conversation was more natural. While I continued to work on putting in place a chronology of her personal and professional life, coming back to this framework to see what was missing, what I should ask her for the next session, I see now, that our occasional tangents always informed my understanding of the context and meaning of her stories of teaching.

From one interview to the next, our agenda seemed to evolve in an organic way from questions that came up; I would ask her to show me something the next time, or she would think of a document during an ongoing interview that she suddenly remembered might be of interest to me. For example, when I asked Alice about the publication dates
of her stories, she got up and exclaimed, ‘I have a record in here!’ and went right to the desk opposite, producing a well-worn pocket sized book labeled “Cash”. In it were neat columns of numbers, pennies and pounds, documenting how much she was paid for each story, and how much was ‘brought forward’ from one date to the next. When I expressed admiration for her organizational skill, “Oh, yes, its all properly kept’ she told me, amused. In fact her little bungalow was a treasure trove of records of all kinds, hidden behind desk drawers and shelves; small leather bound diaries she had kept for each year, indicating where she went and who she met, drawers of photographs, and a collection of hand made books she had put together with photos and neatly lettered calligraphic print, documenting her work with children in several schools.

Within each interview session, over time, the conversation flowed steadily from Alice’s professional life, to her childhood, to talking about philosophy or the food store in the village of Keyworth. There were several occasions, when she felt we were not talking about anything significant, she would laugh and say ‘You’re not recording this nonsense are you?’ and sometimes I would turn the recorder off, when we stopped to get coffee from the kettle in her tiny kitchen, or pulled out a map or some photographs. More often than not, though, the taperecorder was our companion, spinning on, capturing our work together, framing a life within the lively social intercourse that had become our own ‘methodology’ of choice.
One interview, November 3, 2000

As an example of the nature of our process, I will describe in some detail, an interview of a particularly fruitful session that took place in November of 2000, when I visited Alice in her village of Keyworth. This interview session took place on November 3rd, 2000, the second of my visits over a three week period during which I had a small research grant from Nottingham-Trent University. This was the longest time over the course of my research that I spent with Alice, and the visit in which I gathered the most interview material, spent time with several of Alice’s colleagues and friends, and was given a small office at the university in which to work.

By this time Alice had accepted the idea that anything she wanted to talk about would be interesting to me. In contrast to our first sessions, by now we stood together on familiar ground; we had developed the underlying chronological time line, our ‘story time’ as Chatman (1981) calls it, which allowed the discourse of the interview to take off in different directions without elaborate explanation. Alice assumed my prior knowledge of the general shape of her educational life, and within the interview, as I think is clear, this underlying understanding between us made possible an organic flow of information and ideas. This “open-ended” nature of our interview process seemed to encourage Alice to speak naturally and expressively, and to elicit from her the “personal construction of her own experience” which I had hoped for. (Gluck and Patai, 1991, p.23).
In this particular session, Friday morning of November 3rd, 2000, I began by asking her about her trip to Hong Kong in the mid seventies, where she had been sent by the British Ministry of Education to work with teachers of primary schools at British army camps. From this subject we wound our way to discussions of a study she had done of children’s drawings; how children begin to draw people and houses using conventional forms and their own observations in original ways. When I mentioned a story a student of Alice’s had told me about her lecturing style, she described in more detail how she went about giving an annual lecture to 400 on the role of ‘inspiration’ in the development of art: one she gave regularly at Nottingham College. From here we moved to some philosophizing about how adults students learn:

Pebble: And was that a lecture that you’d give?

Alice: Well it was one of the lectures I gave at the college. Ah, occasionally we had to give what we called "principle's lectures" to the whole college. It was a sort of 'command performance’, and I think that one I gave was on the imagination, and the relationship with intelligence, and I prepared all this for that (laughs). and the second one was on the Mental Health Act (laughs). But eh, it was worthwhile work, from my point of view, because you don’t forget it! Not when you’ve got to prepare it, all those discerning adults, 400 of them! Student's age, you know, most of them between 18 and 21, so to speak.

Pebble; 400 of them! Well, you know Chris Conway told me about your lectures, that your lectures were exciting, people wanted to go to them and how
you came to the podium and you had a big bag, and you sort of pulled things out of it.

Alice: You told me that! I can’t remember doing that! I can very well believe it, I mean it was one of the things I do, but that’s just, but I suppose I might fish something out. I’d use any visual aid because I don’t care how old people are they respond, they get better images if you have a few visual aids of a sort, or symbolic - with adults, you can be very symbolic. Yes, I think it captures their imagination, and leaves an image in their mind. Just standing there pole-faced, well, the most ardent student on earth will get bored …you can’t listen forever by forcing yourself, you’ve got to be compelled to listen by what’s happening.

And I don’t believe in reading my lectures. You can have your notes, ok, but I reckoned if you’ve got across six important points about your topic to a group of normal adults that was your limit, you try to put more in or if you .. write it all out in detail , people cannot hold their minds on it, they can’t do it! and you might say something interesting, I don’t care if you only take one of the points away with you, if I said something to spark off their mind, they can go away in that direction. I used to tell them so. You know, if you found something that’s interesting, just go away into your own world, it won’t bother me at all. I see it as something…. But I mean it tis true!

Pebble: Yeah (laughs)
Moving on from this aspect of adult learning, Alice began to talk about the value of direct experience for young children’s learning. Here, in lamenting children’s lack of access to experiences, she expresses the greatest range of feeling in the course of the whole interview. She feels “sad” when she sees how restrained children are by adult limits, going on to describe quite energetically the “sheer pleasure” of long-awaited rain, the “ooze” of mud and “gritty sand” between her toes. Talking about children’s experiential pleasures seemed to draw from her memories of the same sorts of pleasures in her own life:

Alice: Now we can’t experience everything at first hand in life, but we must let children have as much time as possible to experience the world for the first time for themselves, instead of giving them a preconception of what they’re going to be: "Now you can’t go in that water, I told you! No!" All that child hears is “I can’t”, and this is where I sometimes feel very sad, when I see little children being taken to school on a wet day, with their hair nice and combed, their faces clean, prim and proper... They’ll never know what its like to jump in a puddle, and splash it all over themselves. I mean, they won’t will they? The sheer pleasure of jumping in a puddle and getting yourself wet! And you go and do it again because you liked it! You like to make a splash!

We don’t want them getting to school wet through (muttering in imitation of a complaining parent) A bit of water doesn’t hurt now and again.
But the sheer pleasure of rain! I clearly remember one June, when way back... it was the end of the war I should think... they’re hadn’t been a .. the sun rose and set... rose and set... and one day... suddenly there was a thunder storm... and I and quite half the neighborhood... ran out as soon as possible just to feel it.. the sheer pleasure of being out in the rain. Well. For some children, it’s the first time they experience it, isn't it? A baby in a pram, you're not allowed to have those experiences..

Pebble: Children love rain.. and mud.

Alice: Oozing mud (drawing out the vowels expressively) and being on the sands with all that ..black stuff oozing between your toes! And then the gritty sand gets in between and makes you twiggle them..(giggles with pleasure) Oh dear, I know you can't have them all wet in school (laughs ruefully)!

At this point in the transcript, I was struck by how my corroborating comment “Children love rain.. and mud”, seemed to inspire Alice to dwell on memories of her free-wheeling childhood on the beach at Mablethorpe, to give herself room to actually relive this experience. In light of Anderson and Jack’s framing of oral history as an interactive process, it seems a clear example of the benefits of a responsive, participatory interview stance on the part of the interviewer that moves beyond information gathering to a deeper level of communication, inviting a shared entry into the experience described by the subject. (Gluck and Patai, p.23).
Transcribing this particular interview helped me trace a clear thread in Alice’s testimony; her attachment to freedom: freedom of movement, freedom to experience the sensual world, and freedom to take charge of one’s own learning. Alice often described her childhood in Mablethorpe in terms of the freedom and independence she had there. The connection she makes between freedom and learning is, I began to see, a major theme of her life story.
Transcript

I attach here for your information a longer excerpt from this particular interview, showing the range of topics covered, and something of Alice Yardley’s speaking style, as an illustrative example of the nature of our sessions.

Transcript of interview from taped session, November 3. Keyworth.

Alice: The first invitation I ever got was to Hong Kong. For the army that was, because they wanted me to lead a sort of refresher course, to visit and talk to teachers, in their schools, the schools for the children of the troops who were in Hong Kong.

Pebble: So you were going to these sort of schools for the children of British officers?

Alice: Yes, giving them a sort of refresher course, helping them to feel that they'd got in touch with modern developments... refresher courses, and I did the same thing in various parts of the army. They got, you see, they’ve all got...and then some of the people, in some of the countries, invited me independently, separately, on their own accord.

Pebble: And you were saying about the children making these pictures.
Alice: Yes, their idea of what it was, when they drew themselves and their home behind them. Their home was exactly the same little two walk down through as you got from British children, (gesturing with her hands to show the lines of a drawing) with the front door in the middle, and the sides, nice roof, and sometimes a bit of snow on it .. although they’d never seen snow .... (Laughs)

Pebble: They learn the conventional..

Alice: As though it’s a symbol rather than - a typical symbol – I made quite a study of, ah, children’s drawings you know. I’ve got a sort of sequence, I put them on transparencies. Ah...they're all making the same sort of.. and one of the early symbols you see a child produce is the round face. Well, you can imagine, the baby looking up , seeing the person he sees. He sees his mother’s face hanging over him, and its always (uses large gestures) an enormous head, and then he will perhaps begin to put two arms, two legs, and perhaps a little curl round the top. And its only.. oh fairly well on, when they start to put legs, and not till about six or seven that they do a profile. They’ll start sometimes turning the feet sideways..

Pebble : Yah

Alice: You’ve seen all this.

Pebble: Like the Egyptians
Alice: Well, yeah.

Pebble: We used to do that when I did an assessment of children's progress in the nursery and kindergarten. I would ask them to draw a person twice a year..

Alice: You can do an intelligence test almost, certainly an observation test, and occasionally, you’ll get a highly intelligent child who can't produce images, but...can’t symbolize in that sort of way, or, they remain very immature in symbolizing,

Pebble: And yet their verbal skill might be quite high?

Alice: Yes, but you, I mean, with some children, the way they represent things is almost an intelligence test, certainly observation is in there but, its not just observation, because they don’t draw what they see.

Pebble: You mean, their own observation?

Alice: Yeah, I mean, but they observe and know that there have got to be legs hanging off, the feet are off the legs, but.. and at first, the feet will turn both ways at the same time, won’t they? (laughs) I’ve got a whole packet of transparencies, in sequence.

Pebble: And was that a lecture that you’d give?
Alice: Well it was one of the lectures I gave at the college.

Ah, occasionally we had to give what we called "principle's lectures" to the whole college. It was a sort of ‘command performance’, and I think that one I gave was on the imagination, and the relationship with intelligence, and I prepared all this for that (laughs). and the second one was on the Mental Health Act (laughs), But eh, it was worthwhile work, from my point of view, because you don’t forget it, not when you’ve got to prepare it, all those discerning adults, 400 of them! Student's age, you know, most of them between 18 and 21, so to speak.

Pebble: 400 of them! Well, you know C. C. told me about your lectures, that your lectures were exciting, people wanted to go to them and how you came to the podium and you had a big bag, and you sort of pulled things out of it.

Alice: You told me that! I can’t remember doing that! I can very well believe it, I mean it was one of the things I do, but that’s just, but I suppose I might fish something out. I’d use any visual aid because I don’t care how old people are they respond, they get better images if you have a few visual aids of a sort, or symbolic - with adults, you can be very symbolic. Yes, I think it captures their imagination, and leaves an image in their mind. Just standing there pole-faced, well, the most ardent student on earth will get bored ...you can’t listen forever by forcing yourself, you’ve got to be compelled to listen by what’s happening.
And I don’t believe in reading my lectures. You can have your notes, ok, but I reckoned if you’ve got across six important points about your topic to a group of normal adults that was your limit, you try to put more in or if you .. write it all out in detail, people cannot hold their minds on it, they can’t do it! and you might say something interesting, I don’t care if you only take one of the points away with you, if I said something to spark off their mind, they can go away in that direction. I used to tell them so. You know, if you found something that’s interesting, just go away into your own world, it won’t bother me at all. I see it as something.... But I mean it tis true!

Pebble: Yeah (laughs)

Alice: And if they came away with some point of enlightenment if you like, just one little ray of something different they haven’t thought of before, then that was a good result from that lecture. I’d rather they thought their own thoughts, Their own thoughts are far more useful to them. I mean you work according to your own tenets, you don’t work according to somebody else’s. Somebody says "Now I believe in something or other, and I ‘d like you to work that way". Well, you can have a dash at it, but you’ve got to have your own version. You can only do your best work when, if you’re working within the ambit of your own, I would say, creed, belief. You’ve got to have conviction about something. I don’t mind if people’s convictions vary from mine, so long as they’ve got them. Because of integrity, you know it. You can’t work without integrity. I mean you get maybe say a headmistress who says, "Now these are my tenets, I want you to work according to these beliefs". Well you can’t. You can have a bash at it, but you’re
all the time, “Now what would she want me to do?” Well, you’ve got to work according to what you think is right. You haven’t got to be tied to what somebody else thinks you ought to be doing. They can communicate and say that, that’s their skill, but you’ve got to take the reins!

Pebble: Because then you do your best work.

Alice: Yes, yeah,

Pebble: Is that something that you think you learned when you were teaching? At William Crane, as a teacher?

Alice: Well, I learned as I went, and, I mean I think ...didn’t I lend you the philosophy?

Pebble: I have it.

Alice: Yes, I mean its ..what I’m saying is recognized in that, isn’t it? Because I used to write out my thoughts as well.. and sometimes..I’d not be, I remember, I told you when I was writing the book about senses and sensitivity.. and about music, yes, to begin with I didn’t know .. I didn’t preprepare that book at all. I didn’t quite know what I was going to write about. I don’t think I had worked out my own way of putting down .. I knew what I meant in my mind.. my reaction.. but to put it in words was another stage ... but then I do clearly remember ( voice rising with excitement) being taken over! Hearing the words
told me ... in my mind... (soft hushed tones). They didn't come out of the ether.. they come out of my own mind. But the ideas were formulated more clearly to me as I wrote.

The act of writing focused my attention. You can't just have vague ideas. You don't communicate if you try to convey them to somebody else. You've got to have some message contained in it..

And sometimes children ... because we spark off .... Children are nearer to things than we are.. once you put them into words you've distanced them ... and their concepts and ideas .. you see we've been told what the concepts are.. well a concept really is ... well its something you really should formulate for yourself, nobody else can do it for you! And I mean, sure, even when you talk you don’t know precisely in advance what you’re going to say .. eh, it’s a creative process.. the higher.. I mean we don’t know what really the human mind is doing. We haven’t got a word for what the actual.. we call it intelligence, thought, perception, inspiration, all sorts of things, because we haven’t got a precise concept, have we? what the human mind is doing. Its much more miraculous piece of equipment than we think! And then you went to the world “Just knowing” as children say, “I don’t know, I just know!”(high voice showing enthusiasm and emphasis). Well don’t you get... "Nobody told me, I just knowed!" How often have you had children say that? And they do... they know better than you! in some circumstances. Because you had a preconception foisted upon you which you’d accepted without question. They come to it with fresh eyes! You’ve been told what you can see when confronting your experience, haven’t you? Or previous experience leads your mind in that direction, you formulate some notion. And sometimes you get entirely the wrong idea, but you blink, because you’ve got the idea yourself!... well, you, I mean, you just, in everyday
conversation, you know sometimes when, she made that statement... that's what she's going to believe anyway or what she’s going to hang onto, until practical experience discredits it. I’ve lived and worked in different spheres in my life and they are learnt to yours for a while and they’ll ask a question. You give them a simple answer and they haven't a clue what its all about .. and then you try to explain and you realize "I’m making the wrong impression all the time!" And you can’t do anything about it. They’ve got to make their own impression. You can never learn by being told! You only know what somebody else thinks.. I mean we do learn, or we say we’re learning, but what we’re doing is interpreting somebody else’s information.

Now we can’t experience everything at first hand in life, but we must let children have as much time as possible to experience the world for the first time for themselves, instead of giving them a preconception of what they’re going to be: "Now you can’t go in that water, I told you! No!" All that child hears is “I can’t”, and this is where I sometimes feel very sad, when I see little children being taken to school on a wet day, with their hair nice and combed, their faces clean, prim and proper... They’ll never know what it's like to jump in a puddle, and splash it all over themselves. I mean, they won’t will they? The sheer pleasure of jumping in a puddle and getting yourself wet!

And you go and do it again because you liked it! You like to make a splash!

We don’t want them getting to school wet through (muttering in imagination of complaining parent) A bit of water doesn’t hurt now and again..

But the sheer pleasure of rain! I clearly remember one June, when way back.. it was the end of the war I should think.. they’re hadn’t been a .. the sun rose and set... rose and set... and one day.. suddenly there was a thunder storm,.. and I and quite half the
neighborhood.. ran out as soon as possible just to feel it.. the sheer pleasure of being out in the rain. Well. For some children, it’s the first time they experience it, isn’t it? A baby in a pram, you're not allowed to have those experiences..

Pebble: Children love rain and mud.

Alice: Oozing mud, and being on the sands with all that (drawing out her words expressively as she speaks) ..black stuff oozing between your toes. And then the gritty sand gets in between and makes you twiggle them..(giggles with pleasure) Oh dear, I know you can't have them all wet in school (laughs ruefully)! Though some schools are quite accommodating. At William Crane we had what you called the open air classroom.
Coding

After transcribing all the interviews that I had tape recorded between June of 2000, and July of 2001, I reread the entire transcript, (all 200 pages), and coded it for topics of conversation, ideas, and thematic strands that often reoccurred in the interview text. As well as the theme of ‘freedom and independence’ I identified the following categories:

- Freedom and independence
- Stories of teaching
- The child leads, teachers follow
- Physical activity
- Becoming a person
- Personal fulfillment
- Philosophy of teaching
- Memory and language
- Wartime
- College teaching
- Travels
- Being ‘taken over’ by an idea of thought
- Feminist stories
- Humorous stories
- Yardley family history
- Social historical context
Support from authority

History of education

Alice as a teacher-leader

Teacher autonomy

Conflict

Significant moment

Thinking point

Education as development

Metaphor of education and development as ‘growth’

Alice as a learner

Imagination

Self expression

I then read through the entire document a second time and identified all the sections in which Alice Yardley makes direct reference to her own learning and teaching, and to her philosophy of education. This material amounted to approximately sixty pages of (single spaced) text. At this juncture, I made the decision to arrange this material in chronological order, using the underlying ‘story time’ of the narrative of her life. I created time sensitive categories or codes, drawing together in each code material from a number of different interviews, as Alice would often refer to several time periods within the same session. The final coding system was arranged as follows:
Code 1 Before Teaching: childhood and college (1913-1934)
Code 2 Forest Field – first teaching position (1934)
Code 3 William Crane Infants East – teaching position, 8 years (1935-1943)
Code 4 Player Primary East – teaching and deputy headship (1943-1947)
Code 5 St. Anne’s Well Road – first headship (1947-1951)
Code 6 William Crane Infants School – second headship (1951-1959)
Code 7 Brooksby Primary School – third headship (1959-1961)
Code 8 Wartime (1939-1945)

These chronologically ordered codes, structured to reflect key transitions and stages in her professional life, (except for Code 8, Wartime, which overlapped her tenure at two different schools) then became the foundation on which I constructed the biographical narrative of Alice Yardley’s life and thought as a teacher and headteacher. I began with her childhood, and ended when she left the Brooksby Primary School in 1961 to accept a job as an instructor at Nottingham College.

As well as the material gathered from interview transcript, research in relevant literature, including texts in Alice’s library such as the Plowden Report, and the Education Act of 1944, which she had ready to show me on my first formal interview, I also drew on the following primary sources in the construction of the narrative:

A memoir written by Alice Yardley in her early seventies, describing her childhood, teaching life, and experiences during the World War II, some sections of which I transcribed (from its original hand written form) (see appendix)

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6 The names of the teachers and head teachers in Alice Yardley’s professional life are taken from her own accounts. Verification by additional historical sources was not always possible.
Three notebooks she kept while teaching and headteaching at infants schools in Nottingham between 1944 and 1961

Three booklets with photographs and texts describing children’s activities in schools where she taught and was the head teacher; and her collections of children’s poetry, drawings and paintings

Alice Yardley’s short stories

Alice Yardley’s published books

My notes from our telephone calls, and our correspondence

My notes from our interviews in August, 1999, before taping began

An oral history compiled from our conversations and interviews 1999-2000, shown to Alice for her corrections, before tape recording began

Each of these sources of information provided important strands and pieces of the total fabric. My task was to integrate each piece of the pattern into a ‘whole cloth’ that would represent in narrative form the shape of Alice Yardley’s life and work, and within it, the development of her educational thought. This is the chronological narrative that follows in Chapter Four.
Further Reflections on Theory, Method and Form

This dissertation has used for its theoretical basis and methodological principles work from a number of different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences; history, philosophy, biography, anthropology, and sociology. It is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach within the broad area of educational studies with a particular focus on feminist methods in social science, and the emerging field of life history research.

History and Philosophy

I used the tools of historical research based on readings of primary and secondary sources, to trace the evolution of the British Primary School and English Infant school in the context of British educational history, and to identify and trace the philosophical strands which informed their development. As I gained first hand knowledge of Alice Yardley’s experience as a teacher and head teacher of Infant Schools in Nottingham, and my work focused, not only on creating a biographical account of Alice Yardley’s life and work, but also on how to place her life and work within the framework of the historical development of the Infant School between 1930 and 1970.

Biography

Educational and feminist biography
A number of works by biographers of twentieth century women educators, such as Joyce Antler’s study of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of the Bank Street School of Education, and Lydia Smith’s work on the life and work of Susan Isaacs, have provided models for my study of Alice Yardley. Both of these biographies incorporate substantial analysis of their subjects’ written works amid a telling of the more material life events that shaped their educational thinking. Karen Maloney’s study of the life and work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman falls within this broad category, with special attention to relevance of her work as a woman philosopher of education. Each of the women studied, according to their biographers, had contributed significantly to education, yet in part due to the intellectual neglect often accorded women of prominence by a still male dominated world of scholarship, had not yet been given her due. By bringing the story of the intellectual development and life work of these educators back into the public domain, these authors have contributed to the feminist project, pointing once again to the very real contributions of women at all levels in the world of educational theory and practice. This form of intellectual biography, with its focus on the development of the educational thought of women in education, within their historically and socially constructed ‘lived experience’, helped shape my work on Alice Yardley.

Collaborative Biography

The exigencies of my particular project, posed some different problems from those of Antler, Smith, and Maloney, however. Neither Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Susan Isaacs, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman were alive when these scholars began their studies. They were
drawn to their subjects by way of the writing they had ‘left behind’, to find out more about their lives, about the relationship between their ‘lived experience’ and the development of their educational thought.

My work began from a similar place - a place of interest and admiration for Alice Yardley’s published work, and growing from that, a question about how her educational thinking evolved in the context of her life experience. My project was different in one important regard. I need not rely on documents, diaries, letters, and recollections of those who knew my subject alone. I could talk to my subject. I could find out directly from her how her thinking developed, what stimulated her, frustrated her, engaged her. This was an aspect of my work that went beyond traditional biography and history. We might form a team, subject and researcher, working together on a collaborative biographical study of her life and work.

**Life History Research**

Once I had met Alice Yardley, and we had agreed to work together on the project, my methods moved to encompass a kind of biographical study that is currently being defined by social scientists, most recently, by Cole and Knowles, in their book, *Lives in Context: the Art of Life History Research* (2001). The methods of the life historian, which include oral history and ethnography, are drawn from the social sciences, and originate in the field of anthropology, where they were first employed and developed to study the exotic ‘other’. Certainly both oral history and ethnography became important tools for me in my
investigation of Alice Yardley’s life and work.

Life history research is also characterized, according to Cole and Knowles, by a concern with the aesthetic, both throughout the process of researching, and in the form of representation. In this sense, it is ‘arts-informed’ and brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of scientific inquiry with the ‘artistic and imaginative qualities of the arts’. (p. 10). It is concerned with the creative and literary quality of its texts; the art and skill of writing, and the process of writing itself, is recognized as integral to the research act.

Anthropologist Sally McBeth (1998) writes that ‘life histories are stories people tell about themselves. They provide a point of view on the writer’s past life.’ She worked in collaboration with her subject, a Native American Shoshone teacher and elder, Esther Horne, to compose a text that told the story of Horne’s work in Native American boarding schools. McBeth tape recorded their interviews, which were subsequently transcribed. Working together, they fashioned from the text of the interview material a chronological narrative as told in the first person by Horne: at the beginning of each part of the narrative McBeth situates Horne’s story in the social and historical context of nineteenth century Native American experience in the broader sense, and points to ongoing personal and public themes in Horne’s ongoing narrative.

McBeth and Horne’s collaboration differed from mine and Alice Yardley’s in that Horne played a more active role in the creation of the final written text. In our case, while Alice
proofread and edited the oral history narrative I had compiled from our first unrecorded sessions, she never saw the transcribed interview text. Yet her words became a part of the final text in another way, through direct inclusion of interview segments and long passages from her autobiography, discovered after her death. The work of integrating interview, autobiographical text, and in the later sections, material from her teaching notebooks and published work into a coherent, credible and lively narrative, however, was mine alone.

McBeth further defines life histories: they are situated in a time and place. They have a teller, a listener, and an intended audience. The perspectives are “fragmentary, the telling is motivated, and the resulting text is retrospective and reflective.” (1998, p. xi). Norman Denzin, following Titon (1980, p. 283) defines life history, as a type of biographical method whose key features are that it is a written account of a life based on interviews and conversations, and that in its final representation may take a variety of forms.

Cole and Knowles employ a broader definition of life history research that more closely approximates the inclusive nature of my own research on Alice Yardley than either McBeth or Denzin. Like Denzin, interview and conversation are key features of the method for Cole and Knowles, and form the data base from which the life history account is drawn, but these are not the only sources described. Cole and Knowles point to additional major sources for building knowledge of the life history of a participant or subject; artifacts, field study, and the ‘ongoing reflexivity and responsiveness’ of both
researcher and participants (2001, p.70-71). Each of these sources was certainly important in my study of Alice Yardley.

I also share the view expressed by Cole and Knowles that a life history orientation is characterized by concern with the ‘process of researching and the centrality of relationships to the researching endeavor’ (p.9), and this is reflected in my work, in the deep sense of engagement and connection that I developed with my subject. Concern with research that embodies the ethics of mutuality, responsiveness, and empathy, I agree, are integral to the development of a relationship between the researcher and participant or participants. The life history researcher, as does any responsible qualitative researcher, consciously works to develop what Caroline Heller (1998) calls openness and ‘receptivity’ to the other, with the intention of listening with utmost attention to the nuances of meaning that the participant conveys, in both direct and indirect ways.

Feminist Oral history and Interview: Receiving the Other

In the course of our project, Alice and I evolved our own interview style, as I have noted, one that respected the rhythms of conversational discourse within a framework of a shared purpose of reconstructing the material facts and significant events of Alice Yardley’s life history. It was ‘open –ended’, or ‘semi-structured’, in the terms defined by feminist social researcher Hilary Graham. Graham means by ‘semi-structured’ a research approach whereby the researcher plans to ask questions about a given topic, but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained.
Since my aim was to hear Alice’s educational story in her own terms, my research was certainly ‘interviewee-guided’: while I had questions I needed answered, my individual questions were subsumed under the larger aim of allowing Alice space and time to follow the routes of her own thinking, with the hope and trust that in this way I would be shown all the necessary pieces from which I might construct the narrative of her development, of her life history. As a research gathering method advocated by feminist social scientists doing oral history, this kind of interview process has been defined as ‘intensive’, and demands from the researcher to be at once receptive and active:

the feminist researcher, through intensive and active listening, self-awareness, and collaboration gleans a rich understanding of her respondent’s worldview. Within the interview setting, a feminist researcher must be, alternately, an intent listener, active investigator, and collaborator and learn to apply each of these skills when appropriate. (Brooks, A., 2004, p.4.)

Our conversational interview style, allowed us to become comfortable with each other and with the material of our work together. At the same time the focus on looking backwards, and providing time for remembering, fostered self-revelation and reflection. A mutual epistemological space was created where Alice could ruminate and reflect on her past experiences, not simply ‘perform’ a sequential patter of stories for my benefit. This quality, of fragmentation, reflection, and retrospection, noted by McBeth, above, is also treated in Levesque-Lopman’s ‘Claiming Reality’ (1988) in writing of the
phenomenological aspects of feminist research: what happens when women interview women. She speaks of the acts of remembering and reflection as ‘subjective, active, and creative’ (p.148). The researcher helps the subject enter into a process in which the focus is on the phenomena of the experience described, so that it can be “lifted out” and attended to. The fact of telling the story draws attention and builds meaning, for both teller and told. Experience is caught in a “cone of light” that makes it clear and distinct. She draws from the work of Schutz, who wrote that in fact, all lived experiences; whether passive or active, are lacking in meaning and discrete identity. At the same time they are actually lived through, they are not given to us as separate and distinct entities. However, once they have receded a slight distance into the past, that is, once they have “elapsed,” we may turn around and bring to bear upon them one of the aforementioned Acts of reflection, recognition, identification, and so forth. Once it has been caught in the “cone of light” emanating from the Ego, an experience is “lifted out” of the stream of duration and becomes clear and distinct, a discrete entity. It is at this moment and by virtue of the Act of turning-toward that the experience acquires meaning. (1967:xxiii, cited in Levesque-Lopman, 1988, p. 148)

Levesque-Lopman, a sociologist working from a feminist perspective, interviewed women about their experience of childbirth and found that many of them suffered from a sense of dehumanization and alienation as a result of the medicalization of childbirth by predominantly male doctors. She was able to uncover these feelings, she suggests, due to
the ‘phenomenological orientation’ of her research that allowed the distance between researcher and researched to be overcome. Together interviewer and participants built knowledge about these experiences in a reciprocal process ‘defined by mutual dialogue’. In her view, this kind of research orientation helps women become ‘active subjects in the creation of knowledge about ourselves and the world around us’ (Levesque-Lopman, 1988, p.150).

In contrast to a positivist and scientifically objective orientation, Levesque-Lopman argues, feminists doing this kind of research, have developed “more communal kinds of scientific inquiry that involves naturalistic observation, sensitivity to intrinsic structure, and qualitative patterning of phenomena studied”. It is within this ‘more communal’ scientific inquiry using what she calls the ‘phenomenological sociological approach’, that “the greater personal participation of the investigator can be accommodated.” The subject/object dichotomy of researcher and researched begins to be resolved “when women are the agents of knowledge in research on women from a subjective point of view”. This kind of research has the potential to move towards ‘an enlargement of our existence in the direction of both a widened sense of the world and deepened sense of ourselves.” (Ibid, p. 151). Thus, we acknowledge to ourselves and to others our understanding of our own experience in the lifeworld.

Memory and Language
This was my invitation to Alice: to share her understanding of her ‘lifeworld’ with me, and she rose to the challenge. The effort of remembering, sharing, and reconstructing also brought the past back into her experience, and of course into my experience. An interesting example of this phenomena, and Alice’s reflection on it, occurred after I had returned from a visit to Sheffield, her birthplace, and she had described to me an early memory of falling off a table, with a brush in her hand, at her grandfather’s house there. Having shared this still vivid experience with me, Alice reflected on the role of language in memory, and described with animation how children begin to talk and to remember:

" at ten or eleven months they’ll say a word. It's a mechanism, and I can’t explain it, but it’s there. And as a result, they - in a sense - consolidate the idea, and confirm it to memory. I think you’ll notice yourself, if you’ve been somewhere, and you’ve explained it to somebody, or talked about it, the memory of it remains more vivid doesn’t it? Or even if you’ve just talked to yourself, you know...or written something down.

P. Its true. Uhum..

A. You see... you’re telling me about Sheffield. You’re confirming it in your own memory, while its still fresh ...

P. Yeah, you’re absolutely right. Because sometimes I only remember something that I’ve felt or thought, because I remember a conversation about it.
A. Yes, or you’re involved in emotion in it. They go together don’t they… and if you discuss it with somebody else, you add to that, what shall I call it? It’s kinetic, but its also psychological. You add to that… linguistic memory. The words encapsulate it, ‘Ah!! Yes, that’s it’

The phenomena of telling another was a way to re-experience, to remember, and to ‘lift out’ those events from the common stream of life events.

Creating the Text

When I first began tape recording my interviews with Alice, I had no clear plan for how to work with the text that might emerge from the interview material. The social nature of our interview sessions made them deeply enjoyable, and exciting in the way that rich exchange between colleagues or friends can be, though they were also demanding and exhausting. For me, they required using all my interviewing and research skills in the service of being, as ‘a feminist researcher must be, alternately, an intent listener, active investigator, and collaborator’ and to apply each of these skills when appropriate. For Alice, the interview sessions were equally demanding, requiring her full attention, alert physical presence, and mental acuity. The benefits were great. As oral historians Anderson and Jack have noted, for women researchers and subjects in particular:
The spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike. For the narrator, the interview provides the opportunity to tell her own story in her own terms. For researchers, taped interviews preserve a living interchange for present and future use; we can rummage through interviews as we do through an old attic—probing, comparing, checking insights, finding new treasures the third time through, then arranging and carefully documenting our results. (1991, p. 11)

From the transcribed interview material, the record of the ‘living interchange’ between Alice and myself, I had to create a narrative. The ‘freedom and flexibility’ of the spontaneous exchanges recorded during our free ranging interviews, had to be organized and tamed. For McBeth and Horne, McBeth writes, it was in the process of editing the transcribed tapes, and creating a narrative, that ‘all of the theoretical and methodological problems inherent in the process began to confront us’(1998, p.xvi).

This was true in my case as well. Once I had transcribed the tapes, the very different nature of speaking and writing was vividly apparent. As McBeth notes:

The integrated quality of writing contrasts, often dramatically, with the fragmented nature of speaking. In speaking we often string together various ideas without connectives. Transcripts of conversational data frequently appear to be chaotic and unordered compared to written texts. This is not to say that the
dialogue is without coherence but rather that each has its own validity and internal consistency. (Horne and McBeth, 1998, p.xvi)

McBeth and Horne worked together to construct an integrated written text drawn from the ‘conversational data’ material. Their collaboration differed from mine and Alice Yardley’s in that Horne played a more active role in the creation of the final edited manuscript. In our case, while Alice proofread and edited the oral history narrative I had compiled from our first unrecorded sessions, she never saw the completed transcribed interview text, nor the narrative chronology I fashioned from it and the other primary sources she first loaned, and finally bequeathed to me. She was not involved in editing the final manuscript. Yet, of course, her words were everywhere in the text in another way, through direct inclusion of segments from our interviews, and my considerable use of passages from her autobiography, the manuscript of which was discovered only after her death in 2002.

The work of integrating interview, autobiography text, the dates and chronology that she had given me, and evidence from her notebooks and published work into a coherent, lively and integrated narrative was mine alone. Throughout this process, the collaborative biographical nature of our project informed everything I did, but my role was now more interpretive and integrative. The writing had begun.

Questions of Interpretation, Writing a Life
The interpretive biographer, according to Denzin, works within a broad definition of biographical method, making studied use of life documents that include ‘autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories and personal histories’ (1989, p.7). These collection of life documents then are used by the biographer to describe turning-point moments in individuals’ lives. Denzin is interested in the challenge for researchers engaged in ‘interpretive biography’ of coming to terms ‘with a variety of literary techniques for communicating about a life or for inscribing a body of experiences connected to the life of a given individual.’ (Denzin, p.7) The close relationship between biography and fiction, and the role of the researcher-interpreter in creating biography is acknowledged by Denzin when he writes that:

‘when a writer writes a biography he or she writes him – or herself into the life of the subject written about. When the reader reads a biographical text, that text is read through the life of the reader. Hence, writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about. (1989, p.26)

At the same time, Denzin argues, that while the final text representing the subject’s life is ‘created’ by the researcher, and in a sense belongs to the realm of fiction, the legitimacy of biography and biographical method hinges on ‘the belief in a real subject who is present in the world’ and who has given subjective meaning to their life experiences. Real concrete subjects live lives with meaning and these meanings have a concrete
presence in the their lives – what Derrida calls a ‘metaphics of presence’. (cited in
Denzin, p. 7)

The literary biographer Leon Edel, whose statement that ‘biographers write lives’, puts
this another way. The biographer’s primary task is to evoke, often out of ‘inert materials’
the ‘presence’ of the subject:

…the biographer seeks to restore the very sense of life to the inert materials that
survive an individual’s passage on this earth – seeks to recapture some part of
what was once tissue and brain, and above all feeling, and to shape a likeness of
the vanished figure… A biography is a record, in words, of something that is as
mercurial and as flowing, as compact of temperament and emotion, as the human
spirit itself.

And yet the writer of biography must be neat and orderly and logical in describing
this elusive flame-like human spirit which delights in defying order and neatness
and logic. The biographer may be as imaginative as he pleases- the more
imaginative the better- in the way in which he brings together his materials, but he
must not imagine the materials (1957, p.10)

While drawing on the tools of the biographer, defined by Edel, to represent Alice Yardley
with all the writerly skill I could muster in order to capture that ‘elusive flame-like
human spirit’, I felt the weight and force of my responsibility to ‘the material’. These
included, in fact, many of the kinds of documents Denzin defined as sources drawn on by biographers and life historians, including autobiography, diaries, life history, oral history and personal experience stories. In my case, by the time I came to write the final manuscript, I had a wealth of material bequeathed to me by Alice in my possession which gave me extraordinary access to aspects of her educational life and work I would not otherwise have had. (see list of primary source documents in previous section, ‘Coding’)

In order to represent the development of Alice Yardley’s educational thought, I studied and analysed the notebooks Alice Yardley kept while she was teaching and headteaching, and four of her books, in the series Young Children Learning. Examination of these documents, were essential to a study of her life and thought. Thus I drew from both public and private documents, in order to illustrate the relationship between Alice Yardley’s personal life and what became her public self, epitomized in her published texts. Each of these documents contributed in different ways to my understanding of the course of her life and life work, the development of her educational thought and philosophy.

**Women in Philosophy of Education**

As Jane Roland Martin noted in 1985, it might become necessary, in the case of women in the philosophy of education who are beyond the ‘established canon of educational theory’, to broaden the ‘conversational circle’ to draw on more inclusive methods, in order to look for the most complete evidence of their thought and influence. This was
certainly the case in my study of Alice Yardley. The full measure of her person, and her educational philosophy and approach was not found only in her published books, but in other sources of data, including the kind of relationship I made with her, the sorts of exchanges about education and philosophy we had, conversations with her friends, students and colleagues, her unpublished educational writing, short stories, and her novel. Each of these encounters and immersions in aspects of her life enlarged my view of what might constitute a 'bone fide topic of study' in the history and philosophy of education. As Jane Roland Martin had predicted, as our conception of sources is affected by the entrance of women into the educational realm, so too will our conception of the discipline's techniques:

.... we will have to look to sources of data that the history of educational thought regards as far from standard: to personal letters, diaries, pamphlets, newsletters, pieces of fiction and to oral sources as well. (p.180)...It is rare...to become a historian in the more primary sense of digging up the sources and, in the process, determining whether the author is indeed to be considered an educational philosopher. Yet this is precisely what will be required... (1985, p.180).

Roland Martin also proposes that historians must understand that significant theories may have been authored not by single individuals but by groups, for instance, those founding and running schools, and others out of social movements. She writes that taking into account the enormous contributions of hitherto unacknowledged women in the field of
education and educational theory, will require some very real methodological and substantive changes', and when this occurs, our concept of authorship will change, and then 'educational thought will have to take on the role of anthropologist...reconstruction of the philosophy of education of a school or social movement will require philosopher, anthropologist and historian (p. 189). Written in 1985, I believe this prediction has come true. My study of Alice Yardley and her work in the English Infant School has taken me into each of these fields; philosophy, history, and anthropology, as well as many others. My question lead me in many directions, and I followed it and my subject wherever I needed to go to take hold of a life, to trace its path, and to illuminate it's meaning.
Chapter Four: Narrative Chronology

Introduction

In the course of our project, Alice told me a number of stories of her early teaching that she called "thinking points", critical experiences that shaped her approach to infants' school practices in significant directions. These stories illustrate her process of reflecting and restructuring her teaching practice based on what she observed of children in actual school situations. It was the children themselves, in her view, that gave her the tools to design an approach emphasizing the value of direct experience, freedom of expression, and meaningful work. Some of these key incidents also illustrate the relationships, sometimes conflicted, but often collaborative, between headteachers and classroom teachers, older and younger teachers, and national and local inspectors, mostly female, that contributed to the emerging progressive approach to infant education in the city of Nottingham during this period. Another major factor coloring the nature of her educational experiences was her work as a teacher during World War II.

To recapitulate, the themes that emerged from the story of her teaching life include the following:

• the role of key epiphanies, what Alice Yardley’ called ‘thinking points’ in the development of her educational practice and theory,

• relationship-based learning
• bypassing the usual hierarchy of authority,
• education through first hand experience.

Other strands that are woven throughout the narrative, and represented both in Alice’s stories of teaching and in her teaching notebook are the pursuit of freedom: freedom of movement, of expression, and of thought, a shared commitment to reforming the infant school into a place of educational enrichment and hope for Nottingham’s poorest families, and her overarching view that the purpose of education is ‘self-fulfillment’ and personal development.

**Section One: Childhood**

Alice Yardley was born a year before the beginning of World War 1, in the industrial town of Sheffield, Yorkshire, on November 14, 1913. Her mother had trained and worked as a teacher of young children, and her father was a master craftsman and pattern maker.

Before Alice was born, her mother, Alice Bennett, had gone to Sheffield College to get a Froebel teaching certificate, and graduated in 1906. She had taught for six years in local primary schools before she married Charles Ewart Yardley. At that time in the Sheffield authority, married women were barred from teaching, so it was with great reluctance, that she turned in her resignation. Alice Bennet’s passion for teaching, however, was a
continuing force in Alice Yardley’s professional life. 7 When Alice Bennet was in her fifties, however, she did return to teaching. Her daughter Alice Yardley invited her mother to take over her classroom, when she herself was appointed deputy head. By this time, after the Second World War, the marriage bar had been lifted. Alice Bennet eagerly accepted her daughter’s offer. Thus, for a brief period, mother and daughter worked together as teacher and headteacher in the same school.

Charles Ewart Yardley, worked as a Foreman at Hadfield’s Foundry Works, and later at Vicker Armstrong, steel manufacturing companies, designing molds for cutlery and other steel implements. Though he had wanted to enlist for service during the first world war, he was discouraged from doing so when it was determined that he was working in a “reserved occupation” important to the war effort, as by then the factory had turned to munitions production.

Though not allowed to enlist, he was given a set of silver army buttons, which he brought home to Alice. One of her first memories was of playing in her mother’s button box with these decorative buttons commemorating the First World War. Another early memory was of her mother coming home very late but jubilant one afternoon, waving a small union jack with a silver ferrule, and shouting happily, “The war is over!! The war is over! I was in town when Armistice was declared and I couldn’t get here. Everyone was singing and dancing and the trams were held up!” It was Armistice day, Nov. 11, 1918.

7 I have in my possession a long and detailed letter written by Alice Bennet in her eighties describing her early experiences as a teacher between 1996 and 1912, including the names of schools, teachers, head teachers and children she worked with.
In these early days, the young Yardley family was not well off. They lived in a 'through house', 'one up and one down', with one room on the first floor and one on the second. These were small row houses; brick dwellings put up in industrial towns in England at this time, narrow and placed very close together, with only a thin alley between them leading to the communal yard behind, shared by the tenants of all the neighboring houses. There was also a shared bathhouse, according to AY, where all the inhabitants surrounding the communal yard took their clothes to wash. In their own house, they had one water tap in the kitchen. Water was heated on the stove to use for bathing, and then poured into a big tub set in front of the fireplace. Bathing often became a social occasion, as AY relates in her memoir:

Bath time, for instance, with no plumbing beyond the cold tap in the kitchen sink was a lengthy activity which we very much enjoyed. Kettles and pans were placed around the fire and when the water was hot enough the zinc bath was fetched from its hook in the wash house. We bathed in front of the fire and as the water cooled this was added from the kettle. As a child I had 3 or 4 bathes each week and on the nights when I didn’t have a bath I stood in the kitchen sink and had a good ‘wash down’ followed by a toweling in front of the fire. Bath time was a very sociable occasion and sometimes friends and neighbors popped in while ablutions were in progress. and conversation proceeded without embarrassment.
on either side. Today I still appreciate a nightly bath in my own private bathroom with hot water on tap. Sheer luxury! (Memoir, conflict)

There were no heat in the other rooms, unless on the rare occasion when a family member was ill. The kitchen hearth was where the family would eat and gather round to keep warm.

Though Alice Bennet had to carefully count the household pennies to manage all their expenses, (enlisting young Alice’ help), queuing in long lines for meat, and making Alice’s clothes out of her father’s used overalls, the young family was doing fairly well, when Ewart Yardley had a terrible accident. One rainy evening on his way home, as he jumped on a moving tram he slipped and fell; his arm was caught on the tram, and his shoulder badly torn. Unable to let his wife know where he was, Ewart spent the night in the hospital, and almost lost his arm. Fortunately, as he later described to Alice, his shoulder was skillfully ‘manipulated’ by a West African doctor, to whom he gave the credit of saving his arm, which would otherwise have been amputated.

Recovery was slow and painful, however, and there was little financial compensation or material help either from the company he had worked for or from the government. He was unable to work for eighteen months, and his family had little to live on. It was this period that Alice remembers vividly as a time when the whole family suffered from not having enough to eat. She often mentioned this experience in the context of ‘knowing real poverty’; when there was simply not enough food in the house. Etched into Alice’s
memories of her early childhood, this period of material deprivation imprinted her with lifelong sympathy for the poor, and a personal understanding of the terror and humiliation that could threaten a family when the job of the parent was in jeopardy. (In fact, when she became qualified to teach, she was immediately drawn to working with the urban poor. The children and families of the inner city and resettled low income housing projects, what in England are called, ‘‘estate housing’’ were her children, the population she spent her teaching life among.)

Indeed she remembered the awful plight of some families she knew at this time, whose bad fortune had put them in the Poor House, ‘which separated the man from his wife and children,’ as she told me.

Though she wasn’t aware of the reason behind it, to keep Alice nourished, her mother sent her for a week now and then during this period to stay with her Aunt Edith, who lived in the country, had lots of children for Alice to play with, and could feed her well. To help with their financial situation, Alice Bennet also turned to dress - making to earn money. Alice remembers her mother telling her though, that by the time she had paid for the material, pattern, thread and buttons, to make a dress, the profit she made amounted to only one shilling!

When Ewart Yardley was able to go back to work, their financial situation improved, and at her mother’s insistence, the family moved to a bigger house in a better neighborhood when Alice was five, shortly before her sister Beryl was born. Alice remembered Beryl’s
birth, her grandmother coming, and her amazement when she was given Beryl to hold. In her memoir she describes her response to the sister’s arrival:

I watched my mother knit booties and tiny coats and I couldn’t believe that anyone would be small enough to fit them. My mother explained that baby had to be small to begin with so that it could fit inside her tummy. It had to stay in there for a while to keep it safe until it was strong enough to be born.

I accepted this but imagination persisted in providing me with an immediate playmate at the moment of birth. "I shall need you to help me when the day comes," my Mother said. "I'm going to show you the way to the shop and you must remember how to get there by yourself because the lady in the shop will tell the nurse when to come and help the baby to be born."

I felt very important and when the time arrived I ran all the way to the shop and duly delivered my message. The nurse came. My father came home from work and he went to fetch my Grandma. Still the baby didn’t appear and I went to bed in tears. During the night I woke up and heard a baby crying.

Next morning my Gran took me into my mother’s bedroom. "Sit on the buffet," my mother said. "I'm going to let you see your baby sister." Then she turned to Gran and said, "Let her have the baby in her lap for a minute. "It'll be alright." Gran put the little bundle on my lap and I had my first glimpse of my new sister. Her eyes were closed and she looked pretty helpless to me. How could she play with me just lying there and waving her arms about as though she didn’t know they belonged to her? I was intensely disappointed but tried to smile. Then
suddenly I burst out, "But she’s useless."

Then she opened her eyes and I noticed her long lashes. She had tiny ears too, like bits of paper fastened to the side of her face. She had as many fingers as I had and there was even a tiny crescent to each nail. I felt relieved for young as I was I realized that all the bits were there and I had only to wait until she grew a bit.

“She’s not very big is she,” I said, “But I expect she’ll do. She’s better than a doll.” Looking at her in such a state of complete dependency I had my first experience of compassion. (Memoir; conflict)

Around the time of her mother’s pregnancy with Beryl, Alice learned to read. To keep her occupied inside during this period, Alice Bennett gave young Alice words to copy, and easy readers to practice on. Young Alice copied out rows and rows of shapes, the ‘balls and hooks’ that were suppose to be the precursors of good handwriting.

Now I was a very energetic child and in order to settle me down a bit in the afternoon when she was in need of rest, my mother taught me to read and write. I practised rows and rows of pot hooks on paper laid on the kitchen table and joined them to balls in various ways to make letters. My reader was about a girl named Nan: ‘ Has Nan got a bun. No Nan has not got a bun. Is Nan at the rill? Is the nun at the rill?’ I thought this was hilarious stuff and greeted my reader with a laugh every time it appeared. (Memoir: conflict)
Alice Bennet also shared with her daughter the books she herself had used as a kindergarten teacher. Alice Bennet read parts of her teacher's notebook to her little four year old, entertaining her in the long months when she was somewhat more confined than usual due to her mother's condition. Alice remembers that it was while poring over a notebook her mother had kept on 'Froebel's Gifts', one that she had come to know very well, that she found herself actually reading. Looking back on this important moment in her reading life, it seemed to Alice Yardley prophetic that she, whose lifework was in the field of early childhood education, had learned to read with the originator of the Kindergarten, Freidrich Froebel, at her side.

**School Begins**

When she had just turned five, her mother took her to the local school at Sheffield, to register for her first classroom. Alice described this as a "show school":

Children were sitting in two's in little desks facing the teacher, lined up in rows.

The attitude of the school towards students was: “They are to be taught”. The only equipment was the black board and colored chalk. These were the only forms of "expression" available! (interview)

According to Alice, her mother told the head teacher, “She can read”. The headmistress, a tall and imposing figure, was somewhat suspicious, and told her mother, “They all say
that. " She demanded sternly that young Alice prove her ability on the spot, "Sit there. Read this book." However, when Alice started reading the book aloud with little hesitation, the headmistress quickly changed her tune, declaring to Alice "You can read!"

Soon Alice was whisked along the corridor, passing by an enticing room where she glimpsed a rocking horse through the open door, and deposited in "Miss Bell’s room". "I can’t put you in the baby class - I’ll have to put you in Miss Bell’s class", the headmistress had told her. Here Alice, not yet five years old, had to sit at a desk all day, look steadfastly at the blackboard, and listen. Her materials consisted of a slate, a slate pencil, and some chalk.

As this story suggests, Alice precocity as a reader was a double-edged sword. While her mother was proud of her, and brought her to school early because of it, it also meant that in some sense, she missed out on the more informal curriculum of the nursery class. She was not given the chance to use the Froebel inspired gifts in the ‘baby’ class, where, as well as the rocking horse, there may have been pattern blocks, other manipulative materials, and a less formal atmosphere. On to the dry slates and regimen of what Alice describes as a ‘show school’, where the children had little freedom to move about. The five and six year old in Miss Bell’s class had no chance to ‘play’; no, they were there for one reason only, and that was ‘to be taught’.

In spite of her initial disappointment, Alice adjusted to Miss Bell’s ways of working, and at this young age, and as the following story shows, demonstrated characteristic initiative and humor as well.
After performing well in Miss Bell’s class one day, she was brought in front of her desk, where Miss Bell offered her a penny to reward her for her good work that day. On her desk was a red rose in a vase. Alice asked her if she might have the rose instead of the penny. Miss Bell agreed, and Alice went home proudly carrying the rose, with the idea of giving it to her mother. However, by the time she arrived home, most of the petals had dropped off, and as she tells it, though it still had some fragrance, “I gave me mither a dead rose”.

Perhaps Alice took her revenge on her mother whose boast about her being able to read had landed her in Miss Bell’s class, by bringing her that dead rose. Certainly her mothers’ ambition for her had the effect of removing her from the world of home and playful learning, into a formal and rigid space where desks and pencil and paper tasks were the rule. Whatever her mother’s motives, the end result was that Alice missed out on something, the chance to be in the ‘baby class’, where she could have used the rocking horse and the toys. The enforced discipline of Miss Bell’s class, though in some ways a constructive force, in other ways curtailed her own choices and possibilities.

In her own right, Alice Yardley’s mother, Alice Bennet, was a force to be reckoned with. She had many opinions and a fierce independence of outlook. She had fought for women’s suffrage, and Alice remember that they had a parrot in Sheffield who would squawk whenever people came in the room, ‘Votes for women, Votes for women’. Her mother was resourceful and proud of being able to make ends meet, and gave Alice lots
of responsibility. Young Alice even as a small child, was made to feel a part of the economic life of the family, and helped her mother count out the money for food, and go round to the shops to find the very best bargains for all the produce that they needed.

Alice Bennet was aware of the educational potential inherent in giving her daughter opportunity to learn through ‘real life experience’. She was also a loquacious woman who spoke to her children as if they were her peers and her friends, with the expectation that they could understand everything she told them. Her children learned to articulate their thoughts, feelings and questions, and expected adults to be interested in what they had to say. This expectation though could sometimes backfire, as illustrated by the following episode described by Alice. Again this took place in Miss Bell’s class:

Often during the day Miss Bell asked questions and I was supposed to put up my hand and wait until I was chosen to supply an answer. This seemed to me a very stupid procedure. If she didn’t know something and asked me the best way was to tell her as quickly as possible. This did not please Miss Bell and she complained to the HM who told me firmly not to answer any more questions. Forthwith she referred to me as “That girl who knows all the answers” and I felt exceedingly small.

Then one day Miss Bell and the HM smiled at me completely changed.

‘You can answer questions today.’ She told me, ‘I think you’ve learned your lesson.’ She turned to the class. ‘A gentleman is coming to see you today.’ She said. ‘He will talk to you and ask you questions. I want you to try very hard to get
the answers right. He’s a very important gentleman and he wants to find out how much you know.’ This was my introduction to HM Inspectors. (Her Majesties Inspectors) I didn’t remember much about him but I was grateful to him for releasing me from enforced silence. (Memoir; conflict)

The Farm in Mablethorpe

Alice Yardley remained a pupil at this ‘show school’ in Sheffield when in 1921, Charles Ewart’s father died, and he inherited a substantial sum of money from his estate. By this time, Ewart had been back at work at the factory for several years, but on frequent family outings to the woods and farm land of Derbyshire, surrounding the brick town of Sheffield, he had begun to nurture a dream of raising his family on a farm. With the money from his inheritance, he was able to buy a small holding in the seaside village of Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire, on the eastern coast of the North Sea. In March of 1922, the family moved there from Sheffield. Alice was eight years old.

Alice thrived in the countryside where she had free rein of the fields and the nearby dunes and beaches. Her parents gave Alice responsibility for a number of chores; care of the turkey chicks, selling produce to the local boarding house keepers, and taking the chickens to market. She also managed to teach her younger sister Beryl to read during this time.
Beryl would beg Alice to ‘read to me’, but Alice soon realized that what she really wanted was for her sister to listen to her ‘reading’; in fact, to listen to her reciting what she had memorized from the Old Mother Hubbard book of rhymes. For hours, Alice would patiently listen to her sister’s ‘reading’. Then came the exciting moment, when Beryl began to distinguish the individual printed words within the poems that she had memorized. Alice, probably nine or ten at that time, recognized this moment as a crucial one in Beryl’s evolution as a reader.

The whole Yardley family were avid readers and loved books. Alice also memorized poetry, and at family gatherings, she was often called upon to recite. On one occasion, she remembers, she forgot the memorized poem, and much to her surprise, found she could make up one of her own! This was a moment of revelation; that she need not rely on others’ texts, but could call forth words of her own to describe her experiences:

As a young child I memorized poetry, and was often called upon to recite it.
Sometimes I would forget, and then I found that I could make up my own poetry!
This was a great realization. I could write poetry, and make things up myself!

(interview)

School at Mablethorpe

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8 This incident is report in Alice Yardley’s book, Senses and Sensitivity. Beryl name is used, though not that of Alice herself.
When Alice arrived in Mablethorpe, she was enrolled in the local village primary school, located just down the road from her family’s holdings, in a Victorian brick building, with separate entrances marked for girls and boys.

Alice remembers her teacher there, young Mr. Stevenson, explaining to the class the origins of coal. The head of the school, an ignorant and insensitive man, mistakenly corrected this young teacher. Alice found this incident very upsetting, and instructive in just how a head teacher should NOT treat his or her staff when she herself became a head teacher.

The head’s wife, was equally unscrupulous. In the name of teaching the girls how to sew, she would put them to work darning her own socks, mending her own clothes!!

Altogether both Alice and her parents found reasons to think of sending Alice to another school.

The one highlight of this school was its playground, where Alice describes her and her peers organizing their own games and rituals with great pleasure. Delight in using her physical powers was also afforded by her father’s ingenuity in using ‘junk’ that he bought at auctions. With this material he set up a kind of acrobatic heaven for Alice, her sister and all the neighboring children, in their barn.

When my father had selected what was of use to him from the job lots he bought at the sales, there was left a most exciting array of junk. There was an old
phaeton, part of a bus, the top of a hansom carriage, several small wooden barrels and metal drums, odd lengths of timber, an old ladder, several packing cases and crates. My father screwed stout rings to rafters in an open barn and fitted us up with a rope or two and a pair of rings. This wonderful material which fired imagination and them provided the means of satisfying it, became the focal point for children of all ages from neighboring homes. The partnership between physical exercise and imagination became one of the most satisfying experiences of childhood and when I became a head teacher I made sure that the children in my school had similar opportunities. The appeal of junk play is universal and given the chance, children engage in it in all parts of the world. (Memoir, farming)

Ewart Yardley, like Alice, was well-coordinated and athletic and understood the joy of physical movement for his children. He loved seeing his children enjoying the freedom to move and gain skills that he had helped provide for them. A quiet patient man, he was also the more nurturing parent in some ways. It was he to whom Alice turned when she was ill or upset, and she came to rely on his gentle comfort and equanimity, in contrast to her mother’s more vivacious and demanding nature.

Both her parents shared an understanding of the educational value of their communal life on the farm. Even as a child, Alice absorbed this understanding, and in her mature educational philosophy, it was always a deep source of her conviction in the primary value of ‘real life experience’. She had a keen sense that what she learned on the farm as
an important functioning member of this economic unit, and within a kind of physical freedom not found at the local primary school, was far more significant, meaningful, and useful than anything she was being ‘taught’ at the Mablethorpe Primary School. As Pestalozzi intimates in his book, *Leonard and Gertrude*, the sense of purpose gained by children who are part of a household where everyone is to contribute, was part of her life on the farm. Throughout her teaching life and work as an educator, it shaped her thinking. She describes the nature of these experiences in her memoir:

We raised poultry, chickens, geese, ducks and turnkeys. We grew vegetables and a few flowers. We sold most of the produce to the boarding house keepers, and preparation for the weekend would begin on Wednesday. I picked peas until I literally dreamed I was picking peas. I helped to feather and gut the table birds. I collected the eggs and set them out in trays. I carried orders from door to door. In short my education expanded at a terrific rate, and I loved it. I could tell at a glance how many eggs were left in a tray, pick up twelve pennies out of a bowl of coins without counting them, calculate cost and change in a trice. These and thousands of other skills now seemed to me much more important than anything learned in school. (Memoir, farming)

In any case, after attending the village primary school in Mablethorpe for almost two years, Alice ‘sat an exam’ (the 11+) to apply for a scholarship to King Edward VI Girls Grammar School in Louth, a bustling compact market town fifteen miles inland of
Mablethorpe. Alice was the only pupil in the school to qualify. She qualified in both the oral and written parts of the exam. At ten years old, she had won a scholarship that paid for her tuition at King Edward VI for the next six years.

King Edward VI Grammar School, Louth

Alice rode the train to school every morning from Mablethorpe, a ride of thirty minutes or so. There was only one train in the morning from Mablethorpe to Louth. Alice never once missed it! It picked her up in Mablethorpe at 8:30 and arrived in Louth at 9:00. Once arrived at the station, according to Alice, the girls were supposed to walk up the hill to their school at the top of the town, single file in ‘crocodile’ style, not to dawdle looking at shops, or even to carry an umbrella. The severity of this regime applied to the boys school as well: “The boy’s school was situated a little further up School house Lane and pulling up stockings while walking down this lane earned a disorder mark” (memoir, learning)

After trudging up the long hill to the school from the station, Alice would arrive breathless and rosy, often late for Latin, her first class. However, in spite of her ‘tardy’ arrivals, which she couldn’t help, Alice in most other ways was a diligent and eager pupil. She was not a terrific French student, but she did well in her other subjects. She particularly enjoyed English and Geography.
As the train home from Louth didn’t leave until 5:30, Alice would stay at school after classes were over, working on her homework preparations. Arriving back in Mablethorpe, she did her chores on the farm, and then spent two or three more hours doing homework under the Aladdin lamp before bedtime. (The farm had no electricity or running water, and a ‘night soil’ man came every few days to take care of the outhouse — her father would bring in soil in between)

In spite of the rigors and restraints of her school life at King Edward, Alice thrived there. Two of her teachers, Miss Beckerleg, for Geography, and Mrs. Inglesby, for English, were inspired, creative teachers. Alice told me; “Mrs. Inglesby instilled in me a love of words and language, and encouraged me to write”. Mrs. Inglesby helped her develop language that was vivid, personal and precise. As Alice told me, ‘She didn’t have us study grammar, but would ask us "Did you really want to use that word?" What did you mean?’

Field trips were not uncommon at King Edward. Mrs. Inglesby also brought her pupils out into the Hubbard hills, and taught them the names of flowers and trees, ‘meanders’ and other terms with which to describe what they saw and experienced in the beautiful countryside around Lincolnshire. Though inspired to discover new ways to use language, Alice had always been interested in writing, and in her last years in high school, she had considered becoming a journalist as a career. Her stories had won prizes in several competitions she had entered, and she was drawn to the world of journalism as a way to make money through her writing.
At this time, Alice also took and passed an exam for entrance into the university. She passed the exam and also won a small scholarship to help with tuition. Her parents at the time, though, were preoccupied with their own financial troubles and their young son, Terence, who was still a baby at the time. (Alice remembered her mother bringing him to her graduation from the Grammar School, dressed in white lace, and sitting on her mother’s lap in the front row. She felt a big awkward... none of the other girl’s mothers had such a young baby!)

Alice, according to her memoir, didn’t tell her parents of her university placement, since the scholarship would not have been enough to pay all her expenses once there. Instead she chose to apply to a teacher training college, thereby insuring a steady income. This was by far the less expensive option, since the local Sheffield education authority would loan her all the money she might need to study to become a teacher. (It was also the route that had been followed by her mother and her aunt as well.)

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9 ‘At the age of 16, I passed Cambridge School Certificate with Honors and exemption from (indecipherable) Matriculation. A year later I sat for a state Scholarship but my father’s business was suffering in the recession of the early 30’s and I told the HM (Head Mistress) I would not be able to accept a place in University. Although the scholarship earned an award of 200 pounds per year, a substantial sum in those days, it was not enough to cover all expenses and I said I would apply for a TT (Teacher Training) college place instead. I did not in fact tell my parents at the time. They had enough trouble and it would have grieved them to know I was missing a Un (University) education. I stayed at school another year and sat High School Certificate which I passed in four subjects and I was offered a place in Homerton Teaching College, which I accepted.’ (Memoir, learning)
The condition of this loan was that Alice had to promise not to marry for five years following her matriculation as a licensed teacher. This promise would assure the authority that she would be in a position to pay back their loan.

Married women, even in the early 1930’s, were still not allowed to continue teaching, just as had been the case when Alice Yardley’s mother, Alice Bennet, had been a young teacher. It was then with a sense of commitment to a single life, at least at the start of her teaching career, that Alice began her training at Homerton College.

Choices

Alice mentioned to me that the father of one of her high school friends was a journalist and might have helped her get a position on a local Lincolnshire paper. I wonder if Alice’s journalistic literary skills might thereby have been nurtured, and drawn her towards such a career choice; she chose, instead, the safer route, following in her mother and her aunt’s footsteps, and with a daughter’s concern for the economic welfare of her parents. Earning a teaching certificate would give her a chance to become financially independent, while also making it possible for her to help them by making regular monetary contributions from her teaching salary.

In spite of her more practical choice, however, the desire to write, never left Alice, and she continued throughout her life to find some way of expressing her thoughts and experiences on paper.
As Alice told me, in her last decade, she had come to understand that as a teacher, she had chosen a profession which allowed her to develop many parts of herself, including her writing self. In her teacher’s role she developed her powers as an educational writer, a dancer, a scientist and observer of the natural world, a traveler, a philosopher, and a leader of an international educational movement.

Alice Yardley’s choice to become a teacher, though influenced and in important ways determined by her gender, context, and the class and educational background of her parents, empowered her to develop many sides of herself. Choosing teaching as a profession allowed her to develop diverse creative and practical skills, and many aspects of her personality. As a teacher, she was able to ‘compose a life’ (Bateson) that was true to her principles of responsiveness, and of receptivity to new experience. As she described to me often, she set out not with a fixed goal, but with an attitude of openness to new possibilities and challenges. She represented herself as a person who believed in flexibility; the shape of her life was organic and ongoing; it was ‘improvised’ as new circumstances came up, yet was not impervious to the structure imposed by promises she had made, and responsibilities she felt she must uphold:

For her last two years at King Edward VI, Alice won an award of 20 pounds. Then she applied for a grant to go to Homerton College in Cambridge. She received the grant, which came from both government and local council funds, with the understanding that she would pay it back over the first five years of her
teaching career. She had to promise to pay the local authority 10% of her salary for these first five years. As a beginning teacher she made 125 pounds a year. At that time, married women were prohibited from teaching, so it was understood that she was also making a promise not to marry for five years. In spite of having to agree to these conditions, Alice felt lucky when she got her first position, lucky to have a job that would support her during a time of severe national recession.

(Brooks, 2000)

Homerton College

Homerton was a college of education where women trained and qualified to become teachers. Alice’s Aunt Edith, her mother’s sister, had gone there. It was the only college in Cambridge for women only. There were a few students from King Edward VI who also went to Homerton, but Alice soon found herself mixing with all the students at the University of Cambridge, both men and women, as she had access to lectures in all the colleges:

Lectures were taken in the University. You were mixing with the university students. You didn’t study young children, you studied a subject. Now you need a teacher certificate

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10 Homerton has an unusual history. Founded in 1730 as a society for the education of Congregational Church ‘dissenters’ and then relocated to Homerton High Street in the East End of London, in 1850 it was refounded by the Congregational Board of Education to train both men and women for Board of Education Schools. When it moved to Cambridge in 1894 it acquired the Cavendish College buildings and became Homerton College for women only. It is now part of the University of Cambridge.
Cambridge was beautiful. Not Homerton college - it was a brick structure - but King’s College was a beautiful building. And the King College Choir would sing every Sunday at three o’clock. I would go to hear them. I went to many of the churches in Cambridge; there were probably forty or fifty in the place! (oral history)

College Life Begins

Alice arrived at the Cambridge train station in the fall of 1932, with her bicycle in tow, and found her way to Homerton College; a brick Victorian building with some lovely grounds around it, on the outskirts of Cambridge. She was among an entering class of 80 young women. The students were housed on the upper floors of the main building, reached from a wide winding wooden staircase. She had her own room, an unusual luxury in those days, and ate with the other young women in a large open dining hall, where her name was checked off for every meal.

At Homerton Alice studied the history of education, and read the thinkers at the root of an approach which formed in her the inclination to ‘follow the lead of the children’: Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Maria Montessori. In many ways, Homerton was ahead of its time in its commitment to progressive educational practice and theory; the work and educational theory of John Dewey was also discussed, and on her teaching practice Alice worked in a school, where Dewey’s idea of ‘project work’ was current and
put into action. She also felt the influence of the psychologist and educational thinker
Susan Isaacs\textsuperscript{11}, whose experimental Malting house School in Cambridge (1924-27) had
only recently closed down and whose writing was just beginning to be published. Isaacs’
educational work, including the publication in 1930 of her book, *Intellectual Growth in
Young Children*, had brought respect and legitimacy to the new and growing field of
child study and child development, and Alice Yardley was excited to be in the midst of
these emerging ideas.

In her autobiography Alice mentions the importance of Isaacs’ in the formation of her
thinking while she was at Homerton:

> An equally powerful influence on Cambridge at the time was the work of
Susan Isaacs. Her observations based on her work in the Malting House,
Cambridge in 1926 are at the core of all present day views on the needs of young
children. What is significant is that her work was not given the recognition it
deserved at the time. Her writing style is exquisitely simple because she
understood at depth what it was she was trying to say. As a result the academics
tended to disregard even denigrate it and although her influence seeped through it
was rarely acknowledged until a much later date. (Memoir, teaching)

\textsuperscript{11} Susan Sutherland Isaacs (1885-1948) was trained as a psychologist, and taught at the
Institute of Education, University of London. She was the founder of the first Department
of Child Development there in the early 1930’s.
Isaacs was intensely interested in young children’s play, thought, and activity, and believed in allowing children to choose their own activities and forms of expression. This liberal attitude towards children, and belief in the value of observation over intervention, impressed Alice Yardley. At home, Alice had already become fascinated with the unpredictable development of a young child: her brother Terence, whom she adored.

Born when she was sixteen, she had helped bring him up, and taken care of him as a tiny infant when her mother was sick with an infection. As she writes in her memoir:

When I was 16 my mother became pregnant. She was overjoyed. We all were and preparations for the arrival of a third child in the family filled our thoughts much of the time. On August 6th 1930 my mother gave birth to a boy. He was perfect and we were immediately devoted to him. When he was only a few months old however my mother became very ill. A clumsily extracted tooth left her with a damaged jawbone which turned septic and she was kept in bed for several weeks. There was little suitable help available in the village and baby Terence became my charge. I was studying for Exams at the time and I can remember working with him laid in my lap. I gave him a spoonful of orange juice from time to time and he seemed happy enough to lie there just so long as I talked to him for a few minutes in between concentrating on my work. I loved him very much and I think that was the beginning of what was to be for me the best part of a lifetime devoted to the educational welfare of young children. Terence stirred my interest in early
childhood in a way which committed me to the welfare of the young. (Memoir, farming)

When she left for Homerton, Terence was two years old. On every school vacation, Alice looked forward to her return to Mablethorpe, where she devoted much of her time to her infant brother, observing his development with intense interest, now sharpened by her own studies in education:

I watched with fascination the extraordinary changes which took place in a child between the ages of two and four. He was impish, with a keen sense of humour which I recognized as a sure sign of intelligence. It was he who helped me to enjoy the prospect of working with young children. (Memoir, teaching)

Students at Homerton had to decide on what specialization to take in order to earn their Teaching Certificate: Infant, Junior and Secondary course were offered. Alice chose the Infant Course, and looking back on this decision, felt that it may have been influenced by her fondness and fascination for brother. Another factor was what she later called her 'mistaken belief' that work with young children would be less demanding than with older children, and give her more time for her 'alternative interests', including her writing.

However, as Alice realized, more time was not in the cards. Yet she also found that the young children she worked with, 'won her over'. She found herself charmed by their
originality and fascinated by their creativity and unpredictable thinking. The intellectual challenge of working with young children, and of the new and growing field of child study and child development excited her.

Alice chose to work with this young infant population (five to seven year olds) for her student teaching internship. She was assigned to a school which apparently employed a similar approach to education as the Malting House School run by Susan Isaacs. It was considered progressive, and gave children considerable leeway in pursuing their own interests and activities. Alice surmised that, as she told me, as a student, she had proved herself capable of meeting such challenges, and able to ‘cope’, and was given this school as her teaching assignment.

In her student teaching period, she organized projects - or ‘topics’ as they were sometimes called, around a central idea that she thought would be engaging for her pupils. She chose to develop lessons based on the character and history of the Native American Hiawatha, drawing also on Longfellow’ poem of that name. She was gratified to discover that some of her pupils were inspired by these pursuits to write stories and poems of their own,

There was a moment, however, of some chaos, just when her supervisor had come by to observe. The children had scattered, in the character of Native American Indians, some

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12 This was an experimental, privately funded progressive school in Cambridge for young children that enjoyed considerable success and influence, and was the basis for Isaac’s book, *Intellectual Growth in Young Children.*
outside, some inside, and Alice really didn’t know where they all were! She somehow gathered them up, and returned to her plan, but this was her first taste of what can happen with young children when they suddenly ‘take off’ in their own directions.

Alice’s relative equanimity after this experience must have been helpful to her. It probably also brought home the disjunction between idealistic plans for teaching content – albeit through thoughtful lessons – and the reality of children’s unpredictable responses. This element of unpredictability challenged Alice’s sense of adventure and intellectual curiosity. She in some ways was ideally suited to work with young children; intensely curious, able to improvise, planful but not compulsive about planning, and deeply appreciative of the individual and different responses of each child. It may also have helped Alice understand that children are better served by a curriculum in which they can be deeply physically engaged – with water, mud, fabric, sand – to ground them in the physical world; and of turning to small group activity rather than the exhilarating but sometimes uncontrolled whole class teaching on a ‘topic’ that she had tried here.

Her student teaching experiences, courses and social events at Homerton kept her busy, but Alice missed her independence and chances for reflective solitude there. She often went for long walks in the countryside before breakfast, and would come into the dining room refreshed and well-exercised. She didn’t take easily to institutional life, escaping by riding her bicycle into Cambridge and eating at the tea shops with fellow-students. She became interested in the churches, and over a period of time, went every Sunday to a different one, getting a sense of the many types of Christian practice available in
Cambridge at that time. She loved going to King’s College Chapel to hear the boy’s choir there, and went often to the 3 o’clock Vespers service there.

Her parents regularly sent her packages from home which she shared with the less fortunate girls who didn’t receive them. Apparently Alice wouldn’t eat much of the food at Homerton; a friend of Alice’s in her later years told me that her sister Beryl implied that her parents had worried about her not eating well: there is a comment in her memoir mentioning that ‘girls’ would be sent to the nurse if they didn’t show up for every college meal.

While in some ways, it seems, the time she spent at Homerton was not a particularly happy one for Alice, she looked forward to setting up her own premises, getting a teaching job, and finding her own way upon graduation: “I longed to be independent and set up a life of my own designing”. (Memoir, teaching). By this time her training and student teaching experience had fostered in her a commitment to working for an authority that was ‘forward looking’, both in the sense of supporting progressive child-centered pedagogy, and ‘lifting up’ the poor children of the inner cities through a more enlightened approach to their education. As she wrote in her memoir:

“College stirred in me ideas about liberating children from the repetitive monotony of learning by memorizing. I wanted to teach in a forward looking town and I applied for a job in Nottingham because it had the reputation of being progressive. (Memoir, p. 24)”
Before the end of her last spring term at Homerton, Alice had been offered a job at a school in Nottingham, where, she had heard, the local inspectors knew the schools well, and were moving forward with a progressive agenda. Apparently, Alice had been recommended by the head mistress of the college along with her friend, ‘Miss Alex’, another Homerton pupil (see recommendation letter in Documents, #1).

Alice accepted eagerly, and looked forward to her first year of teaching in the city of Nottingham, to begin in the fall of 1934.

**Section Two: Teaching**

After spending the summer at home in Mablethorpe with her family, Alice set out to establish herself in the town of Nottingham. She was eager to set up her own ‘premises’, to be ‘on me own’, as she told me. She found a small flat in a neighborhood near the school and prepared to begin her probationary year. She had been assigned to the Forest Field School, west of Sherwood Forest, in a densely populated area, which she described as ‘a very pleasant old school in a poorer part of the city’. She arrived on her cycle, excited to start her new job, only to find that, due to some administrative confusion, the headmistress was not quite sure what class to assign her to. Soon, however, the situation was sorted out. The headmistress was very happy to have her, and assigned Alice and another probationer, Miss Alex, to share responsibility between them for teaching a large reception class of 50 incoming four and five year olds. Alice and ‘Miss Alex’ each were
given charge of 25 children. These first few months with a smaller group to plan for was a pleasant way to begin her first year of teaching.

In fact, Alice liked this school. The headmistress was ‘lovely’ according to Alice, warm and eager to give her young probationers the ‘scope’ they needed to begin with confidence. But the local authorities soon let Alice know that she had actually been slated to start at a new school, the William Crane Infants’ East School, and would be transferred there the following term, in January of 1935. After Christmas break, then she left Forest Field and began teaching a new class of ‘infants’ at William Crane Infants’ East School.

This Infant School was housed in one building among a group of brick school buildings that included two ‘mixed’ infants schools, a junior school for the boys, one for the girls, and two high school buildings, one for each gender. Only the infants – children five to seven - were in ‘mixed’ classes of both sexes, where boys and girls intermingled in the same classrooms and school grounds. To Alice’s amusement, her pupils when asked what class they were in would state firmly, ‘I’m a mixed infant.”

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13 The lack of gender division in this age group, the five to seven year olds, was in itself a singular aspect of the school experience for both children and infant teachers. The fact that Alice had both boys and girls in her classrooms at the same time gave her opportunity and experience in designing what she later described to be a ‘non-sexist’ environment; woodworking, block building, water experiments, and sewing were well-used by both sexes.
These six building then were designed to cater to the educational needs of infants through high school students, and together made up the educational heart and hub of the William Crane Estates. They were grouped together in the geographic center with concentric circles of streets radiating out in widening circles around the school complex.

(see map on following page )
Aspley, Bells Lane and Broxtowe communities

City Boundary

These areas have been created for statistical purposes so Census data can be provided for recognisable communities. The areas have different boundaries to any administrative areas with the same name.

Map produced on: 31.07.03
Map produced by: Policy and Information Team

City of Nottingham
Development and Environmental Services

Scale 1:12,500

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The William Crane Estate and Schools

Not only in Nottingham but throughout England during this period, poor people in industrial cities were being moved out of deteriorating neighborhoods into newly built housing estates, with the idea of forcefully creating ‘model’ communities. The William Crane Estate, when it opened 1934, boasting new schools and housing, was hailed as a particularly successful and hopeful modern community whose inhabitants had been ‘lifted up’ from their depths. Alice describes her sense of the public optimism that accompanied the opening days of the Estate Schools:

The William Crane Schools were newly built to a design, which had received world-wide acclaim. The William Crane Estate was a slum clearance area.

Situated on a sunny hill on the city boundary, the houses were built of brick, with bathrooms and internal toilets. They each had a private garden. It was hoped that the new tenants would live up to their bright environment and the 6 schools were placed at the hub of the Estate, The idea being that they would act as a community centre and lend cohesion to a modern housing estate. (Memoir – teaching)

Alice’s teaching assignment at the William Crane Infants’ East School was to take charge of a very large ‘reception’ class. This consisted of children who had just turned five or would be turning five during the coming term, beginning in January of 1935. As the policy at this time was to allow children into school in the term of their fifth birthday, children in the ‘reception’ class were coming to school for the first time. Her classroom,
as she described, had windows along two sides, one along a corridor, and one that opened onto French doors, through which the children could go outside, and “were supposed to be kept open unless the weather was too inclement, as the open-air style classroom was designed to offer a very healthy workspace.” (Memoir, teaching)

Though, following educational fashion of the time, 14 her classroom was open and light, its many windows meant that it was often chilly, and she soon got in the habit of wearing several layers in the colder months. It was in this light but always drafty classroom that she was to teach in for the next eight years.

**Teaching Begins**

At William Crane, Alice felt the excitement of participation in a new and exciting experiment in social reform. The hope of transforming the lives of so many young families was inspiring, and she was swept up in the challenges of her new job with a renewed sense of commitment to her chosen career.

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14 In addition to the classrooms along the corridor, there was an additional space designated an ‘open-air’ classroom, which was open to the air on three sides: “One extra classroom had a sliding screen on 3 sides, with a coke stove in the center of the 4th wall. This was for the then called ‘retarded’ children and was known as the open-air classroom.” The theory behind the open air classroom was influenced by the work of the Rachel and Margaret Mcmillan, English sisters interested in social reform, who had advanced the cause of nursery education in the ‘open air’ for the children of the working poor.
Practically speaking the challenges were great. The numbers coming in to this new school complex on the Western edge of Nottingham were very large, Alice describes the magnitude of this changing school demographic, caused by the migration of families from the inner city out to the housing estates as follows:

“... they were opening new schools, classes, you see, on the William Crane Estate...they were being moved out, schools were just opening, and they were filling up termly. And there were young parents, there were vast numbers of children, you realize we had two infants schools there, and...there were eleven classrooms with fifty children. (Interviews, Code 2)

Eleven classrooms of fifty children each meant that over five hundred children, many of them just moved in to the neighborhood, were streaming into the Infants School East every day. Yet in spite of being housed in a ‘modern’ facility equipped with light-filled classrooms and French doors opening on to the yard, many teachers’ responses to their large incoming classes were rarely innovative or different than they had been in the past. According to Alice, what she saw inside the newly built classrooms was a typical scene, as follows:

Those children were sitting two in a desk, facing each other. At the front there was what was a sort of - the headmistress’ idea - a display table - you had a theme or a topic and all your work was based around the topic, a sort of topic approach. It was a step towards integration, but as soon as we got, particularly in
Though the school was new and shiny, old-fashioned ways of teaching still prevailed, in spite of the nod to the Deweyan ‘topic’ approach signalled by the ‘display table’ at the front of each classroom.

While in her practice teaching school in Cambridge, which had followed a project method and topic approach, Alice had seen classrooms that planned an integrated curriculum around a central theme, what she saw at William Crane was embryonic and superficial.

Yet the close proximity to the outdoors, and her French doors opening to the yard, did allow Alice a chance to put into practice some of what she knew about children’s learning. Her reference to a further movement towards ‘integration’ when summer began, when her doors might to left open all day to the outdoors, contains the story of how she went about fulfilling what she knew were the legitimate needs of her very young pupils for physical activity.

Influenced by the McMillan sisters’ theory of the benefit for young children of having access and experience to the ‘open air’, William Crane’s school designers had made access to the outside yard a priority. Thus Alice could take her charges outside at any time without any one else noticing, or so she thought. Eventually her plan became known to the head mistress, Miss Cook. Alice told me, on a humorous note, that one day Miss...
Cook had come to her and commented that she seemed to be taking her class out very often, asking Alice quite pointedly, “When is it your turn for PE (Physical Education) on our timetable?”

With a class of fifty children four and five years old, and little in the way of equipment except desks, individual wooden slates, white chalk and a few pieces of colored chalk, it made sense to Alice to spend a good part of the school days, when weather permitted, using the large yard, where they could play games. From her own experience as a student teacher and with her brother Terence, she knew that 4 1/2 and 5 year olds were physical beings who needed time during their school day to practice the physical skills that for children this age are such crucial markers of normal development, and of a sturdy and stable sense of self-worth. Alice quickly saw the benefits, not only for her pupils overall good nature and well being, but also in their capacity to become engaged in learning.

The alternative, of forcing her 42 children to sit quietly at their desks, she came to understand, was ‘a matter of keeping control, rather than getting on with learning’. She came to realize, she told me, ‘I got far more work done when they kept going out’ (Interview, Code 2 &3).

Alice’s experience as a student teacher at an experimental school in Cambridge, and with her own brother at home, had taught her that a lively and intelligent child might be squashed both physically and intellectually, by the rote and restrictions of the conventional classroom. These young children, leaving home for the first time, were
being forced to sit at their desks and copy from the blackboard, and she understood how difficult this might be:

A. (high voice; emphasis) You can’t expect children to suddenly change from being at home, to sitting watching the blackboard: ‘A is for apple, B is for bird, C is for cat, and D is for dirt.’ you know! (laughs). You can’t believe it, can you? I don’t wonder they start to cry, and don’t like school, and won’t go. (Interview, Code 2&3, Code 4)

As this passage reveals, from the beginning of her teaching experience, Alice’s capacity to identify with the young child, and to imagine his or her state of mind, was a prod and a stimulus to find ways to change her classroom practice to include more active, informal, and ‘home-like’ experiences.

An example of her ingenuity in this regard, during this period, was her practice of distributing colored chalk to her pupils, and encourage them to draw freely on their individual slates, something they could do while sitting at their desks. The color selection was limited; pink, green, and blue. The children worked hard, and holding firmly onto the chalk their small hands went round and round in circular motions, up and down to make lines, and quick strokes back and forth to fill in spaces. At the end of this period, as Alice exclaimed with affectionate humor, her small charges were beaming, and the classroom was awash in a cloud of purple haze from all the floating chalk particles. She had found a way to give them some freedom and independence, and she hoped – and apparently her
wish was granted – that the HM, the dreaded Miss Cook, would not discover her, or poke her head into the unseemly purple cloud.

In these small ways, in her first year of teaching, Alice experimented with giving the children what she felt they needed; greater physical independence, activity, and freedom. Yet at the same time she was conscientious in spending time in class pursuing the expected academic agenda and instructing her children on the rudiments of reading, writing, and ‘number work’.

While feeling some sense of accomplishment, even pride, at her ability to circumvent some of the restrictions imposed on her classroom practice, at the same time, Alice suffered from the keen anxiety of the beginning teacher who occasionally, (and usually for good reasons!) ignores the administrative restrictions imposed by the school authorities. For instance, Alice, against school policy, but desperate to find a quiet space to work, would cycle home at lunchtime on Fridays with the school register under her arm. Here she would have the peace and quiet to be able to concentrate uninterrupted on tallying the total number of children in attendance all week. Getting the correct tally was important to her economy, she told me, as ‘you were paid according to how many children you were coping with’. Thus a mistake in the tally might mean a difference in her salary that week.
Miss Cook

Since it was against school policy to remove the register from the school, she was terrified of being found out. "Taking it home was like a sin!" she told me, laughing with animation at this memory of her rebellious act. Still a new teacher, she dreaded the thought of Miss Cook's disapproval, whom Alice described frequently and with animation as a 'dread-nought of a head mistress'. (Interviews, Codes 2 & 3).

Miss Cook, in fact, ruled the school with 'military rigor', and had very 'formal ideas' as to how education should proceed. Her school was at the center of a socially progressive mission, but her own training and leadership style was conservative and authoritarian. Miss Cooke, perhaps chosen for her organizational skills, clung to a vision of order and conventional academic tradition that was not aligned with the progressive ideas that her younger teachers, and the more forward looking members of the local authority were (gently) advocating.

Yet Miss Cook was aware of public attention on her and her school, and made some effort to give an impression of a kind of veneer of modernity; including the display table at the front of each classroom, previously mentioned, and at the back, elaborate and detailed pictures drawn by the teacher, to impress visitors who might come to observe

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15 This term, 'dread-nought' described a new kind of battleship, built with more guns than ever before, belonging to the Queen. Thus as Alice used it, it signifies military authority, power, and a personality who insists on plowing on irrespective of what's around her, canons clanging, and guns at the ready.
(Memoir, teaching). In spite of these superficial attempts, genuine reform in the direction of more progressive and child-centered practices, was not yet in evidence under Miss Cook’s headship. Alice comments, in regard to Miss Cook:

Perhaps it was unfortunate for her that she was appointed to this school where the eyes of educators trying to interpret in a somewhat confused way the findings of the Hadow report were on her and her school.” (memoir, teaching)

The philosophical principles of learning outlined in the Hadow report) with its emphasis on the importance of activity and experience, represented an ideal still far from the reality of classroom practice at the William Crane Infants East School in 1935. (Only in its physical attributes did it reflect some of the recommendations of the report, with its separate building for infants and juniors, its easy access to the outside, and its preponderance of windows, both interior and exterior. 16

Miss Cook’s training and temperament, and her style of leadership did not encourage experimentation. In fact, as Alice remarks in both her interviews and in her memoir, Hadow’s broader philosophical emphasis on a more active engaged child-learner was virtually ignored in many schools at this time, and certainly at William Crane under Miss Cook’s leadership, formal teaching methods continued to prevail:

16 As we have seen, the Hadow report made a strong case for a breakup of the old elementary school into separate groupings of nursery, infants and juniors, all to co-exist side by side within the umbrella of the primary school. While the nursery was not added until later, (when Alice returned as head teacher in 1951), the organization of William Crane was one of the first in Nottingham to reflect this new division into infants and junior groupings
Children from the moment they entered at the age of 5 were subject to formal tuition in reading, writing & number. It mattered little whether they understood or enjoyed what they were doing. The aim was to pass termly tests based on what they had memorized. They were expected to stand, break off what they were doing and say ‘Good Morning Mme. So and So’ when the head teacher entered the room. (memoir, teaching)

Each day was started with the odd practice of “handkerchief drill” which Alice describes as follows:

Each child wore a handkerchief pinned from the shoulder and each day commenced with handkerchief drill. In fact all the routines associated with the days of formal schooling were drilled into these infants from the 1rst day in school.” (memoir, teaching)

Not only were the children dominated by formal ideas, the staff was also subject to rigid rules and regulations about their appearance - stockings must be worn no matter how hot the weather was - and supplies had to be accounted for up to the last penny. Teachers were obliged, according to AY, “to make every scrap of apparatus and account for each sheet of paper used.” (memoir, teaching)
In fact, Alice enjoyed making ‘apparatus’ (see Schemes notebook) for her classroom, and she and her fellow teachers accepted these financial and personal restraints with little complaint, grateful at least to have a job in a time of recession, and worrying as they did about repaying their student loans.

From Alice’s point of view, women at this time, whose employment opportunities were still very limited, had to choose between their teaching jobs, and marriage, since married women were prohibited from teaching. For this reason, she explains, along with the other restrictions:

Women also accepted the idea of remaining a spinster, for unless you married a man wealthy enough to repay the college loan to the Council, you were required to stay on the job until the loan was paid off and married teachers were not employable. (Memoir, teaching)

**Second year of Teaching**

At the end of her first year of teaching, Alice went home to Mablethorpe to spend the summer with her parents, her sister Beryl, and her little brother Terence, who had recently turned four. Late that summer, Alice’s mother had left the farm and taken Terence to visit relatives for a few days. While there, he was stricken with meningitis, and died the next day. The body was brought back to Mablethorpe, as Alice describes, in a small white coffin, and arrived at the farm in a taxi. A funeral was soon arranged at the
village cemetery of St. Mary’s.

This was a time when Alice sought solace by setting off for a long walk by the ocean. She climbed the dunes and looked over the sea, and felt somehow calmed, as she told me, by the surging waters, the depth and the enormity of the North Sea before her. Her mother, Alice Bennet was utterly distraught. At the funeral she had tried to jump into the freshly dug grave alongside the small coffin containing Terence’s body. Alice and her father had not only been coping with their own wrenching sense of loss, but also with a mother close to the verge of complete mental breakdown.

When Alice came back to Nottingham that fall, she faced a class of children exactly the age that Terence had been when he died. Alice describes her return to William Crane that September:

“...I had to go back to school, and that was my first summer vacation. And I remember going back to school and looking at all these children, and there were... two of them were wearing glasses, they looked exactly like he did.” (Interview, Codes 2&3)

Whatever her own emotional state, her young pupils did not hold back from making demands of their teacher, and in spite of her grief, she felt gratitude towards them for providing her a compelling distraction. Rather than resenting them, she embraced their egocentric natures. As she told me, “At that age they need you. They don’t need you to be
thinking about somebody else; (they say) “I’m me and I need you to look at me’’. They dragged her from the depths of despair, onto the surface of real life. As she told me, “those children were my lifeline.” Her children needed her and she responded, and putting aside her own pain and grief, she understood that she must ‘hang on to normality’, because ‘anyway, you’ve got to live, and get on with it.’” As it happened, more children had entered the school that year, and her class of infants was even bigger than it had been the previous year.

And after all, I’d got 45 by that time, and the numbers were growing, and I really hadn’t any time to think of anything else except how to survive amongst them.

(Interviews, Code 2&3)

When the end of term came, however, she was again overcome, contemplating the first Christmas at home without her small brother. She left the school without saying goodbye, too upset and grief stricken to enter into the normal holiday events at school before preparing to go home to Mablethorpe, now empty of Terence:

I remember the first Christmas. I couldn’t even go and wish the head mistress, ‘Happy Christmas’; I didn’t want Christmas to happen. It couldn’t be a happy Christmas, I couldn’t wish somebody else a happy Christmas. I just sneaked off. But I guess she knew. (Interview, Code 2&3)
Back at Mablethorpe, feeling remorseful about her rapid departure, Alice wrote to Miss Cook about her feelings and about Terence. When she returned to William Crane in January, quite to her surprise, Miss Cook came to tell Alice that she had also lost a younger brother, at about the same age.

After this exchange of confidences, Miss Cook made a singular invitation to her young staff member to accompany her on an all day outing to a town in the Lake District on the next school holiday. Alice accepted, and they drove together in Miss Cook’s car to see the building of the Lady Bower Tower on a lake in the Peak district in nearby Derbyshire. Alice was touched by this kind invitation, and enjoyed this outing, though she found herself quite frightened by Miss Cook’s wild driving!

She didn’t stop at traffic lights, and I was on tenterhooks all the whole time! But she was being kind; She was extremely kind, the ‘dreadnought’ of a woman!

(Interview, Code 2&3)

This incident proved significant in Alice’s relationship with Miss Cook, and with her authority, and by extension, with school authorities in general. Miss Cooke’s kindness, the fact that she owned a car, in itself unusual for a woman at that time, and her wild driving habits stood in contradiction to her strict and formal style as a head teacher. They had both lost a beloved younger brother, and this created a current of understanding between them. It was perhaps this underground understanding that emboldened Alice as a teacher to challenge some of Miss Cook’s pedagogical practices, as we see in the following incident.
Thinking Point Stories

Brown Paint and the ‘New Art’

In spite of her kindness to Alice, in other ways Miss Cook remained the ‘dreadnought’ of a headmistress, and her firm views on all school subjects clearly ruled her staff. Her style of leadership at this point did not include openness to discussion among her staff about how to implement ‘modern ideas about teaching and learning’. This was clearly evident in the manner of art education that all were obliged to follow:

For Miss Cook, ‘Art’ was a period on the timetable. She called it the “New Art”, and thought she was very advanced in setting aside a time to let children paint. We were supposed to set up the easels in the lunch hour. They were set up in rows in the classroom, one easel shared between two children. The children were given an object to paint, a snowdrop in the spring, or a picture of a robin. They were all supposed to paint the same thing, while Miss Cook walked down the corridor along the string of rooms, checking on the children’s “Stance”. There were windows between the corridor and the classrooms, and she could see what they were up to. The children were supposed to have the top of their head over their heels, and their heels together while they painted, standing up very straight. and they were all supposed to be painting something that looked like something, that was representational. (Interview, oral history)
Alice and her friend were appalled by the restrictions imposed on children by Miss Cook’s methods. They had read the work of Marion Richardson, an artist and teacher, who argued in favor of allowing children the opportunity for free expression with paint materials. They were eager to give children this opportunity in their own classrooms, and soon found a way to do so, circumventing Miss Cook in the following manner:

... there was a floor space under the window that she couldn’t see. So my friend and I started putting paper down on the floor where she couldn’t see, and letting a few children at a time paint what they wanted. We’d give them a pot of paint, usually a brownish color mixed from leftover paint, and they would go to it. They loved it! They would dab and play with the paint and get some interesting results. Free painting gave them a chance to see what they have in their minds. They would make “abstract” paintings, with blobs and squiggles. They would get absolutely absorbed. (Interview, oral history)

The excitement and engagement of the children in this activity encouraged Alice and her co-teacher to make it available at other times during the day, whenever they had ‘a little freedom’. Alice was delighted with the ‘exciting lines’ and shapes that emerged. She realized the extent that exhorting young children to ‘represent’ what they saw, in the way of objects to copy, limited their ability to ‘imagine things that can’t be represented’. To her this was a revelation. It confirmed her understanding that children had powers that had been untapped in the formal classroom; (and it paved the way for continuing to experiment with more and more varied forms of personal expression)
Alice delighted in her secret cache of children’s paintings, which she kept in the bottom drawer of her cabinet, yet, unbeknownst to her, her experimental activities had not gone unobserved. As Alice told me:

There was an advisor to the school who knew that there were two teachers at the William Crane School who were practising, ‘on the quiet’, a freer approach to painting. One fall she came to the Headmistress and told her they were setting up an exhibit in Nottingham of the New Art, and declared, “I’m sure you have some teachers here practicing the New Art”. Miss Cook brought the organizer right to me and my friend! She knew where to go! She didn’t want to condone it until she knew it was right. (Interview, oral history)

In spite of Alice’s efforts to hide her children’s experimental art activities, Miss Cooke had been quite aware of them.

So our children’s paintings were hung up among the others at the Exhibit. It was part of a conference, I think. There was a visiting lecturer who was promoting it around the schools. This happened probably in my second or third year at William Crane. (Interview, oral history)

From this point on, Alice writes, “all children in the school were allowed ‘free expression’ with paint”. The acknowledgement and celebration of children’s art in a
public forum had reassured Miss Cook that her staff might pursue an approach to art education which allowed for children’s unstructured personal expression without reflecting badly on her school. The incident of the ‘Brown Paint’, signaled a change in attitude on the part of the head, and also gave impetus to the teaching staff throughout the school to move more openly towards progressive and experimental curriculum ventures.

In the narrative context of Alice’s individual development as a teacher, ‘Brown Paint’ was clearly a ‘thinking point’, a seminal experience. (Memoir, teaching).

In finding a way around what she perceived as arbitrary restrictions on the exploratory artistry of young children, Alice had taken some risks. She had give her pupils a chance to experiment, and it had had important consequences, and she saw this, in looking back at her career, as marking ‘the beginning of a slow change towards improving the lot of young children in school’, (Memoir, teaching). She had built, in her classroom, a pedagogical space where children might freely express a vivid aspect of their individuality. and where they might be engaged as much in the process of ‘doing’ and ‘creating’ as in producing an expected ‘result’. This incident moved her forward in an exciting new direction. In its aftermath, everything had changed; much that had seemed impossible now became possible.
Experiments to Follow

Indeed, Alice soon embarked on some other teaching experiments, specifically in the more ‘academic’ areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. The idea, learned from ‘Brown Paint’ that children had within them their own powerful means of expression, continued to drive the evolution of her curricular projects.

The prevailing method of teaching reading, which relied on children memorizing words and word patterns, gave way as Alice and her teaching friends recognized that their pupils’ own words and stories had far greater meaning to them than words chosen by others. Children had lots of personal experiences they were eager to tell and write about, and these could become the basis of their own early reading material.

After writing down children’s stories and thoughts, Alice would often type them up, sometimes in book form, and these would be added to the class library.

The children also were much better able to read their own words, when they saw them in print. This approach allowed them the ‘free expression’ of their own ideas, using language forms that derived from the way they spoke spontaneously and naturally. Her method, she told me, invited children to tap into ‘what they had in their imagination’. The excitement they felt at seeing their own words written down mirrored what Alice had seen in their faces as they went about their ‘free’ painting activities. Reflecting on the development of this approach to teaching reading, and her excitement about opening up
another channel of creativity and imagination, Alice wrote in her Memoir about this evolution:

We began to realize that children needed to understand the uses of words and in particular of the printed word. Learning to read by memorizing word patterns gave way to learning the reading process through personal writing. Individual and class news replaced such drills as “I see a ___” or “There is a house. I am a girl/boy etc.” I well remember the thrill of discovering that children could be as creative in making their own writing and reading as they were in making speech. (Memoir, teaching)

Daily Diary

Another practice Alice initiated in these first years of teaching at William Crane, was to encourage every student to keep a diary in their desks, and to write in it every day. Each student was given a notebook for this purpose and over time, a period was designated, usually at the end of the day, for them to write in their ‘daily diary’ about their lives, and more particularly, what they’d done at school during the day. 17 Children often put down their ideas ‘pictorially’, drawing their thoughts, and writing only what they could. They always had something to write or draw about, Alice humorously remarked, as long as the subject was themselves and their activities:

17 This practice, according to Alice became quite widespread during the thirties.
"It's a very useful material for writing about, what you've done. I mean, yes, it
gives you something to say, if you like! (voice rising). I mean, you tell somebody
to write about a haystack, he might sit there... (high laugh)... you know!"

(Interview, Code, 2&3)

Alice implies here that the child given a writing assignment, such as to 'write about a
haystack' is paralyzed, and might have nothing to say about the subject, or perhaps had
had no experience of a haystack, other than the picture on display. Letting children
determine what they wrote about, and giving them permission to take the 'daily bread' of
their ordinary school and home lives as subject, on the other hand, was 'useful material'
because it was the stuff of real and direct experience.

Handwriting

In a related curriculum area, Alice also became interested in teaching the mechanics of
handwriting in a more natural manner, and in a way that would have more personal
meaning for her pupils. Again, it was a particular event which, like the 'Brown Paint'
episode, stirred in her a kind of mental anguish, and a keen sense of dissonance between
her educational goals for her pupils, and those of the 'authorities' on high, that generated
a radical change in practice.

Ball and Stick
One day in her classroom at William Crane, Alice had spent a long period with her four and five year old pupils teaching them how to complete the expected handwriting exercises, which consisted of copying the shapes of a ‘ball and stick’ - a circle and a line – over and over, on lined handwriting paper. When the children were finished, their papers brimming with many rows of the prescribed ball and stick shapes, she cleared a space on the floor, and asked them each to put their papers carefully down side by side on a cleared patch of floor. Much to her dismay, when her pupils came back, none of them could identify their own papers - they hadn’t had time to put their names on their work - and neither could their teacher!

Looking back on this event, Alice felt that sense again of a reflective turning point. When she saw that the children were unable to recognize their own work, she understand at that instant that what she had demanded of her pupils was quite without personal meaning for them, and, as she thought about it, she realized that she didn’t believe in the value of the exercise herself. She did not really see how this kind of empty drill was helping them master the mechanics of writing. In fact there was evidence that it was having the opposite effect, of turning children away from writing.

Apparently such handwriting exercises were commonly required in Infants Schools of the 1930’s and 1040’s 1940’s. Reflecting on this practice several decades later, Alice ruminates on the philosophical implications of such mechanical practices:

Identical pages of print are displayed on the wall.
Unless they bear the child’s name not even their owners can identify them. The whole aim is to eradicate individuality in style, when handwriting, as an intimate art form, should express the individual’s personality. (*Reaching Out*, Rubicon, p. 23)

For Alice, these handwriting exercises belonged to a view of education whose purposes were to control, to ‘eradicate individuality in style’, the antithesis of her vision of bringing children into a place where they would be ‘liberated’ to express their developing personalities and ideas in a number of art forms, including handwriting, one which she saw as a particularly ‘intimate art form’. Revolt against the conventional practice propelled her forward along her philosophical path. The endless rows of ‘balls and sticks’ ruled over a meaningless landscape. In Alice’s teaching practice, they would soon be replaced by the strong, uneven marks or free flowing pattern of each individual child struggling to put his or words and thoughts onto paper. This made for a much more dramatic and interesting landscape.

In her classroom teaching, children were given more opportunities to copy and write whole words of their own choosing, or to make pictures and write stories with what words they knew, without undue regard for correct spelling. In this way, a child’s writing might become a vivid expression of original ideas and experiences, an imprint of their individual personalities. Children could gain experience with the mechanics of writing within a framework of greater personal meaning, and learn to respect, not only their own, but their classmates thoughts and ideas.
This was a moment in my understanding of Alice’s development as a teacher which resonated deeply for me. I had experienced a similar shock of recognition as a fairly new teacher when, responding to parent pressures, I had assigned my kindergarten students a
an exercise taken from a math ‘workbook’. I remembered how upset I was when I realized that while the children were struggling to complete the assignment I had given them, they had little understanding of the purpose of it, and neither were they gaining any intellectual understanding from the experience. The worksheet, it seemed to me, with its black lines and limited content, was designed solely to push children to conform to some kind of cultural mystique of ‘academic work’ without any true intellectual value to them as thinking individuals. I had been intimidated into using these worksheets by parent’s concerns. Yet part of me had already known, before I saw the evidence clearly in the children’s responses, that it would be meaningless, a waste of the child’s time, and a betrayal of my own values.

Alice, I believe, felt that same sense of self mistrust and horror to discover that as a teacher she had demanded that a child squash his individuality in service to uniformity and conformity; that she had been promulgating a cultural ideal of homogeneity, achieved through repressive and dubious means.

Mathematics
In another area of the curriculum, mathematics, Alice in these early years was also rebelling against the established practice of teaching through drill, essentially based on memorizing number facts, with little opportunity provided for exploring number with concrete objects with ‘real life’ meaning.

Alice knew from her own experience on the farm at Mablethorphe, when she had helped her parents manage their farm, that real life experience was the ground bed for understanding number and number operations. Starting when she was ten or eleven, her responsibilities collecting eggs, sometimes lifting hens off their roosts to collect the twelve eggs she needed to make a dozen, and making change for customers as she made her rounds of the seaside boarding houses at Mablethorpe. This experience had made a strong impression, and shaped Alice’s growing awareness that, to make number work come alive for her pupils, she must bring into the classroom some aspects of the ‘real life experience’ that had shaped her own learning as a child. One way she did this was by moving towards an approach that substituted memorizing abstract numbers and symbols, with experiences and activities that involve children directly with ‘the real thing’.

Dolly Mixtures

Once a week Alice would go to the local candy store, and buy a variety of penny candy, what were called ‘dolly mixtures’; small shapes of different colors, sizes and textures, striped peppermints, black and red liquorice, hot balls, etc. These hard candy ‘dolly mixtures’ then became the stuff of math class that day:
On Friday afternoon I always bought a pound of dolly mixtures. The children sorted them, ordered them and grouped them. They parted and combined groups, set them in equal rows and arranged them in pyramids etc. In short they used dolly mixtures as a means of comprehending number combinations and then they ‘sold’ them to one another and were allowed to eat those they earned through correct purchasing procedures. (Memoir, teaching)

After sorting and counting all the different varieties, children would set up store, and sell the candies to each other, practicing as she says ‘correct purchasing procedures’ before being allowed to eat them. Apparently this method was very popular with the children, (though nowadays, in our health conscious society, it probably wouldn’t be approved of) Alice also brought collections of natural and everyday objects into school; stones, nuts and seed pods, buttons, and other collections that she had made at home, sometimes for display and more often than not, to give her pupils practice with sorting and organizing them in all the ways that they might think of.

Lecturing vs. ‘Doing things’

However, in spite of Alice’s small successes in bringing more interesting materials and activities into her classroom, the large size of her reception classes at William Crane
continued to pose enormous challenges. In the area of reading instruction she had begun to encourage children’s personal writing, and the use of the ‘daily diary’. While she had made some progress in making the reading and writing process a more personal one, it took several years before she developed a classroom management strategy for balancing whole group instruction and one on one instruction in reading.

When Alice had first arrived at William Crane as a beginning teacher, the customary approach to reading instruction was to have children take turns reading off the blackboard, seated at their desks, all facing forward. However, after the ‘brown paint’ episode had worn down Miss Cook’s authoritarian rule, and opened the gates to allowing children greater individuality and self-expression, she felt confident enough to initiate some changes. She describes this development in the interview below:

I wasn’t having children sitting in twos staring straight front and reading in turns off the blackboard. I had them individually, you see, and that means that the rest of the class has got to find something else to do, and we started doing things!

(Interview, Code 2&3)

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18 The large classes at William Crane were in part the result of the city policy of moving families from the slum areas into these new estates, and, regardless of whether there was space in the school, Alice told me, there was the idea that ‘oh, you must admit them’ and ‘lead them in with a shoe horn’. There were often up to 50 four and five year olds in one class space.
If children came to her individually, the rest of the class must find worthwhile activities, and appropriate spaces to do them in. Providing opportunities for ‘doing things’ became an impetus for the redesign of the classroom. In response to this need, Alice designed a corner of her classroom to contain a story mat. She worked at home, sometimes with the help of her father and his tools, to make bookracks and equipment to hold reading charts. She would transport them to school with difficulty, piece by piece, on foot or on her trusty bicycle. Children could spend time in the reading corner, while she worked with individuals one on one.  

The Teacher – Child Relationship

Eric and the Ball of Wool

After only a few years at William Crane, Alice had gained some recognition as a teacher who was particularly able to teach children with unusual needs and behavior ‘difficulties’. Eric was one of these children. Alice described him to me in our first set of sessions:

Eric had a twisted neck, which gave him a furtive appearance. He was brought to me after he had gone and filled all the toilets with soil. I was considered a

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19 This was the beginning of what became a ‘workshop’ open-ended model of the classroom, one which Alice was to develop to a far greater degree in her successive teaching posts.
'mature' teacher by then, since I had been at William Crane for a couple of years, and the headmistress thought maybe I could do something with him. I went home and talked to my mother about Eric. Together we came up with an idea. My mother had been collecting odd balls of wool, and she had a great bagful. We decided to give Eric the job of sorting all the wool into its different colors. When the headmistress came by, she saw Eric sitting in the front row of the class, sitting at his desk working diligently at this task, utterly absorbed! She said to me in amazement "Is that Eric?" There he was, so calmly and cleverly unraveling all those little bits of wool so that we could use them. It made him feel important, and that he was doing something for other people, and sorting out his own mind in the process. (Interview, oral history)

Eric was born with a deformed shoulder, and this physical difference had made it even more difficult for him to fit in among his classmates. In spite of his physical difference, though, he was an active, mischievous, and imaginative child who was always 'getting into trouble'. Neglected by his over burdened mother, Eric was a child much in need of adult attention and encouragement. When Alice got to know him, she found him to have hidden strengths, and eventually he became one of the students she felt closest to.

Alice delighted in Eric's patience and skill at unraveling the tangled balls of wool into neat balls, each of a different color. He was successful and knew it, and his self-confidence began to grow. In this act of creating order in his somewhat chaotic world, he had found a sense of purpose, and an acceptable way to make a contribution.
Miss Cook’s surprise when she saw Eric sitting quietly at his desk, ‘utterly absorbed’, added to Alice’s sense of success and accomplishment in having found a medium and a project through which Eric could begin to enter into the communal life of the classroom and the school.

Eric began to see meaning in other areas of his work at school, and Alice continued to look for opportunities to bolster his self-confidence. Over the course of the year, she told me:

I gave him more and more responsibility. He had grown up feeling inferior, people would say about him “Oh poor boy”. He had an impish streak, but he wasn’t vicious. He might throw mud at people but he wouldn’t pull a leg off a fly. We sometimes forget that children are little people.

Clearly Eric made a strong impression on Alice in her beginning years as a teacher. (He appears frequently, always distinguished by his habit of ‘putting soil down the toilets’ and his deformed shoulder, in three of her published books, written 25 years after she first encountered him). Neglected at home, he had no experience of an adult who was truly on his side, and her attentions to him gave him his first experience of a loving, understanding adult. Over the course of the two years Eric remained in her class, he developed a strong attachment to her, and she to him.
Like ‘Brown Paint’ and ‘Ball and Stick’, the story of ‘Erica and the Ball of Wool’ was a ‘thinking point’ event for Alice, a turning point in the development of her educational approach and philosophy. While the earlier ‘thinking point’ events were centered on Alice’s relationships with children in a general sense, illustrative of how her urge to ‘follow their lead’ had shaped the way she taught and interacted with them, this story was the first in which the main focus is on an individual child.

This small child, restless, intelligent, sometimes destructive, sometimes gleeful and mischievous, brought her new understanding about the nature of teaching and learning, and of the role of the teacher-child relationship. She learned from Eric how important it was that she be attentive to his unique qualities and abilities, and to be open to what his contribution might be. Her warm relationship with him, and her confidence that he did have something important to contribute made a difference in his perception of himself, in his energy for learning, and his sense of belonging to the group. 20

The story of Eric became a guidepost in her development. From this point on, she understood that building a sustained, personal and particular relationships with each of her pupils was more important than anything else she could do as a teacher. These relationships made learning possible, as did the children’s relationships with each other.

20 (As it happened, Eric proved to have ‘clever hands’, and manual and mechanic abilities, which Alice was able to provide channels for. Apparently, in his later years at school he did indeed find his true ‘gifts’; his niche; becoming in adult life a ‘highly skilled motor mechanic’ who eventually sets up his own garage. )
The teacher-child relationship was a key to the quality of learning possible for the young child. This conviction was strengthened during the war years to follow by two factors.

One was her experiences with children evacuated from their own homes and schools, when she got to know them not only as students, but in the totality of their day to day lives: small human beings who had landed, often without parents, in an alien environment where they had to find their way. Their teachers often became their lifeline.

The second was the fact that during most of the war years, 1939 till 1945, classes at William Crane were dispersed into local homes, and much smaller class sizes that before.

Each of this situations gave her more opportunity to get to know children, to observe them at work and at play with other children, to listen to them, and to join in their enthusiasms. Knowing children better meant discovering that every child was an ‘Eric’: every child had qualities and abilities that could be nurtured, qualities that in time would be given back to their communities.

Time, interest, friendship, and that spark of enthusiasm for who they were and what they were about, were what she offered these children. Without these elements, much of their interior gifts would remain unseen, and undeveloped.

Summary of First Five Years at William Crane
During this period Alice had initiated a number of curricular innovations. She had made changes in the areas of physical education, art, reading and writing, and math activities.

She had provided painting activity that allowed children free expression with color, shape, and form, brought real objects into the classroom for math work and research study. She had created a reading corner in her classroom, where children could develop their skills independently. She had encouraged children to practice their handwriting not with sterile drills, but for personal and artistic purposes.

The themes of her ongoing project for children; ‘liberation’ from rote memorization and drill, ‘freedom’ to express their individuality, ‘doing things’ that had personal meaning for them, learning to be independent, and learning from real life experience, had taken root, and were beginning to bear fruit. She had also discovered just how important her individual relationships with each child were to their continuing development, to their sense of who they were and what they could do in the world.

Onset of World War II

By 1939 when war was declared, Alice had been at William Crane for five years, and was no longer an inexperienced teacher.

During these years, she had made changes in how she went about teaching her four and five year old pupils. Significantly she had also done so without unduly ruffling the feathers of her ‘dreadnought’ of a headmistress; perhaps partly because Alice had had a
glimpse of Miss Cook’s softer side. Alice also understood that those in authority might better accept change in small increments, and was aware, as she told me, of not wanting Miss Cook to ‘feel unstable’. She had followed the example of her mother, who was, in Alice’s words ‘a non-conformist’, in daring to experiment behind the headteachers’ back, without confronting her directly. 21 What did ruffle Miss Cook’s austere feathers, as it turned out, was the onset of World War II.

At the beginning of the fall semester, 1939, due to unease about the possible start of war, (Germany had invaded Czechoslovakia earlier that spring) teachers were recalled early from holiday, and school started the last week in August. With tension in the air, the staff at William Crane did their best to maintain a ‘normal happy atmosphere’ during this first week of school, but on that Friday, September 1, Miss Cook on a round of all the classrooms, “opened each door and whispered solemnly, “They’re dropping bombs on Poland.” (Memoir, survival, ay)

On the Sunday following, September 3, the BBC reported that the Germans had indeed invaded Poland. Prime Minister Chamberlain spoke to the nation, declaring that Britain, in accordance with its treaty with Poland stating that it would come to Poland’s aid in the event of an invasion, had declared war on Germany. Britain had entered the war.

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21 It is interesting to speculate that Alice’s considerable skill in maneuvering around authority figures had been tried and honed through her observing the compromises eventually arrived at between her two very different parents, her mother being the volatile, emotional, one, and her father, the sweeter tempered, nurturing and more patient parent. (By this time Alice’s parents had come to live with her in Nottingham.)
From this point on, children were required to keep gas masks with them at all times. Even the youngest children traveled to school with awkward cardboard boxes that contained their masks dangling from their necks, bumping each other with them as they moved through the school and collected in large groups in the halls and corridors. (Alice describes the children using them as weapons, swinging them at each other). Gas mask drills and a game of ‘who can be first to hide under the desk?’ became a regular part of daily life at the school. At night searchlights spanned the night sky, on alert for possible German war planes overhead. In order to maintain a 24-hour watch over the school building, the teachers at William Crane set up a roster, taking turns staying in the building all night, sleeping in a cot in the boiler room.

Window Panes

In this charged atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, most palpable in the first months of war, Miss Cook seemed unable to maintain her rigid standards of order. The following incident seemed to Alice representative of the end of an old order and the beginning of a new one.

One day in the early months of the war, Alice and a friend found Miss Cook looking apprehensively at several rolls of adhesive netting that had been delivered to her school that day by government authorities. She had been told that this required netting must be put up on all the windows in the William Crane Infants’ school. “How ever are we going to do this job,” she anguished. “The school’s all glass. Just cutting the stuff into small
pieces is going to take days.” This was the moment, vividly described by Alice, when she and her friend quickly took charge, brushing Miss Cook aside. ‘Just leave it to us, ‘We’ll sort it out’,” they told her. (Memoir, teaching, ay)

From this time on Miss Cook had lost some of her powers as a leader. Her loss of control represented for Alice a clear and dramatic shift away from a more autocratic model, and towards one in which the school began to function more as a community of equals, one where individual teachers and children’s ideas mattered and were listened to in a spirit of collaboration and joint responsibility. This shift was also dramatized by changes in how and where classes were taught.

Because of the eminent threat of bomb attack, to prevent the possibility of bombs hitting large groups of children at once, schools were not allowed to have a concentration of children in any one building. This order was particularly relevant to the case at the William Crane Schools, where large numbers of pupils in multiple buildings made it a likely target for German bombardiers.

Spare Bedrooms

The largest classes at William Crane Infants East, (including Alice’s) were broken up, and teachers sent off in small groups of 8 or 10 children to parent’s houses to teach them in several shifts throughout the day. As Alice describes, they were often given the use of the spare bedroom in which the hot water tank was kept, as this was typically the only
warm room in the colder months of winter.

What teachers discovered, quite to their amazement, was that their pupils in these more intimate settings seemed to thrive, to learn better and with more enthusiasm, than in their larger all day classes, even though they were spending less instructional time over all with their teachers. Their teachers in this more informal setting, away from the heavy-handed authority of the headteacher were inspired to teach their students in more experimental and individualized ways; ‘to grow close to them and treat them as individual people.’ (Memoir, teaching.)

Freedom of Approach Takes Hold

When in 1941 the bombing ceased, classes were allowed to return to the William Crane school building. Yet ‘this freedom of approach continued’, writes Alice. Teachers had gained confidence, ‘in the field’, and this, combined with Miss Cook’s weakening authority, brought lasting changes to the way infants were taught at William Crane. As Alice remarks in her memoir, referring again to the moment when she and her friend ‘took over’ the rolls of netting from Miss Cook, “Perhaps it was the reinforcement of window panes which proved a turning point.”

Many members of the teaching staff at William Crane didn’t want to return to the old pre-war factory model, characterized by large classes, formal instruction, and the rigid separation of subjects that had been the rule, for the most part, at William Crane. The
disruptions and innovative forms of organization brought forth by the conditions of wartime had given teachers the freedom to experiment along lines that hearkened back to their earlier training in child-centered approaches. Here was an opportunity, beyond the imposing brick and glass of the ‘model’ school, to try once again to take on the mantle of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, to ‘follow the lead of the child’. Alice, had understood early in her career that whole group instruction with classes of 44-50 would not reach the majority of her children. The work in smaller groups that took place school wide during the war years showed the older and more traditional teachers the value of small group work, greater freedom of movement, and more intimate relationships between child and teacher.

Changes brought about by wartime conditions were conducive to more progressive, child-centered methods, and their success reinforced Alice’s allegiance to these methods:

Adverse academic pressure gave way to ensuring the happiness and well being of young children. They were thought of as our future. We learned much about the benefits of working with children on an individual basis and educational thought took steps forward during those early months of the war.

(Memoir, survival)

Ironically, the horrors of war had brought advances in addressing the needs of children, and establishing their rights. Priorities had changed overnight. Long established academic demands or standards gave way to a commitment to protecting the lives of young
children. Looking back, Alice comments:

In 1939, war was declared and this evil event was to prove a tremendous aid in establishing the rights of children. Almost overnight our priorities changed. The lives of children were threatened and long established academic demands or standards paled to insignificance. (Memoir, teaching)

Not only were children’s lives threatened by the war, children’s whole existence, beyond the hours they normally spent in school, became the concern of teachers who were responsible for their well-being between 7 am and 7 pm. Some schools, such as the Player school where Alice moved to in 1943, were often kept open all day and also provided breakfast and other supplementary food in order to help out working mothers. They led children down to bomb shelters during air raid drills, and waited with them in these cramped conditions for the all-safe signal to sound.

In these situations, teachers became more intimately involved with the children’s family situations, physical needs, temperament and social skills. They saw the whole child, not a limited fraction of the child’s life. And they were responsible for saving that life.

The children at the William Crane Estate, a large settlement outside and to the west of the inner city, were in danger of attack from the air. But children in the inner city itself were in even greater danger, as the German bombers’ most likely target was the dense industrial and residential heart of the city.
In response to this threat of air raids, Nottingham City Authorities assigned classroom teachers to report for duty at selected sites from where they were to take children from inner city Nottingham out into the neighboring countryside, (even Alice wasn’t told where she was going!) Children were bused out for extended periods, housed by farmers or other volunteer country people, for the most part without their parents. Their teachers, who accompanied them on the journey, were in charge of them during most of the day and got to know them very well.

This experience, living close to the lives of these children day and night, gave Alice intimate understanding of their needs, anxieties, enthusiasms and appetite for new experiences. In simple terms, she was in a position to see first-hand exactly how children learned, and this was to have a deep effect on her subsequent pedagogy, as illustrated in the following incident. (similar to Pestalozzi’s experience ‘living with ‘ his children at the orphanage.)

First hand Experience

“Coo, Miss, I never knew a cow was that size!”

In her interviews with me, and in her memoir, Alice describes one experience that impressed on her the difference between learning about phenomena through print and picture, and learning from the experience of the phenomena itself. She describes this
I arrived in C.B. (Cropwell Bishop) with about 12 children most of whom were boys. The people who took them on wanted them off their hands during the day. The village school was already overcrowded so I took them out into the fields and lanes for most of those November and December days. It was a revelation.

One 9-year-old boy stood transfixed staring over a wall at a cow in a field. “It’s a cow,” I told him. He continued to stare. Eventually he turned, “I know it’s a cow,” he said “but coo, Miss, I never knew a cow was that size”. His previous concept of a cow was based on a small 2d (two penny) paper picture from an illustrated leaflet obtained from the Mill Marketing Board. Those luminous eyes with long sweepy lashes, that rotundity, the warm sweet breath and the exciting appendages which gave milk when squeezed were way outside his impression until this moment of experience.

The children were learning from real things they could explore with the senses and emotions. I was learning about the learning process. This was a turning point in my understanding and never again could I revert to formal instructions as an attempt to communicate ideas. Not all we learned was altogether happy. We discovered that horse chestnuts and laburnum pods made dangerous eating and one boy was taken to hospital when he turned a peculiar silvery color. (Memoir, survival)

This experience formed another ‘thinking point’ for Alice. This student had seen
illustrations of cows, and knew that they were large animals that lived on farms. But it was his first contact with a real living, breathing cow, and nothing that preceded it was anything remotely like the real thing. Alice’s concept of ‘learning and teaching about cows’ had unraveled to its point of origin. With him along side of her, gazing in wonder at an ordinary, but at the same time extraordinary cow, she was able to peel back, as he was, layers of custom, and conventional wisdom about cows, to re-experience with him the stark and beautiful experience of ‘cowness’ as it engaged all their senses. While he learned about the cow, Alice was ‘learning about the learning process’ making a vow to herself that she would ‘never again revert to formal instruction as an attempt to communicate ideas”. Significantly, she also mentions the less than happy ‘hands-on’ learning experience of one of her pupils who became violently sick after eating horse chestnuts. Real life learning ‘in the field’ is not bland or always risk-free.

Teaching evacuated children, using the countryside as her classroom, strengthened in Alice her belief in the educational power of direct experience. This led to the articulation of an ‘informal’ approach, one that encouraged children to explore their surroundings alongside their with teachers in a collegial, collaborative spirit. And it also made Alice more acutely aware of the stark contrast in resources and experience between children growing up in the dense inner city of Nottingham, and those from middle class and lower middle class neighborhoods. Many of her evacuees had never before been outside of the city, had never seen fields, horizons, farm animals, in fact had rarely been on outings anywhere. They had little at home in the way of books or toys, and often lived in cramped quarters with no space for reading, drawing, or simply thinking quietly. For
many of these children, spending time with an adult who was genuinely interested in them, who guided them with enthusiasm as they explored their surroundings, and who listened to their thoughts and feelings, was a new experience.

**Relationship-based Learning**

Whether out in the countryside, or in the makeshift classrooms in the spare bedrooms of the William Crane estate, the war years had given Alice a chance to develop more informal and more intimate relationships with her pupils. Her thinking had moved forward towards an approach to teaching young children in which relationships, the power of human exchange person to person, took precedence. She had talked to children, and listened to them. She had been their guide, collaborator, and co-discoverer. Twenty-five years later she articulated this idea in the following passage from *The Teacher of Young Children*:

The adult who stimulates thought and speech in a child, and then listens while he attempts to communicate thought in the shape of words, is the child’s most effective educator. The teacher who can stimulate questions on the part of the child, and then listen to him when he tries to think aloud in search of answers to his own questions, is the most powerful intellectual challenge the child can have. *(1971, p.46)*

Lillian Weber also remarks on the role of wartime on the development of informal
methods, as does Lydia Smith and others. The educational establishment and its hierarchy had been dislodged and replaced with structures that in many ways seemed better suited to the learning needs of young children. Also, the vivid lack educational opportunity available to poor inner city children, was brought home, not only to their teachers, but to the middle class families in the country who housed them during evacuation.

Fortunately for Alice, in her next position, the head teacher, Miss Jeans, was sympathetic to experimentation. Here she was given greater freedom to develop the ideas that had begun to seep into her teaching practice at William Crane.
School Administration

Deputy Headship at the Player Primary East School: 1944-47

After nine years teaching the reception classes at William Crane Infants’ East School, Alice was offered a job as deputy head of a nearby school, Player Primary East in Bilborough. Eager to meet a new challenge, Alice accepted. In the fall of 1943 she began a new phase in her educational career, and the first year of her professional life as a school administrator.

The Player school complex was built along similar designs as the William Crane, and also served a similar population, with separate school buildings for mixed infants, junior girls, junior boys, senior girls, and senior boys. The school buildings were located close to the center of the Aspley estate, in Bilborough. Each separate building consisted of a long rectangular brick structure, with classrooms arranged side by side along a glass walled corridor. In the courtyard between the buildings were several outdoor play spaces. The school where Alice taught, Player Primary East, with nine classes of ‘mixed infants’ was located right next to the junior girls school. Along with her administrative duties at Player, Alice also had a classroom of her own to teach. She was in charge of the children here who were called the ‘practical class’, the slow learners. These were students who had not learned to read by the time they were six, and therefore seen as needing a specialized class. The size of the class was large. In her memoir she describes it as consisting of 44 children.
Shortly after Alice was appointed Deputy HT at Player Primary East, the Education Act of 1944 was published. In Alice’s view it was the outcome of what the nation had learned about its children during war time conditions, and a reflection of her own experience during evacuation:

Evacuation brought impoverished families into the homes of the more affluent and the other half of a nation were forced into recognizing the plight of many families so far ignored. The outcome was the Education Act of 1944, which was based on the principle of equal opportunity for all. (Memoir, teaching)

Alice saw the Act as an affirmation of what she and her fellow teachers had become acutely aware of during the war, the inequity in educational opportunity for the children of the poor. Passage of the act replaced the old board of education with the new Ministry of Education. The act established that education for all children must be provided to them according to their age, ability, and interests, and the right for children to attend school from preschool through the age of sixteen. It also made clear that parents and teachers must share responsibility for the education of young children, and called for a national program for nursery school aged children. The Act signaled the end of a segregated system, which had shut out the children of the poor from the higher levels of education.

Alice writes in her memoir that she and her colleagues were so excited by passage of the 1944 Act, that they ‘almost forgot about the war!’ They saw it as a ‘charter for children’,
a clear signal from the government that their child-centered approach had been recognized, that all children, starting at three and four years old, would be given a fair and equal education.

The impact of the Act seemed especially relevant to the families on the estate, the population whose children attended Player Primary East, where Alice was now assigned as deputy head teacher and teacher of the practical class.

These families were amongst the poorest in the city of Nottingham. Alice told me, that many of the children ‘came to school in the worst weather wearing only 2 pairs of old socks on their feet’. The school, in response to the needs of its families, was one of the first during this period to provide free breakfast, consisting of bread and dripping and cocoa. This service was to continue at Player Primary East for many years.

**Teaching the Practical Class**

Alice was given the class which contained all the six year-olds in the school who had not yet learned to read. It was assumed that these children were low in ability and intelligence. Called ‘dull and backward’ according to Alice, she soon found out that many of them were not dull at all, in spite of their difficulties with reading. In fact, some of them were already reading, and others seemed to her quite capable of learning. These children were often quick and competent when given the opportunity. One little boy
whom she had asked to deliver a written message came bounding back into the classroom, saying he’d lost the piece of paper, ‘but I told Miss so and so about it’ he reported to Alice. He had known perfectly well the contents of the message!

Alice spent time observing this child and many others in her class, making note of their individual strengths and difficulties. The unique challenges that they presented lead Alice to experiment with alternative methods of teaching them reading skills.

As Alice had at William Crane, one of her first steps was to bring in a piece of carpet and set up a book corner in her classroom. She furnished it with all of her own children’s books, those she had bought and many she had kept from her own childhood, and some of her sister’s too. She set up screens to divide it off from the rest of the classroom, and to afford her pupils some privacy as they spent quiet time browsing through the book collection, which, she told me, they treated with great respect. As had been true of the children she shepherded through the evacuation experience, Alice soon realized that some of her pupils had never seen books, except perhaps the dull readers provided in school.

One day, when she looked over into the book corner, she noticed a little boy laughing out- loud at something in the book he was looking at:

A. I went round one day and one of these boys who was sitting laughing at a book. Now was he reading or not? And he was telling me the tale he got out of it...
P. Yeah..Oh wow! So he really was reading it!
A. Well in a fashion he was.
P. In some way, he was getting meaning out of it.
A. He was getting meaning out of it, he was interpreting it.
P. Uuhh, (laughing)
A. Oh, they did educate me those children! (Interview, Code 3)

Observing him quietly for a period of time, she came to understand that he actually was getting meaning from the story, that in fact, he was ‘interpreting it’ and that this was a crucial step in the reading process. Because he had ‘a sort of lost look about him’ his previous teachers had apparently underestimated his abilities, yet he was well on his way to becoming a reader.

Alice became aware of the many ways in which young children approach books and find meaning in them; even when not yet able to decode words one by one. She watched these children, many of whom had few books at home, spend long periods of time looking at these books, absorbed and delighted, laughing to themselves, and eager to tell the story the book was telling them. From her observations, Alice understood that reading was not just about decoding but about finding personal meaning in experience with books; that enjoyment and absorption in the actually physical pleasure of sitting quietly with a book,
looking at the illustrations, and telling yourself a story to go with them, was a key skill in
the reading continuum. 22

Another child who had missed school because she’d been ill had somehow slipped
through the net. Since children typically were taught as a whole group, if any child
missed a crucial instructional step, many teachers simply had not the skill or interest in
catching them up. However, with a short period of a more individualized program, this
little girl, after only a few weeks, ‘could read anything’ (Interview, Code 5)

Alice also watched many of her pupils struggle with reading texts that reflected a middle
class English vocabulary at odds with the everyday spoken language that they themselves
used. She saw these children floundering; and that, in spite of her efforts, ‘they made
nonsense of a reading scheme based on language totally alien to their personal speech”
(Memoir, teaching). In fact, she writes:

I never did persuade them to read ‘Jane fell in the mud,’ because in their
vocabulary she could only fall in the ‘sludge’. I discarded reading schemes and
apparatus and made each of them a book about themselves. They told me what to
write in it and it follows that they could read it. For the first time in their school
lives those children succeeded. (Memoir, teaching)

By inviting them to be the authors of their own first ‘readers’, Alice had found a way to

22 These habits of spending time with and enjoying books form the set of what is now
often called ‘literacy skills’.
make reading a skill that had personal meaning for her pupils, and to give them a reason to unlock the secret codes that had hitherto been denied to them.

Alice’s deep respect for the personal speech and individual choices and interests of each of her students had led her to break away from the expected methods of teaching reading. These traditional methods, which made use of ‘reading schemes’, were, homogenized and bland representations of a middle class life that these children weren’t familiar with, and weren’t a part of.

This success emboldened her to move further and further away from relying on commercial reading schemes. Fortunately, her new headteacher, Miss Jeans, was supportive of her ideas, and gave her the freedom to explore, to ‘find my way with children’, as she told me. Miss Jeans was ‘mellow, observant and kind’. She watched with interest and encouraged teachers to experiment. When teachers would ask ‘What should I do” she would say” I won’t tell you. Think, study the children, experiment and do what you think best.” (Notes, August, 1999.)

**The Dawning of the Integrated Day**

Alice continued to look for ways, during part of the long school day, that she might replace whole class teaching with more active learning experiences for her children in the ‘practical’ class. She had come to the realization early in the school year, that ‘there was no way those little ‘scofididdles’ would sit still and listen to you lecturing, not at that
age!' and for at least some period of the school day she set about planning more active educational ventures.

By this time, Alice’s parents had come to live with her in Nottingham. With the goal of providing activities for the children Alice described to me how she and her mother, a former teacher, would make all sorts of equipment for the classroom, Alice stored the materials for these activities in a cupboard, getting them out only on Friday afternoons for the children, after the academic periods set aside for reading and mathematics were over. Materials spilling out of the cupboard included what was needed to do sewing, model making equipment, number games, and small building blocks. Individual and small group of children would quickly make a choice, take what they needed and get to work.

Alice described to me how ‘everything out of the cupboard’ practice evolved in an interview session:

...sheer necessity made me keep each child busy, and you know, you feel that they learn much more rapidly when if they’re engrossed in what they’re doing and they’re doing what they want to do, (emphasis and inflexion up and down). Its not a case of letting them play, in any case whatever we call play is their work..(code 4 p.3)

my mother helped me.. We used to make all sorts of equipment, cause there
wasn’t anything much…there weren’t many things to do! And we used to put it away…

I had first started with it on Friday afternoon, and it was called ‘Everything Out of the Cupboard’ by the children…and they’d start coming in the morning, and they’d say, “Can we have ‘Everything Out of the Cupboard’ like Friday?”

(Interview, Code 4))

At this time as well as her teaching duties, Alice’s duties as Deputy Head required her to balance the accounts for the money children brought in to pay for their school milk and dinners. There were no school secretaries at that time, and on Friday mornings she had to tally up the total monies brought in by every pupil, ½ penny each day for milk and about one shilling for dinner.

With 44 ‘less able children’ to be ‘kept going’ at the same time while she took time to sort out these accounts, her ingenuity was taxed to the hilt: ‘Friday morning became a nightmare.’ How could she manage her accounting tasks and keep her six-year-old students constructively engaged? This is how she solved her problem, as described in her memoir:

In desperation I hit on the idea of having everything out of the cupboards so that their each child could be given something at which he could
work independently, building blocks, painting, sewing, model making rubbed shoulders with reading and number games. The children were happy and able to concentrate on individual tasks, which matched their ability. They were learning how to learn and their attitude to learning improved tremendously. The integrated day had dawned. (Memoir, teaching)

Inspired by children’s delight and interest in pursuing projects of their own choosing and devising, Alice had taken a radical step towards breaking up the school day, replacing it with a more organic, and integrated vision of what school could be.

Her pupils were happier, as she states, choosing from among this variety of materials and activities. With her support, but without direct instruction, they were able to settle independently on ‘individual tasks which matched their ability’. Making decisions on their own about what ‘things to do’ gave them experience in independent learning. They were getting practice in ‘learning how to learn’, and they loved it. In consequence, Alice asserts, ‘their attitude to learning improved tremendously’.

In the final sentence of the passage from Alice’s memoir quoted above, Alice sums up the full historical significance of the practice of what the children called ‘Everything Out of

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23 Alice identifies here one of the innovations that became characteristic of the British Primary school in the fifties and sixties. But this was in the early forties. Alice was ahead of her time, and describes the evolution of this practice with her characteristic mixture of modestly and assertion.
the Cupboard’. This was the moment for Alice when ‘the integrated day had dawned. When she opened up the cupboard doors to a new vision of classroom learning, it was the start of a whole new era in educational provision for young children, one that allowed children choice, independence, and access to a rich variety of concrete experiences and materials. It also gave her pupils a continuity of intellectual purpose which the old divisions into academic subjects had until now prevented.

For Alice, this practice was a significant new direction, moving away from all that had seemed to her arbitrary and authoritarian about traditional conventions; it swept away the old rigidities. Instead of arbitrary divisions into academic subject areas, copying from the blackboard, or rote memorization of number facts, children were self-directed. Their engagement seemed to her the sign that they are ‘learning how to learn’. In this environment, Alice believed, they were developing an attitude of relish towards learning and school, which might be the most important factor in their continuing development as ‘good learners’. This attitude of relish would stay with them, build affection for their teachers and their classmates, and inspire them to further learning.

**Following the Child**

Though the methods Alice used were born largely from practical considerations, ‘sheer necessity’ as she calls it, their foundation was her principled belief in ‘following the child’ and in the integrated nature of learning in the mind of young children. Here again, was the chance to ‘draw out’ from the children, rather than ‘push in’, and to act as a guide
rather than a trainer. The children’s leading question, ‘Can we have everything out of the cupboard like Friday?’ had sparked a drive towards a more democratic and collaborative model of teaching and learning.

As it was to be described later, both in the Plowden report and in the writings of the many American who came to England to visit primary schools in the 1960’s and 70’s, during the heyday of interest in the British Primary School approach, many of its characteristics are here. We see them at work as these so called ‘slow learning’ children move about Alice Yardley’s classroom, exploring with relish and joy ‘everything out of the cupboard’. These characteristics include:

Children make choices
Children work independently on tasks, which reflect their interests and abilities
Children are excited and enthusiastic about ‘learning’
Attitudes and habits of learning and doing research are emphasized more than mastery of academic ‘content’
Learning how to ‘find out for yourself’ is more important than ‘being told’
Doing – learning actively – is emphasized over passive learning
Children choosing tasks which match their own ability and interests
A free flow of the day, not always divided into subject areas
Learning how to learn
Finding out rather than ‘being told’

This democratic spirit of ‘Everything Out of the Cupboard’ was also exhibited in the equality of opportunity for all the ‘mixed infants’ to choose among many experiences.
Girls and boys in her practical class were not restricted to certain activities defined by their sex. Both could choose sewing, blocks, painting or reading (and later on, at St. Anne’s Well Road, woodworking, clay work, water and sand).

Aesthetic Considerations

Turquoise room

In spite of being a new school, because of the outbreak of the war and a dearth of materials, some of its plaster walls it had never been painted. Alice had become more aware of the importance to children of their surroundings. The walls in her classroom were spattered with ‘milk stains and dirty finger marks’ and made the whole room look dingy. Alice took a bold step, and decided to take it upon herself to brighten it up:

One weekend I took a tin of turquoise paint to school and transformed my classroom. When the children arrived on Monday morning they were delighted and watched one another critically lest any should as much as brush against the pretty walls. When the HM came in she didn’t know whether to laugh or frown. It was illegal apparently to interfere with the fabric of the building. Yet nothing happened to me and we all continued to respect and enjoy our brighter classroom.
Again she had taken a risk and bypassed the usual ‘hierarchy’, and again succeeded in winning the HT to her side. – getting her way. The turquoise room remained the brightest one in the school, and when, soon after Miss Jeans stepped down as Head Teacher, Alice was asked to take over as Acting Head as Player Primary East.

Alice inquired of the authorities if she might hire her mother, Alice Bennet, a qualified teacher, to take over the teaching of her class. This arrangement was worked out, and Alice Bennet was duly hired. Her daughter Alice Yardley could now devote herself full time to her head teaching responsibilities, yet keep in close touch with her former pupils through her mother, (who did a terrific job, according to Alice!). Alice Bennet continued teaching the Practical class through the spring of 1947 when Alice Yardley was hired as the new head of the St. Anne’s Well Road School.

Encouraged by the local education authorities, and with some headteaching experience under her belt, Alice applied for a headship at several different schools in Nottingham, eager to try out her ideas on a larger scale. She wanted ‘a school of my own in which to translate ideas into practice.’ She was offered and accepted a position as head teacher, to begin in the fall of 1947, at the St. Anne’s Well infant school on the eastern side of Nottingham City.

Looking back on her time teaching at the Player school, Alice often spoke of how much the children in her classroom there had taught her; ‘they did educate me, those children’, she told me. She felt that she had been fortunate to have spent time with this group of
non-readers. They had educated her in a way her previous classes at William Crane had not, and she always gave credit to their educative power on her thinking, as she wrote in her memoir, ‘these children taught me more in the four years I worked with them than I had in all my preceding years”.

Alice had learned from them that ‘it was working with the individual people’ that was the ‘creative’ part of the job, (Interview, Code 4). She had been fortunate in Miss Jeans, who ‘gave me the freedom to follow children, and to be educated by them’.

At Player, more than at William Crane, Alice had been given the freedom to develop her ideas, and amidst the struggles and challenges, the core of her philosophy had taken shape:

Freedom to try out my ideas increased my interest in the modes and procedures which would help young children to make the best of themselves. I began a diary or record of my thoughts and observations.

Reading it 40 years later the immaturity of some of my comments astounds me. Yet the core of later philosophy was shaping. What I wrote then about the teaching of reading holds good today. The struggle to formulate and express ideas encouraged ideas to develop. I longed for the day when I could have a school of my own in which to translate ideas into practice. (Memoir, teaching)
In this passage we see the central themes of Alice’s developing philosophy; the importance of freedom to try out ideas, and of developing the ‘modes and procedures’ – the pedagogy – that would support ‘young children to make the best of themselves’.

Until Miss Jeans, most of the head teachers Alice had known had conformed to an autocratic leadership style; a patriarchal model emphasizing control and hierarchy. They were women in authority not willing to share it, who were not interested in collaborating with their staff. These women in leadership roles were not necessarily attuned to others, or interested in listening to their teachers or the children in their care.

At Player Alice had discovered how empowering it was to be treated as an individual with worthy ideas of her own. In her new position, Alice was determined to listen and to liberate; to work with her staff in a collaborative and democratic manner.

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24 Alice writes of her headmistress at the Louth Grammar School in the following passages from her memoir: ‘The headmistress was dedicated and her severe personality veiled a genuine interest in young girls and a concern for them as individuals. In her room there was an ancient sofa with broken springs on which her visitors were invited to sit. This immediately placed them in a position of vulnerable inferiority, for struggling to maintain balance with ones bottom almost touching the floor reduced one’s resolve irreparably and she was inevitable given the upper hand in any discourse which ensued. Even my mother bowed to her judgment and she ruled both parents and pupils with steely control which was never questioned.’ (memoir, learning)
From all the interview material gathered in my sessions with Alice Yardley, her references to the period between 1947 and 1951, when she was the energetic and active head of the St. Anne’s Well Road Infants School, are among the most numerous. The quantity of vivid language she used to refer to this period during our sixty hours of interview sessions also indicates that for Alice Yardley, this was a critical time in the development of her educational thought and practice. It was also a high point in her career, and a period when she was indeed able to put into practice a number of innovative programs that became cornerstones of the British Primary School movement as it later developed on a larger scale in the fifties and sixties.

Alice speaks of this period in the following passage:

The years I worked in St. Anne’s Well Road were, as far as education was concerned, the happiest in my life. These were the pioneer days which led to the development of modern educational practice. They were days filled with challenge, fascinating problems, many disasters and an equal number of successes. The enthusiasm generated was so intense as to lift those who worked there completely out of themselves. Here was a cause which transcended our own needs. We went home exhausted each night but scarcely able to wait for the new day to begin. (Memoir, teaching)
The exhaustion and exhilaration of these ‘pioneer days’ bore fruit. With a dedicated staff around her, Alice Yardley built on the insights she had gained over her fourteen years of teaching. At St. Ann’ Well Road School she came into her own as an educational reformer and innovator.

**Headship at St. Ann’s Well Road School**

During her last year at Player, when she was filling the position of Acting Head after the retirement of Miss Jeans, Alice became interested in applying for headships in other schools, and was considered for three positions in Nottingham city. The position she was offered and accepted was at St. Anne’s Well Road School, a large school in an old decrepit building in ‘the poorest part of the city’. Looking back on this event, Alice surmised that she had been offered the headship of this particular school because she was deemed capable of getting the job done. Though at 33 she was among the youngest heads of school in the city, she believed that the Nottingham authorities, who she had always seen as her supporters, ‘thought that I could cope’. Alice was eager to begin. She had proved her abilities as an infant school teacher and as an administrator, and now as head teacher of a school in a very needy area, she had a chance to put her ideas into practice on a larger scale:

In 1947 my ambitions were realized. I was appointed HT of St. Ann’s Well Road Infant School in the poorest part of the city. The building itself was a massive stone monstrosity towering menacingly over narrow cobbled streets and
huddles of tiny homes. The Junior School occupied the front of the building and the Infant School was housed on two floors at the rear. It boasted 3 sets of stone stairs. On each floor the classrooms were isolated from one another by moveable glass partitions. There was a pokey office for the Head with an inside window which opened into a tiny hall. We had part time use of the Junior School Hall which was vast and reputed to have been constructed on the plan of a German prison. (Memoir, teaching)

The Infants School alone at St. Anne’s Well road served over 300 five to seven year old children, and was located on the Eastern side of Nottingham City. It had been built in the previous century, when ‘teacher-pupils’ on the upper floors lectured large groups of students clustered in the courtyard.25 The old building retained these vestiges of the monitorial system, though it had been renovated to include glass partitions between several classrooms on the top floor. The space for outside play was stark and uninviting:

Outside two tiny yards were shared with the Junior School. These were surrounded by 20 ft. high walls. Not a green thing was to be seen from any part of either building or yard. Indeed the only claim to beauty for the whole area was the sky and those who worked in that building frequently refreshed their sights by looking upwards. (Memoir, teaching)

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25 The teacher-pupils or monitors, were instructed directly by the teacher and in turn instructed the other pupils. It was often assumed that the monitors would eventually become teachers. The monitorial system was devised in the 19th century to furnish schooling to the underprivileged even under conditions of severely limited facilities.
If she was intimidated at all by the task in front of her, AY never told me. In fact the opposite was true; she found this school both rewarding and affirming of her developing leadership abilities. As she told me, the school offered her a large ‘canvas’, one of her favorite words for the challenges she encountered in her life. It was on this canvas that she began to make the broad strokes of change that came to be emblematic of the British Primary School Movement in Nottingham. Many of the teachers who joined her there were also committed to the ‘work of helping underprivileged children and their families’. Some of them came with her from Player, including her good friend, Nora Needham, (see photo) who eventually became her deputy head at St. Anne’s Well Road. Alice and her staff were filled with a missionary zeal to transform this prison-like school into a place of light, and space, and hope.

Coming to work at this school represented for them a ‘golden opportunity for instigating the kind of social and educational reform envisaged in the 1944 Act’, as Alice wrote. Her team of teachers consisted of one older woman and 7 young teachers.

Because of the old and decrepit state of the building, Alice and her staff had more or less blanket permission from the LEA and local inspectors to ‘do almost anything with it’. They converted cloakrooms into private work areas, opened up corridors, painted the old woodwork in bright colors, and turned dark store rooms into viewing areas for film strips. (Memoir, teaching).
Curricular Innovation

While busy with her staff and parent volunteers sprucing up the school, Alice did not hesitate to plunge right into curricular innovation. A peek at the Schemes notebook she kept during this period, gives us insight into her evolving thoughts on various aspects of the curriculum, and the direction she was leading her school in.

The notebook documents her thoughts on the teaching of reading, writing, number, and 'handwork', including art in considerable detail. An entry made in October of 1947 indicates that she had initiated the adoption of Marion Richardson’s' handwriting approach throughout the school. While these notes show that Alice was energetically engaged in exercising her persuasive powers as a head teacher, they also delineate areas when she gives complete autonomy to the individual teacher, particularly in the (non-academic) 'aesthetic' and expressive aspects of the curriculum. In one section, under the heading 'Notes on other aspects of the Curriculum' she writes:

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26 ‘Handwork’ for Alice, stands for what we now put in the category of ‘hands-on’, or activity-based experiences, that in her curricular scheme, are necessary to develop children’s powers of ‘self expression. Under this heading she writes, ‘Every Infant teacher will agree that Handwork plays one of the most important places in the Activity of the Infant School. Of course no one subject can be disassociated from the rest of the child’s interests in the Infant School but it is helpful to view the curriculum from different aspects and the manual medium of self expression is a very definite aspect.’ Alice goes on to list the following materials as suitable for ‘handwork’ and self expression: ‘Toys, Modelling, Waste Materials, Paint, Paper, Woodwork’, and the standards, ‘Knitting and Sewing.’ Alice adds here ‘there is no reason why this should be confined to girls,’ and Art. She also suggests ‘free experiment with any materials you can acquire...waste materials, scrap, salvage.'
Music, Physical training and other forms of aesthetic appreciation such as Poetry, Story, drama are the individual teachers’ own concern. Here so much depends on the Teachers interest and ability to inspire the children and each teacher has her own flair. The children must have these forms of self expression and Physical Movement is the keynote to most of the young child’s interests. (capitals hers)

And the end of this same section she reiterates:

Poetry – Story – Drama – each teacher must make their own selection to suit the children and the moment. If you have a flair for any particular thing say Drama – use it, for in so doing you are giving the children something of your best, which is worthy for more than uninspired efforts to hand over something in which you have little interest.

From this notebook, my interview notes, and Alice’s memoir it seems clear that Alice did not hesitate to ‘translate’ the ideas she had developed as a classroom teacher observing and teaching young children into a school wide approach that emphasized her sense of ‘modern practice’.
The Experimental Year

After her first year as head at St. Ann's Well Road, Alice saw her approach resoundingly confirmed by an authority at the highest level, the newly formed Ministry of Education.

In the summer of 1948, Alice had volunteered, along with several of her fellow infants school headteachers, to attend a National conference organized by the Ministry of Education, and lead by leading members of Her Majesties Inspectorate. Its purpose, according to Alice, was to instruct school leaders on the implications and interpretation of the Education Act of 1944, with an eye towards stimulating them to go forward with educational reform when they returned that fall to their various institutions.

Alice’s understanding was that that the HMI’s who ran this conference, ‘were using us as their tools to interpret the act’. But as Alice saw it, her group of independent heads of infants schools had their own ideas about how to interpret the mandate, and how to make it their own. Though they were aware that they were seen as a tool of the new government policy, Alice and her colleagues took hold of this opportunity; ‘we grabbed it to make what we wanted of it.’ (Interview, Code 5)

For Alice Yardley, this meant focusing on what for her was the most significant part of the Act; its requirement that schools provide “all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be
expected to remain at school, including practical instruction and training appropriate to
their respective needs”. (Dent, 1944 Act)

The idea that schools should offer instruction to children, not according to prescribed
curricula, but ‘in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes. appropriate to their
respective needs’, gave governmental sanction to this group of headteachers to continue
in the direction that had already started in; to individualize instruction in order to offer a
range of active experiences to children, and to allow for greater freedom of movement
and use of materials. Another benefit of the conference was that its participants were
invited to experience for themselves some of the activities, such as painting, clay work,
and writing, that the reform minded conference leaders were interested in promoting in
the schools; they learned through ‘doing’ in the Deweyan sense, and became more
committed to an experiential pedagogy of action, exploration and self expression, and
self-reflection.

Another unique aspect of the conference was the clear support it gave to head teachers to
experiment in their own contexts; not to dictate ‘how practice should change’ in
particular educational environments. Alice encapsulates this moment in her memoir as
quoted below:

The Ministry of Education, as it was then called, mounted national courses to
which they invited selected ‘key’ people who worked in small groups. Eminent
speakers (on these courses) promoted their ideas for our consideration. No attempt
was made to dictate how practice should change. The whole idea was to encourage thought and initiative and to disseminate innovative ideas through the schools. As a follow-up to these courses we were encouraged to form local discussion groups. We were given the go ahead for experimentation and guaranteed support. Those of us with experience of working with children who had been evacuated to country areas knew the advantage to the child of exploratory learning and education through first hand experience. Now we were free to test beliefs about children born of observation of them when they were free to be themselves. (Memoir, teaching) (italics mine)

(The reference to when children ‘were free to be themselves’ alludes to the period of evacuation, when Alice had been out in the country and lived alongside of inner children city in the countryside, and when her growing understanding of the value of direct experience and exploration was confirmed by her observations as described in the section ‘ Coo, Miss, a cow!’)

Thus, it was in this environment open to new ideas, and with a sense that the government was carrying her along, blowing a strong wind at her back, that Alice Yardley revised her new schedule for the coming year; she wrote in her notebook, ‘Schemes’, (Schemes and Plans for the Infant School, 1944-47, with Special reference to St. Ann’s Well Rd. Infants School, 1947) in the fall of 1948:

Activity Programme
Experimental Year 1948-9

Decided to experiment on lines suggested by Ministry with a view to finding the methods most suitable for our circumstances and children

Basic Programme here appended.

Children free to show us

Teachers free to follow children.

Now Alice found herself in a position to be openly child-centered; at St. Ann’s Well Road children would be listened to, their thoughts taken seriously. Teachers were encouraged to observe children carefully, to be led by children’s interests, enthusiasms, and ideas, and to follow their explorations into new and exciting territory.

Partitions dissolved

Her first move was towards changing the way the day was organized. She designated the first part of the morning ‘Free Activities’. During the second part of the morning, more emphasis was placed on English and Mathematics, while the afternoon was given over to ‘Aesthetic Activities’, ‘during which each teacher developed her personal interests as a
means of providing inspiration in the field of Art.’ The day ended with ‘collective
discussion and Service’. 27

Once this new schedule was established, with its morning period of ‘free activity’,
children’s positive responses brought her and her staff to the realization that children
might also benefit from a free range of movement between their individual classrooms,
allowing for greater access to limited physical resources. The architectural character of
upper story of the building, with its moveable glass partitions, was also a factor, as
reflected in the following interview excerpt:

A. On the top floor, up the stairs, there were three classrooms, divided by glass
partitions which were moveable, so they could they pulled up. There was a
shortage of equipment!

P. And you decided to open them up, when you started giving children permission
to move within classrooms, be more flexible?

A. Yes... Well, they took over! They couldn’t see any sense in those having a
nice oven, and they hadn’t got one, and why couldn’t they use that one? And you
know they go, ‘We’ll go to Mrs. So and So. She’s doing some baking today!’

(Interview, Code 5)

27 Even the law requiring each day to begin with Religious Education was waived by
progressive leaning HMI’s, who, Alice writes, understood ‘the futility of trying to
separate appreciation of things spiritual from other aspects of living’, and allowed her to
schedule religious education at the end of the day. (memoir, teaching)
Alice describes how children, noticing that there was something interesting going on in a nearby classroom - a cooking project, or a dramatic story telling - 'took themselves off to another teacher', and that in the end 'it worked out all right'. Alice's strategy of listening to children and their ideas, gave her a tool by which she could help them make the most of limited equipment. Even Mrs. Gray, the teacher for the self-contained classroom, where the 'dull and backward' children were assigned, smaller than the others, would keep her doors open. Her pupils as well were given the freedom to join with the other children, then return at to their own 'tucked away place', when they needed to be in their own group. The result of this, Alice said was that 'everybody was perfectly happy!'

In this account, Alice makes the point that she and her teachers were not responding to a theoretical model, but to the everyday needs of the children and teachers in this particular school context. When I ask again about the more 'open' plan that evolved at St. Anne's Well Road, she is emphatic in her response:

A. It wasn't prearranged, it wasn't thought up, it grew and matured out of the work we were doing. I've no hesitations in saying that. It wasn't some 'high-falutin' philosophy that we made apply to the school. The philosophy grew out of the work; in other words, it was proven to us before we consciously put it into operation.

P. Yeah, yeah,
A. It was the children that made it, as much as anything. Plus of course the teachers’ willingness to follow the lead of the children.

Here Alice uses the language of ‘following the children’ that she often expressed as driving her sense of ‘rightness’ when it came to educational innovation. In her memoir she gives a succinct account of how this practice came about, and its place in the development of open plan and team teaching approaches, and the further exploration of what came to be known as the ‘integrated day’ (as foreshadowed in the ‘Everything Out of the Cupboard’ story). Clearly in her memoir she places herself in the forefront of educational change at this time, and in the development of ‘modern practice’:

We then looked more closely at the content of the environment. The financial situation in these post war years was extremely difficult and we had to improvise, make use of rough or inexpensive materials in order to provide concrete learning experience. A great sense of excitement united teacher and children and absence from school on the part of either was extremely rare.

In order to maximize the distribution of our meager equipment, the partitions between the rooms on both floors were pushed open. The children quickly discovered the advantages of using all the facilities available and all of the teachers as well. A mode of organization we would now call open-plan or team-teaching grew out of the way staff and children worked together. This previous paragraph is a repeat of one a bit back related to physical space … it becomes a different point when you get to the curriculum. Maybe merge the two space
discussions and quote and then focus on the integrated curriculum section

In a similar way, arbitrary divisions between the subjects of the curriculum broke down. A child engaged in constructing a doll’s house from waste materials was led into experiences such as measurement, consulting books, writing signs and notices, painting and modelling. Each activity became a staring point for learning in many directions. The day became integrated. What is even more important: What the children learned had meaning and was seen by them to be for their own purposes not merely a task performed to satisfy an adult.

Active purposeful learning needs space, and all available corners in the school were brought into use. Classroom doors stood open, cloakrooms and halls, storerooms and corridors, even the HT’s Office became part of the learning environment. Children were talking and asking questions as well as listening and answering questions. They pursued self chosen projects as often as they responded to teacher instructions. (Memoir, teaching)

In the last paragraph, we see a lively bustling place of ‘active purposeful learning’, a radically different one from the drab vision Alice had when she started her teaching career at William Crane. Now, instead of the handkerchief drill and rote memorization, children are talking to each other and to their teachers, asking questions, listening, and responding. Children ‘pursued self-chosen projects as often as they responded to teacher instructions.’ There was a sense of learning as a collaborative enterprise that teachers and children joined in together, a sense of reciprocity.
Parent Participation

Parents also were part of this collaborative spirit of educational enterprise. Some were eager to help with the renovations; moving pegs out of closet to create extra spaces, and volunteering to help build the playground equipment, As Alice told me, ‘anything you wanted them to do, they just took over!’ They were invited in regularly to visit their children’s classrooms, and soon became staunch advocates of the approach they saw working for their children at St. Ann’s. In fact, when I asked her about the parents’ response to her work there, Alice admitted, they almost worshipped her.

P...because you were working in a poor neighborhood…

A. They thought you were the sun and the stars!

P. You could do what you wanted to, more than in a more middle class school?

Al. Yes... I think it was the children as much as anything...cause... you see the classroom was a place where they could do things, and there was color, and light, and interest...happiness! And I remember this mother coming in, ‘She really shouldn’t be coming today, but I can’t keep her at home!’ She said “I’ve come to see what it is she has to come to!”

This mother had come to school to see what it was that had so engaged her daughter that she wanted to come to school even when she was ill. The fact that for the first time, their children actually were eager to come to school was of enormous significance to these parents, who had often not had good experiences at their own primary schools. Alice was
particularly moved by this story, and mentioned it to me more than once. For her it was
testament to the whole hearted support of parents for the program at St. Ann’s, and to
their appreciation for the deep level of engagement and sheer enjoyment that their
children experienced there. Alice reciprocated with feelings of deep affection for the
people and children of St. Ann’s Well Road. In a rare display of emotion she burst out:

'I loved that school! I loved those people. They were so real, they were living in
such dreadful circumstances, and they were so appreciative of anything the school
did, and when... a mother came to me and told me she couldn’t keep her child out
of school even when she was ill, I thought, well, that was, you know, I must have
made the school a place that they enjoy!

At one holiday party, several parents gave Alice gifts of the precious jars of jellies
purchased with their valuable rations, still in effect though the war had been over for
several years. (On one occasion, she was quite embarrassed to be left with so many jars
that she couldn’t possibly consume, and in desperation, flushed some of their contents
down the sink, she confessed)

At St. Anne’s Well Road School, parents came to her for advice, not only about how to
deal with their children’s educational progress, but also about their family life, work
problems, and marital difficulties. They saw her, she told me ‘as a sort of life saving

28 She told the story of one mother of many children coming to Alice for advice as to how
to prevent further pregnancies. ‘He’d have me breeding like rabbits’ she told Alice.
However, this was one subject in which, as she admitted to me, ‘I am not an expert!’
body who’d rescued them’ from a dismal view of themselves and their future. And while most parents at St. Anne’s did not expect their children to sit for the ‘dread 11 plus exam’ actually some of the very bright ones did, Alice told me, “Because some children were brighter than their parents recognized! Oh they could learn things, but they’d never had the opportunity.” (Interview, Code 5)

Playground project

While the inside spaces of the school were brimming with purposeful activity and enthusiastic learners, the outside spaces were dreary. In this asphalt jungle, as Alice says in her memoir, the only thing worth looking at was the sky.

This situation did not last long, however. Soon after she had arrived at St. Anne’s Well Road, Alice was visited by an observant, creative and ‘forward looking inspector’29 eager to work with headteachers interested in developing physical education. Alice and Miss Studman, accompanied by a specialist in physical education, came and stood in the barren yard, surrounded by a 20 foot wall, ‘with not a green thing to be seen’. Together they cogitated on the question of what to do with the space, which up till now had only been suitable for the ‘dull drill’ of regimented PE (Physical Education) classes. They asked themselves; ‘How could we make this playground interesting?’

29 “I welcomed them in, they had a broader perspective...” We were fortunate that we had good organizers in Nottingham. This is why I stayed in Nottingham. Every time I felt the need of a new canvas, they supported me.”
The result of this discussion was that Alice got permission to have a number of pieces of discarded army equipment delivered to St. Ann’s. With some funding from the local authority, and the help of her caretaker (and her father-carpenter), she designed and built a fully equipped playground area, complete with a number of different kinds of apparatus for the children to climb, slide, swing, and crawl on.

When the children were let loose on the new equipment, they found many new and imaginative uses for their new-built equipment. “You let the children take over, they show you! They have imagination!!” Alice burst out, when telling me this story.

(Interview, Code 5)

It was after our first or second interview session, in fact, when Alice had asked me to look at something, and pulled out from a drawer in her study a folding booklet made with dark green paper, with the title, ‘On the Playground’. On each page were photographs of children playing on the equipment at St. Ann’s Well Road. She had taken the photographs herself, she told me, and made the booklet herself. Under each photo, in graceful calligraphy, she had hand lettered a phrase of description.  

30 The caretaker was not supposed to be helping her so at first Alice tackled the job herself. She reported though that soon he came to her and said “You ought not to be doing that Miss” and from then ‘on the quiet’ began the construction....

31 This was the first piece of physical and visual evidence I had seen of Alice’s work in schools, apart from what I read in her published texts. Over the course of our time together, she showed me a number of similar booklets she had put together with photographs and headings, to illustrate some aspect of her students’ lives. Each booklet documented a component of Alice’s innovative and integrated educational approach. The
Looking through the green booklet, with its black and white photos glinting up from the dark background, I was brought suddenly into her world at St. Ann’s. I saw the high walls in the background: the asphalt surface of the ground all around. And here, are the children in their gym shorts, hair flying as they swing and hang upside down across the climbing frame, their small faces, some smiling, and some intent. There are pictures of them using every bit of equipment, including what she labeled ‘junk play’, climbing on poles, swinging upside down, pouring water from hoses into buckets, building vehicles with planks of wood and tires, walking on balance beams.

**Trust; physical activity; imagination**

One of the photos from ‘In the Playground’, shows children hanging upside down in their shorts, both boys and girls, over an asphalt surface. There were no mats, and Alice maintained that no one ever got hurt; her theory being that they only tried to do what they were physically capable of; ‘children know what their bodies can do if you give them

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first booklet, ‘In the Playground’, showed children at play on the newly built apparatus at St. Ann’s Well Road, the second, ‘Janet’, illustrating the movements of a little girl through a typical ‘integrated day’ at William Crane, and ‘Movement Dance Sequence’ showing children improvising through movement the dramatic story of Pyr Gynt, as they listen to the music of Greig. Another hand made book stored a collection of her students’ poetry.

Each booklet is in a sense, a ‘mini-biography’ of Alice’s teaching life, a palpable look at the real world of children and school that she was a part of. It seems likely that she kept them in the school library, or in her office to share with visiting parents. Certainly their existence illustrates that she was aware of the importance and benefit of this kind of documentation.
freedom and trust them’, that they were intuitively sensible about physical danger. She traced this attitude of ‘trust’ in regard to children’s physical adventures, from her own childhood on the farm at Mablethorpe, where she had climbed tall haystacks, handled barbed wire, and swung on the rings that her father had attached to the rafters of their turkey house. On the farm her father had created, out of an odd assortment of spare parts, a play space for her and her sister, where, joined by most of the neighborhood’s children, they had spent countless hours engrossed in the kind of imaginative play that, as she maintains, is so allied in young children with active physical movement. Her father had put together for them:

...a most exciting array of junk. There was an old phaeton, part of a bus, the top of a hansom carriage, several small wooden barrels and metal drums, odd lengths of timber, an old ladder, several packing cases and crates. My father screwed stout rings to rafters in an open barn and fitted us up with a rope or two and a pair of rings. This wonderful material, which fired imagination and then provided the means of satisfying it, became the focal point for children of all ages from neighboring homes. (Memoir, childhood)

Clearly the creation of playground apparatus had been a highlight of Alice’s tenure at St. Anne’s Well Road. There was a sense of excitement and humor and joyfulness in her voice and manner as she told me about it; as her father had done for her and her sister, she had provided for the children in her care ‘wonderful material which fired imagination
and then provided the means of satisfying it: she had transformed the asphalt wasteland into a space of active imaginative play.

Some of this feeling of exaltation is conveyed in the following interview excerpt, which I believe gives a flavor of the animated way that Alice and I talked about this experience. It also documents her amazed and gratified surprise at the extent of the support she continued to received from the Local Inspectorate, even when one child, in front of her patron, leapt from the apparatus up onto the 20 ft wall, and then merrily slid down a drain pipe. Here is Alice:

A....And what they (the children) learned with me, was experimentally, the army demob stuff. The overpole nets, the climbing frames, the pole you hang on to... they (the authorities) asked me if I... wanted mats. And I said. (Well I mean I don’t know if I’d have the courage to do it now) No, I don’t want mats, that suggests that they’re going to fall down.. and those little monkeys were all over the place. They loved it! They didn’t need any tuition\textsuperscript{32}. They were off on this army stuff and then this inspector came to see what was happening to her equipment one day. And she came to me and she says. “Have you seen what’s happening round the corner?” Have I told you this? NO?  
P. Tell me again, I think I know, something about the pipes. But tell me again.  
A. So... she took me around, and there was this boy. He’d gone on the over pole net, and he got on the top of this twenty foot wall, and he was walking on the ...I

\textsuperscript{32} Tuition is an English term for instruction.
just stood there, ‘Don’t make a sound. Don’t distract his attention’... then he
walked to a drainpipe, he just shinned down it. Oh no, while he was on the wall,
he looked down at us and grinned! You see... “I’ve done it, you know,... won’t
you be pleased with me” Oh dear! I did have to make one rule...
P. What was that?
A. You do not walk on the top of the wall (laugh)
P. (laughing)
A. You stay on the apparatus.
P. Right, right..
A. Humph (little laugh)
P. And even though this inspector came and saw that happening, she still didn’t
A. She didn’t..
P. She didn’t.
A. No,
P. Stop you.
A. No, no, she was with you.
P. She was with you, yah.
A. The child could do it. He was used to doing it! (Interview, Code 5)

The visiting inspector, in spite of witnessing this incident of the boy sliding down the
pipe from a very high wall, illustrative of the possible dangers presented by misuse of the
apparatus, was every bit as enthusiastic as she had been in the planning stages. When
Alice says, ‘She was with you’ she means that the inspector had given her approval of
Alice’s work on the playground, and gave the go ahead for continued free use of it. The only change deemed necessary in order to allay possible dangers was taken care of by the imposition of one simple rule, that ‘You do not walk on the top of the wall”. This little boy was agile and athletic, and was doing what his body ‘was used’ to doing, knew it could do, and had done before, Alice implies. We can trust children in these instances, though we do need to make rules and structures around them.

Physical Training Course

At the back of Alice’s ‘Schemes’ notebook, I found a single sheet of thin onionskin paper, typed on both sides, taped into the back pages. At the top of the sheet is the heading ‘ P. T. Course on use of Apparatus’ ( P. T. stands for Physical Training). What follows is an outline of a workshop or course that Alice gave to instruct teachers on the purposes and uses of the ‘apparatus’, the playground structure. It sheds a fascinating light on Alice’s thoughts on her pedagogical aims, and on how to prepare teachers and children at St. Ann’s Well Road School for the safe and active use of the equipment.

The overall thrust of her training program, according to this document, was to show how use of the apparatus fit into ‘a well balanced programme containing spontaneous vigorous movement of a purposeful nature’; one that would benefit children by giving them the

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33 In this excerpt, Alice and I finish each other’s sentence, in a classic instance of ‘duetting’, as described by social linguists, and an interesting instance of the shared subjective space that we inhabited, as subject and researcher.
chance to experience ‘exhilaration of mind and body worked through exploration’. This kind of movement education, calling for the teacher to provide ‘guidance and direction’ only ‘when the child is ready and needy’ 34, has an important part to play in supporting the broad purposes of child-centered education, which she lists as follows:

(1) To develop the whole child.

(2) Train him to listen, observe, reason and discriminate,

(3) To achieve a sense of purpose – better quality – satisfaction in doing things well.

(4) Train to be self reliant, courageous, independent.

(5) To establish happy social relationships.

(6) To help the child to be happy and physically fit, producing a feeling of well being.

The teacher is advised to provide ‘wise help,’ in helping the children ‘select movements that give basic fundamentals’. Finally, Alice suggests that ‘the teacher must have balance between exploration and consolidation’. Under the last heading, “Advise to the Teacher on Use and Care of Apparatus” 13 points follow covering issues of safety, group size, and the setting up and cleaning the apparatus, concluding with an emphatic rule that ‘The teacher must never imposes activities of her own choice but must let the child develop at

34 Alice saw use of the apparatus as contributing to the physical health of the child. It would provide opportunities for: (a) movement for stretching, curling and twisting the spine – this gives correct posture (b) Strong arm and leg movements – hanging, swinging, balancing, (c) Jumping and landing with resilience for strong feet and for safety. The end of this section of the course outline, is a firm reminder to ‘Take the needs of the child and fit your lesson to his needs.’
his own rate, but coach by suggestion or praise’. Significantly the last point is; ‘When finishing do not hurry the children off the apparatus as this causes accidents’.

This final point reinforces again Alice’s contention that children, when they are free to explore with their bodies, will do only what is within their physical reach, but when forced by adults to hurry, or to go against their internal and intuitive sense of their abilities, will perhaps fall and hurt themselves.

In summary, the aim of her Physical Training Course, was to instruct teachers on how best to use the apparatus to help children develop independence and confidence, imagination, social skills, and of course, specific motor abilities: agility, flexibility, balance and posture. Use of the apparatus was part of a larger physical education program which also included sports, movement education, and opportunities for the physical activity which accompanies imaginative play.

The tangible fruits of her playground project helped Alice Yardley become more articulate about the role of physical exercise and activity in children’s intellectual and imaginative development. Her observations of the children at St. Ann’s Well Road strengthened her conviction that the physical child can not be separated from the intellectual child; that both physical capacity and intellectual understanding contribute to the child’s ability to express his or her own ideas. Thinking itself is invisible, ideas need to find expression through palpable sensory forms; through words, oral or written, or
through mediums that have a more concrete aspects such as clay, paint, fabric, and wood, or through the use of the body in movement and dance.

The exhilarating experience children had of using their bodies in new and adventurous ways through the physical education program, and the skills they developed in doing so, paved the way for them to also to learn to express themselves in the language of dance. Just as it was in the areas of written expression, art, drama, and physical education, dancing at St. Ann’s Well Road was developed as an extension of a curriculum in which exploration lead to individual expression and development of skills.

Dancing at St. Anne’s

As a child Alice Yardley had dreamed of becoming a ballet dancer. She often rose early in the morning and set out for the beach to choreograph her own compositions on the vast empty stretches of sand along the North Sea at Maplethorpe. In the summer, she and her friends spent much of their free time rehearsing and organizing a dance concert for the local people and summer vacationers. To drum up business for the concert, Alice would stand on the train platform as it pulled into Mablethorpe, greeting the passengers as they came off the train with an urgent invitation to buy tickets for their upcoming event.

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35 In another entry, under the heading ‘Dancing Basic Principles’ A. lists as goals:
   1. Physical preparation
   2. Study of Music Technique
   3. Self Expression
performance. In fact, the concert did raise a sizeable sum of money for several years running that was donated to the local 'home for crippled children' in Lincolnshire.

Alice continued to be very interested in dance through her college years, and when she came to Nottingham in 1934, she took classes at a neighborhood school of ballet, though by this time, she had realized that her tall stature made a serious career in ballet impossible. However in Nottingham, she soon discovered various forms of 'modern' dance that were liberated from the constraints of ballet. From a cousin who taught a form of Natural Movement based on Ancient Greek forms, she learned a style of dancing that emphasized flowing and free forms of movement, one that Isadora Duncan had popularized throughout Europe and the United States in the early part of the century. (Isadora Duncan in this country was a theorist and practitioner of this form of dance). A newspaper clipping saved from this time, shows her in a short white tunic, taking part in a demonstration of 'Greek Dancing' at the local Nottingham YWCA. (See newspaper clipping in Documents #13). One summer after she had been teaching only a few years, with money she had saved up, she went to a coed gymnastic camp with her sister Beryl, where Alice, due to her strength and stature, was selected to take part in elaborate acrobatic stunts where each member balanced on top of the other. Later on, during several Christmas and summer holidays – she had participated in weeklong classes that met in Cudham-on Kent, where the group danced in a free improvisatory style outside on the grounds of a Montessori school there.
When she became head At St. Anne's Well Road, Alice had the chance for the first time to initiate the teaching of dance, and to teach the classes herself. She held voluntary dance classes during the afternoon 'aesthetic activity' period which she had introduced into the daily schedule: Dance, Art and Music were offered, as well as English and Drama. Her system for holding these voluntary dance sessions, she told me, was that whenever she had some free time she would ask a child to go around the school ringing a bell signaling that she would be giving dance classes in the large hall. Children who were interested might then ask permission to be released from their respective classrooms by their teachers.

In her previous positions at William Crane when she was employed as a classroom teacher, and at Player, where she was teacher in the practical class and deputy head teacher, Alice's dancing life had remained apart from her school life. But when she became the head teacher at St. Anne's Well road, she seized the opportunity to teach dancing to her students. This was the area that became the focus of her continuing evolution as a teacher in direct contact with children, the area that remained part of her 'teaching life' rather than her administrative life. Her methods reflected her experience with 'natural movement', and the influence of Rudolph Laban, a dancer, choreographer and movement theorist, who emigrated to England after World War II. and had established a school there which emphasized natural movement, fluidity, and improvisation.
This more improvisatory and fluid dance movement was at the opposite end of the spectrum from both the stylized forms of ballet on the one hand, and the rigid ‘Swedish drill’ and ‘physical jerks’ of the typical physical education fare at that time. It was a way in which ‘all children could excel in their own way’. Here is Alice:

A. ...This movement into dance, movement experience, was based on Laban movement, (which ) originated in Greek Dancing, and then (there was) this breaking away from this rigid PE (Physical Education) into the world of natural movement. And I attended a school on that. (laughs) This has been going on since the beginning of the century. It was based on the Greek notion, that when you move the left foot forward you move the right hand. That’s how you naturally walk. So the whole of the movement is based on Natural Movements (emphasis). Formal style, stylized dancing like ballet, was the opposite end of the stream. It is highly stylized, ballet! And this was something for everybody, because it was everybody’s natural movements...

P. And I know that you taught dance in your school!

A. Well I put it on instead of physical education, I put on modern dance. Which meant all children could excel in their own way, couldn’t they? Freedom from what we called Swedish drill, all physical jerks,

P. Touching your toes ten times...

A. Yes. These forward bends...

(Interview, Code 5, my italics)
Not only at St. Ann’s Well Road Infants School, but in her subsequent headships, Alice continued to ‘put on modern dance’. In fact, teaching modern dance through ‘Natural Movement’ became an emblem of her tenure. Through it she continued to put forward a pedagogy of freedom, to carve out a space where old forms and constrictions might drop away, as they had in the area of reading and writing, math and science, in order to give rise to new and more imaginative movements and expressions. Modern dance was open and democratic in its embrace of a diverse range of personal styles. Each child might have a chance to ‘excel in their own way’, and that way was never predictable.

For Alice, predictability was like ‘sitting still’. It was the equivalent of death; of the end of life and learning. Once, after expressing dismay at the earlier convention of sitting children at their desks for long periods of time with no opportunity to move, Alice had ruminated, in her thoughtful fashion:

A… Sitting still means beginning to die, doesn’t it really. While ever you are alive there is movement. Complete lack of movement is death. (Interview, Code 5)

The Caravan

In fact, it was true that during her tenure at St. Ann’s, it was not only in reference to the school and classroom, but also to her own life, that Alice pursued a form of continuous
movement. With the help of her trusty caretaker, Alice had a caravan\textsuperscript{36} built for herself. She had it moved several times, to different sites along the North Sea shore, and on the shores of the Wash, near Boston. While she was still living with her parents in Nottingham, and now joined by her sister and her family, the caravan was a place where Alice could be on her own. This was where she could retreat for her school vacations, away from the city. Or she might invite friends and colleagues out to stay with her, which she did frequently both while she was at St. Ann’s and later when she returned to William Crane as headteacher.\textsuperscript{37}

In these photographs we see Alice standing on the steps leading up to her caravan, dark haired, and smiling, host to a group of young teachers who she was introducing to the pleasures of camping and the simple life. In some way, it seemed that the caravan was her claim to an independent life of change and adventure; a statement of resistance to ‘sitting still’ that she felt was akin to a kind of slow death. Even at the height of her success as the head of a large urban infants school in a ‘deprived area’, a big and demanding job, Alice took action to keep a corner of her life ‘free and easy’. The caravan was motion and change; it gave her the wings to fly; to metamorphose, to be adventurous and improvisational.

\textsuperscript{36} A caravan is the equivalent of what we would call a trailer in the US.

\textsuperscript{37} In a photo from this period, Alice stands on the steps leading up to her caravan, dark haired, and smiling, host to a group of young teachers who she was introducing to the pleasures of camping and the simple life.
It was perhaps this affinity for motion, both forward and backward, that drew her back to William Crane, after four years at St. Anne’s Well Road. She had spent nine years there as an infant teacher, and she continued to have a strong sense of connection and responsibility to the families and children there that she had left behind. When she heard the head teacher there was leaving, Alice was drawn to the challenge of bringing ‘modern educational practice’, as she had defined it at St. Ann’s Well Road, back to her old stomping ground at the William Crane’s Infants School East.

Alice Yardley’s Legacy at St. Anne’s Well Road School

On many levels, Alice Yardley had succeeded in transforming St. Ann’s Well Road School from a dull and regimented institution into a place of active purposeful learning, of hope. Inside the school walls was a new world for these children, one in which they had freedom and access to all that was either lacking or forbidden in their ‘huddles of tiny homes’, as Alice had described them. In the following interview passage she expressed her hopes for the children who came to St. Ann’s Well Road School:

You know my ideal was everything they can’t do at home they can do here. There’s clay, and there’s hammer and nails, and there’s sand, and all sorts of paper to tear up, and all these nice things to do, and we could pretend, and we can be acting, and we can dress up in these clothes and go and be somebody else (dramatic voice full of expression) Kids love it don’t they!

P. Yes, they do they love it.
A. And if we feel we want to run round the yard, she doesn’t mind so long as we don’t go too far...

(Interview, Code 5)

In describing here an ideal vision of a ‘child-centered’ environment, Alice highlights the differences in method, purpose, and attitude towards learning, brought about by a century of educational evolution, particularly in regard to provision for the education of young children. From a social historical perspective, changes in educational practice since the mid-1800’s when St. Ann’s Well Road School was first built, were dramatically evident. Her understanding of the course of history and the deep shifts in educational purpose that the building had witnessed, is captured in the following passage. Alice begins with a description of the system of instruction in place at St. Ann’s Well Road a century earlier:

A. This was one of the early ways of teaching a lot of children, you see. They’d have the monitors, the ones that had been through the school, the clever ones... and the tutor would sort of get together with them. And then they would go off and each would have a group you see. So you taught... and there was this big hall place, and then this sort of balcony round at the top where the tutor could walk around and watch these groups standing around their monitor.

P. Around their monitor, amazing!

38 Alice was undoubtedly aware of the publication in 1900 by Swedish author Ellen Key of her book, The Century of the Child, an important milestone in the history of ‘child-centered’ education that had been translated into English and many other languages.
A. So their work, their brain, was disseminated through a large number. Now what they learned, I don’t really know… but that was basically the monitorial system. Where one teacher taught about a hundred children.

P. Using the brighter students to then teach the other ones.

A. It was all… it wasn’t education.. it was instruction.

P. Right.

A. Education…It wasn’t drawn out of the pupils, it was fed into them. Cause education means drawing out of, doesn’t it?

P. Yes, hum..

A. Drawing out of them what is there,

P. What’s there. Yeah.

A. And helping them to use it. (little laugh)

(Interview, Code 5, my italics)

At St. Anne’s Well Road, in stark contrast to the monitorial system that the building had been set up for originally, Alice felt she had succeeded in creating an environment, curriculum and means of expression for her students that would ‘draw out of them what is there’, and ‘help them to use it’. This was not instruction, fed in by rote and drill, but education in its fullest sense. The rambling old building - that ‘massive stone monstrosity towering menacingly over narrow cobbled streets and huddles of tiny homes’ had come to house a sense of hope and exhilaration, of possibilities that expanded the futures of all its students way beyond its walls.
Section Four
Headteaching at William Crane and Brooksby

While Alice, in our many conversations, always denied that she ever had fixed goals or ambitions for herself; she acknowledged that there was something strong in her that responded with energy and excitement to a new challenge. In an early interview, she said of her personal philosophy, that ‘it is a philosophy of acceptance… I don’t believe in a fixed or distant goal, but to have a sense of direction. You can’t anticipate what will come up, what directions you might take. View the situation and see what emerges!’ (Notes, August 99)

From her vantage point, now that she had been a headteacher at St. Ann’s for several years, the chance to return to William Crane as its headteacher ‘emerged’ clearly as an important next step: a chance to make her mark on her old stomping ground, and to return to the community where she had first come into her own as a teacher:

In 1951 the headship of my previous school, William Crane Infants Schools became vacant. I applied for the job because I saw in it the opportunity to free the school of the formality which persisted since my probationary years there.

(Memoir, teaching)

Supporting Experimentation but not Imposing it
The challenge at William Crane was quite different than what she had faced at St. Ann’s Well Road, where she and her staff had begun their work with unified purpose and a sense of mission. At William Crane, some teachers who had been there since it opened in the early thirties were apprehensive about the changes that Alice Yardley might bring about. She was seen as a reformer and an innovator, apparently, and part of the ‘modern’ approach to teaching that had been gaining adherents not only in Nottingham, but also in other parts of England. But the approach was still controversial in many communities particularly among middle class parents anxious for their children to climb the conventional ladder of opportunity.

Alice told a story, which illustrates some of the worries and resistance to her approach, that she often faced from anxious parents. The mother of a newly admitted child into the reception class was unhappy to find her five year old child happily playing in the water table, experimenting with different containers and apparatus. She went to Alice, her child’s head teacher, and told her, “He doesn’t need to play with water. Teach him to read. Then he can read about water!” From this parent’s point of view, direct experience had no value. She didn’t want her son’s time wasted with the real thing, when he could just as well get the information by learning about it from books. When we talked and laughed about this incident, Alice remarked:

A. You can sit and learn the facts and say what they are. It doesn’t mean to say you’ve learned them, does it. You can even pass(ed) the exams without understanding what you’ve done. The test is in the live situation.
P. In a real situation. Yeah.

A. Involving other people who think differently.

P. Yes. (laughs)

A. And it's also, it's in a lot of things, isn't it? It's in the degree of confidence you've got in what you're attempting to do. I mean just take what we're talking about, if I hadn't confidence, I got a dashed amount of criticism from me colleagues, you can bet that, at first, anyway. (Interviews, Code 6)

Here Alice is making an interesting link between a child's experience with the physicality of materials and concepts, with what she calls the 'the live situation' as is gained in 'water play', and her own experience as a teacher watching and observing children. This is what gave her the 'live situation' - the solid evidence - that underlay her confidence in the approach she took. Direct experience gives the learner, child or adult, confidence in his or her own understanding of the phenomena, understanding that goes deeper and has a staying power that learning indirectly through the written word will not. Her own experience as a classroom teacher provided the equivalent of playing in the water for her understanding of the basic principles at work; she knew what worked, and what didn't, what children were really like as living moving, breathing small human beings. It was this knowledge, grounded in her personal experience, that gave her the confidence to withstand the 'dashed amount of criticism from me colleagues', that she encountered in her head teaching positions and later, at Nottingham College.
While she fully expected some teachers at William Crane to be initially suspicious and reluctant to follow her lead, like the anxious mother described above, she knew that in order to support change, her teachers would need her reassurance and support. Alice had learned at St. Ann’s that her effectiveness depended on her ability to listen to her staff, to collaborate with them in their attempts to meet the needs of children, and to find the resources they needed to bring their ideas to fruition.

As soon as she took on the headship, Alice devoted her energies to reassuring the teaching staff at William Crane that her approach would be to support experimentation but not to impose it. As she writes in her memoir:

I got the job and found that my reputation had gone before me. “What do you want us to do?” the staff asked with considerable apprehension. My reply ‘Carry on as you are doing, but if anyone would like to experiment go ahead and I’ll back you up.’ I had already learned the educational realism of slow growth towards improvement. The human situation needs time if change and growth are to be worthwhile. In the end some of the most formal teachers developed the most interesting and enlightened procedures. Once they began to loosen up there was no turning back. ‘I have never felt so near my children,’ one teacher confided. ‘And you couldn't make me change back to formal teaching even if you tried.’

(Memoir, teaching)
In fact, one of the ‘interesting and enlightened’ procedures that was developed by Alice and her staff at William Crane, including ‘some of the most formal teachers’ was the initiation of a ‘family classes’. This was another change that allowed for close relationships between teachers and children - ‘I have never felt so near my children’ - and among children as well.

Family Classes

While teachers had started to experiment with this way of re-organizing children’s age groupings and class structure at St. Ann’s Well, it was while Alice was head teacher at William Crane, that the procedure became accepted practice. Children would stay on in their class of entry, so that over the course of the year, as new children joined each term, (there are three terms in the English system – fall, winter, spring,) there remained a nucleus of older children who provided continuity, stability, and instruction to the whole group. Alice describes this evolution in her memoir as follows:

It was traditional practice in infant schools at this time to transfer children to a higher class at the beginning of each term in order to accommodate entrants. In a large school with an annual entry of say 490 children, some children had three different teachers in their first year. In order to establish a settled year of entry, it was decided to start the year with six reception classes, each of which contained a nucleus of six-year olds. By the end of the year the age range of these classes was 18 months and they became known as family classes.
After working with family classes for two years, so many unexpected benefits emerged that it was decided to include the seven-year olds. In subsequent years each class contained children from each age group and incoming children were allocated to the class which best met their needs. Vertical Grouping had become established. (Memoir, teaching)\(^{39}\)

With ‘Family Classes’ children could stay in the class they had started with for at least three terms, or a year. This created ‘a settled year of entry’ for children when they first came to school\(^{40}\), and, as in a true family, included them in a group of children of varying ages, who all shared the same ‘teacher-parent’. Children within each of these family classes might range in age between almost 5 and almost 7 years old. (This would be the equivalent in US terms of a K-1, or a 1-2 mixed age classroom.)

As Alice describes, once this practice had proved its effectiveness and benefits, family classes were expanded to include the 7 to 8 year olds as well. Groups in the infant school would now contain an age range of up to two and a half years. At this stage of the practice, the term ‘Vertical Grouping’ was applied, conveying the idea that the horizontal

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\(^{39}\) In her memoir then, Alice gives credit to her own part in the evolution and implementation of both ‘family classes’ and ‘vertical grouping’, implying that it was during her tenure at St. Ann’ and later at William Crane that these practices first came about. It is not clear from the language she uses if she means to imply that similar changes were also coming about in other schools in Nottingham and in the UK in general. What we do know is that this practice became more and more widespread over the next decade, that it took hold in much of the UK during the sixties and seventies, and that it was also widely discussed and imitated in the US, where it was more often called mixed-age or multi-age grouping.

\(^{40}\) Children in England at this time typically entered school in a ‘reception class’ in the term in which they turned 5, whether fall, winter or spring.
age structure, where same age children were grouped together, was now replaced by a vertical grouping, in which children of a range of different ages shared the same space and teacher.

Each classroom of mixed age children developed particular routines, styles and cultures of their own, and headteacher and teachers together thought hard about which class each new entrant might flourish best in. Class placement was thus not based on age, but on personality, interests, developmental level, and social considerations. As Alice writes of this practice; ‘incoming children were allocated to the class which best met their needs’.

Alice got to know each child in the school individually, and visited each classroom every day. She would often be invited in by a teacher to see a special project going on in a particular classroom. She also spent time watching children as they moved about the halls between activities and at the end of the school day. She told me that by observing how children left their rooms, she could determine how their day was going and how they felt about their teacher. Some would ‘shoot out like little bullets’; others leave languorously, reluctant to leave their projects and teacher behind. She describes herself as always on the go, wandering the corridors, talking to children and teachers, or in the hall teaching dance. She was rarely in her office, except early in the morning before the children had arrived.

The Integrated Day at William Crane
Looking back on her work at William Crane during this period, Alice understood how the evolving structure of family classes and vertical groupings enhanced the basic principles of the ‘integrated day’. She developed this first at St. Ann’s Well, where children were free to ‘follow’ their own ideas and interests, where a purposeful and intellectually rich curriculum flowed out from those interests. She remarks in her memoir on the relationship of these organizational innovations to their philosophical underpinnings:

Changes in organization were now well advanced. They reflected a new way of thinking about children and a set of beliefs based in helping each child to learn and develop according to its unique personal pattern. The days of pressuring children in order to obtain measurable results mainly for our own satisfaction were gone. We now began to look more closely at aspects of the curriculum and work towards understanding the learning processes involved. The works of Piaget, Susan Isaacs, Tanner and many other educators helped to improve our knowledge of children and develop skills in observing them so that we could base what we were doing on what we learned about children from children themselves. (Memoir, teaching)

In Reaching Out, Alice gives a full account of how teachers in one integrated day program where vertical grouping was established, developed curriculum that took into account children’s ‘learning processes’. The curriculum was based on ‘helping each child to learn and develop according to its unique personal pattern.’ (1970, p. 51) She begins by reminding beginning teachers that in order for children to work well in a ‘free atmosphere’, teachers need to provide ‘the security of good planning and organization’.
The description that follows shows a typical day’s activity in a mixed age classroom, as they explore concepts of the sun and space:

An unusually sunny September stimulated observation of the sun. One group of four six-year-old children became fascinated by its journey through space. They noticed that “there were other things in the space round the earth. There were stars and a moon”.

An older child explained “things in the sky” to one of the group. He got a book on astronomy from the library corner to illustrate his points. Thereafter the book on astronomy was used by one or other of the children each day. Distances in kilometers of planets from the earth filled the children with awe. Whilst unable to understand such distances, they were able to grasp some notion of the immensity of space.

They constructed a “space” using a hoop. The sun was suspended from the centre of the hoop. Planets made from crushed paper were suspended in relative positions.

The children described their experiences at home and one mother invited the group to view on her television a senior science program on space. The children were allowed to go to the home at 2 p.m. Soon after 3 p.m. they burst into the classroom full of information. With help from the teacher and the older child, they wrote up their impressions of the program with illustrations.

Margaret, aged four-and-a-half, showed interest in these activities from the start. She watched the children at work and heard their comments. While they were reading the book they had made to the rest of the class and some of the teachers, she
went to the painting corner and painted a picture which she called “Space”. It was a seething mass of swirling black and purple. “It’s a tunnel”, she explained. “It’s the space in a tunnel when the train’s gone through.”

While this description is not specifically tied to any one school, it portrays the sorts of activities which might have taken place at William Crane in an integrated day program 'in a classroom that included a range of children of different ages in a Vertical Grouping. It helps us imagine what was actually going on in one of these classrooms when Alice was head teacher there, and the kinds of exploration that arose from the ‘spontaneous interests of the children’. As the text continues, in Alice’s words:

“This example illustrates the balance between individual and group participation.

At some points children were working alone, at others a small group shared a common interest and from time to time the whole class became involved. (pp.51-52)

Cardboard Box Methods

As she had at St. Ann’s Well, Alice and her staff put much of their energy into building a sense of community among the parents of their pupils. Right away, Alice initiated a plan whereby parents were invited into their children’s classrooms on Wednesday afternoons

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41 This story is taken almost verbatim from Alice’s notebook, *Diary of a Primary School*, kept while she was at Brooksby.
to visit, talk to the teachers, and see what work their child was involved in. During these afternoon visits, Alice made a point of coming in to the classroom, mixing among the parents, and listening and talking to them about their child. She loved this time, and felt it was important to the health of the school. These kinds of informal contacts between parents and teachers, she felt ‘were more important that the prescribed ‘curriculum night’, and that the more such informal such contact is the better’. Alice believed that ‘children need to see their parents and teachers working together on their behalf’, and she took concrete steps to make this happen.

In an address to the parents at the Christmas gathering in 1951, Alice had appealed to them to enter into a ‘partnership’ with the school, ‘in the job of rearing and educating children’:

I persuaded them to bring waste materials into the school and then observe what the children did with them. Slowly the ideas behind what they called “cardboard box” methods began to make sense. There was still a long way to go in gaining the full cooperation of parents but the groundwork had been well covered long before the publication of the Plowden Report. (Memoir, teaching)

A Success

As headteacher, her work at William Crane also involved Alice in ongoing support for her staff. Early in her tenure, when large numbers of children were continuing to stream
in the ‘reception’ classes, Alice realized she needed another teacher. Looking back, the story of how this newly hired teacher grew in professional commitment while she was at William Crane, seemed to Alice to have been a ‘little highlight’ of her head teaching;

,, the children were coming in thick and fast, and I needed another to open another class... so I saw the organizer, and she sent me a transfer from another school. And she says, ‘Well I’ve got one, will you sort of take her on board?’ And I said, ‘Well, I’ll take anybody as long as she’s a body!’ (I laugh with her) and um... I didn’t ask her about her background... I thought, ‘We’ve got to make do with what we get’, you know... and um, it was from a school on the outside. I didn’t know the woman at all. Anyway, she was very slow moving, you know, sort of... (she demonstrates, slowing her voice down as she speaks).

I gave her this class, and I left it. I said, ‘If you want help, the deputy head’s next door, she’ll come... or come and ask me’, and I left her to it! And then one day, after she’d been there a couple of months, the inspector came along. They often visited us, the local inspectors, just to see how we were doing, but I think she’d come partly to see how this teacher had settled in. And it was after four o’clock, and the teachers used to say to the children, ‘Well, it’s time. You can go home now, but you can finish what you want. If you want to finish something before you go, it’s alright.’ Because they’d allow that. And the inspector says, (goes into a high voice) ‘I’ve just passed Miss Baxter’s room. But she’s working, she’s putting something up for tomorrow!’ And I said, ‘Oh, that’s what they do! And she said. ‘I don’t believe it!’
(We laugh)
And you can infer the rest! So what I’m getting at there is… something about the
way we were working, had *stirred a teacher*, if you like, who was a bit - perhaps
she’d had a bad deal I don’t know - but she was a little inclined to… get by, if you
like. And here she was after hours, staying on, and some of the children were still
hanging round her! So, they were learning from her weren’t they!
P. Yeah, yah…oh that’s a lovely story. I’ve never heard you tell about that.
(Interview, Code 6)

The ‘way we were working’, with its informality, integration of the arts, and respect for
teacher’s ideas, had ‘stirred’ this rather uncertain and ‘slow moving’ teacher. She was
staying late at school to work in the classroom, and her students, absorbed in their
projects, were reluctant to leave her at the end of the day, They were ‘learning from her’.
For Alice, this was a success story.

**The Child Reveals Himself**

Alice kept a notebook during her tenure at William Crane. With a sturdy green cardboard
cover and cloth binding, page after page is filled with her careful handwriting, part print
and part script. The words are still clear, and bite into the paper with authority. The title,
‘Philosophy for the Infant School, 1951-59’ is written on the front on a small gummed
label on the upper right hand corner, and was probably added later, after Alice had left
William Crane.
Alice remarked to me that her habit of writing about her evolving beliefs and goals for the infant school helped her develop her educational thinking. As she remarks in her memoir about this period in the fifties when 'modern practice' was gaining momentum and recognition:

The need to be articulate about what we were doing sharpened observation and helped us to clarify our ideas. Principles needed definition yet prescription must be avoided. There weren't a set of rules which guaranteed the establishment of successful practice. If education was to serve children as individuals it must be devised within the context in which it operated. Procedures and practice must be flexible enough to change with changing needs and examples of good practice were not transferable between schools. These were difficult ideas to communicate to the general public and to other onlookers. (Memoir, teaching)

In this notebook we see Alice attempting to define her principles and clarify her ideas as she struggled to become more articulate about the goal of school and her approach to education for young children. On the first page is the powerful and evocative statement:

The Child Reveals Himself

Some observations of the school experiences of the Infant-age child, written from the background of the William Crane Schools.
On the following pages, the notebook continues to lay out Alice’s general philosophy and approach to school, the child, materials and subject areas (these sections of the ‘Philosophy of the Infant School’ will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, in section one, ‘Notebooks’). After these general comments, there follow a series of entries for each of the eight years that Alice worked at William Crane, between 1951 and 59.

Every September at the beginning of the term, Alice wrote a guiding statement articulating her thoughts and goals for each coming year, followed by further notes on topical matters. Some of the topics treated the teaching of reading and writing, ‘Developing our Philosophy for Number’, and ‘Movement and its place in the daily pattern of the School’. The entry for 1956, comments that ‘the policy of placing entrants in family groups has proved itself and this will continue’ indicating that this practice was probably introduced initially in 1955. Alice drew on these guiding statements and topical entries to prepare her opening comments to the staff in the first meetings of every school year.

The Quiet Room

In her notes for 1955, Alice remarks that the school population at William Crane had begun to shrink, due to the waning of the baby boom that had swelled its numbers after the war. This had a benefit in allowing for the reduction of class sizes from over fifty in many cases, to ‘not more than 40’ for the older children, and 30-35 for the younger children. It also meant that the school had an extra space. Under the heading ‘Reflections
for the 1955-56 Programme’, Alice laid out her plans and goals for its use in the
notebook as follows:

The Use of the Spare Room

In a world of speed and noise it is essential to provide opportunities for peace and
meditation. Few if any of our estate homes have a quiet corner of any kind. Homes
where art, beauty and culture find a space are rare. Can we wonder then, that our
children are tense, neurotic and disintegrated. It is up to the school to provide this
ingredient so essential for sound education for living. If we can give each child a
little inner peace we have done well.

The spare room will be set aside with this in mind. The aim here will be to
procure an atmosphere conducive to the appreciation of things aesthetic. Detailed
usage of Room 9 will be announced as its purpose develops. (Reflections for the
1955-56 Programme, from the ‘Philosophy’ notebook)

The Quiet Room, as Room 9 came to be called, soon found good uses by many of the
children in the school, and was a potent emblem and symbol of Alice’s tenure at William
Crane. Yet, its creation also signaled a change in the demographics of the school
population that was troubling to Alice’s sense of professional challenge; her job as head
teacher was not as demanding as it had been in the past. She expresses some of these
thoughts in the following interviewt:
A. Yes, well at William Crane, I had one room. Oh, when a classroom became vacant, the numbers began to drop. You see that was another thing, the school was, the numbers were dropping, and there was a feeling that, to be honest, I needed a demanding job, a big job, I’m not happy unless I get busy, and that job...I felt like I was walking on quick sands. The job was crumbling under me feet, and one of the things, that happened...oh...a classroom became vacant, so I turned this into a classroom where children could enjoy aesthetic experiences. Now some people thought this was crazy, but included in that was a music room, it was called the quiet room, they could choose to go there, they could ask their teacher, not more than two from each class, and to keep it quiet, and they could just go and enjoy doing what did in there, but it was always to be quiet, everybody else could be quiet...(imitating the children’s high voices) Can we go to the quiet room? (I laugh). Anyway, I kept it the one straight opposite my door, so that I could...it didn’t have anybody supervising it, but I could...

P. You could peek in,

A. Well... I’d know if anything wasn’t right. (Interviews, Code 6)

Professional Writing: Fiction

The Quiet Room had proved successful in attracting children to it, and inviting them to spend reflective time exploring and enjoying aesthetic materials. Yet the smaller class size of the school meant that Alice had less to do as head teacher, and with more time on her hands than she was used to, Alice turned to her writing. Somewhat on the sly, she had
written and published a number of short ‘human interest’ stories, advise essays, and imaginative fiction for young children, that were published in local newspapers and magazines such as the Nottingham Guardian, the Psychologist, Woman’s Companion and ‘Reveille’, which she laughingly admitted to me was geared to men, and was sent to the British overseas forces.

One of her first published stories to appear was called ‘Granny’s Nylon Nightie’, in the summer of 1954. It told the story of a grandmother (a character based on Alice’s own mother) looking longingly in a store window at an enticing nightgown made of what was then a brand new material. (Alice had observed her mother doing this from a bus she was riding!) These one page short works of fiction described working class families in which children, grandparents, young couples, teachers, and neighborhood toughs, sorted through emotional conflicts, hurt feelings and misunderstandings, poverty and other practical household problems, and usually ended with some kind of moral resolution, and mending of relations.

It was quite thrilling for Alice to discover that she could make money on her stories, and she awaited with pleasure the checks in their slim envelopes that would arrive by post from her publishers. At the same time, she felt guilty and torn about the double life she was leading. She described to me how, when a young mother came to her disturbed about her child, that instead of listening with all her heart to the woman, part of her was making mental notes:
A. You see what I was doing is... a mother would come to me with a tale about her husband, and instead of listening to the woman, thinking, what can I do to help her, I was making a story (voice rising) about it, so that when she’d left me I couldn’t wait to sit down and write my story, and I thought, well this is a disgraceful state of affairs. And I will tell you, did I tell you this? That I sent in my resignation?

P. You did mention it...

Sometime in 1957, feeling obligated to choose one or the other, Alice had decided to resign her job at William Crane, and devote herself to writing. 42 When she sent in her letter of resignation, however, the director of education and his deputy (Ken Baird, who later was the principal of Nottingham College), countered with their own offer. They proposed that she take a year’s sabbatical with paid salary, to try out her writing career. As Alice told me on several different occasions, she was both amazed and gratified that these people who were her superiors, who knew her well and had watched over her professional growth, would allow her the freedom to launch in this new direction, and to support her while doing so. Yet it was not to be.

Recommitment

42 As well as her short stories, sometime during this period, she had also began work on a full length novel, ‘Reluctant Dreams’, based on the story of her family’s struggle to keep the farm at Mablethorpe during a period of hard times, and the conflict this had engendered between her parents.
A small child changed her mind for her, and this is the story she tells of how it happened.

I had remembered her telling me about him, a little boy with his boots too big for him, laces untied, seeming a bit forlorn and underfed, who came to find her:

A....this funny little... tooky little lad, he was the funniest little thing. And much to my amazement, he came to my room one day, and said, 'Can I go into the Quiet Room? The teacher says I can.' I looked at him and said 'Well, you've asked. You can go!' And amongst other things in the quiet room, was a music making corner, things that would make sounds; sound - making, and this child was sitting there quietly by himself. Something was soothing its soul. I mean he was one of these awful lads who goes 'pow' when he gets with other children, when he gets frustrated. And he came to school one day with a mark across his forehead. His father had hit him on he head with a hot poker...Anyway, it was all a sad tale... and I thought, good heavens! ...anyway, he obviously found some peace for his soul in that room.

One day I got to school very early, about half past eight. There was a knock on the door, and I opened the door, and there was this child with an old fashioned German zither. His father was a refuse collector, and something the child had said, or something the parents and child shared, must have been this love of music. And the father had recognized what it was, and brought it home for the child, and he’d brought it to me to put in the Quiet Room, to give to me. I was so touched by this... and I never felt...he says 'I’ve brought y’arp'. And I thought,
I’ve never felt nearer the angels. I just felt I was on a cloud! And I thought, well this is what I’m here to do, not write my little fiddling stories. And it was that child that made me just… I then went back to the director of education, and said, ‘I have committed myself to this job. I can’t, no, I can’t relinquish it! No. I’ll decide to go on. And that’s when I tried to turn me back against it… And what I’ve said… I can see in my mind’s eye, precisely how it happened…I’ll never forget it…

P. It’s a wonderful story…(softly)
A. Hmmmm (with a little laugh of agreement and pleasure)

P. Do you remember his name, that little boy?
A. No…I just remember this little image you see. I mean his name may pop into me mind some day… Sorry (quickly). I don’t think I ever wrote that down! I mean I didn’t need to write it down.

From this point on, while she continued to write a story or article now and again, she had recommitted herself to her job as head teacher at William Crane. During the interview in which we spoke about this incident, she told me, that in her mind this little boy with his gift of a ‘harp’ had brought her a message, one that resolved the conflict and guilt she was feeling. Through him, she said, ‘I was being shown what to do’. He was the angel Gabriel come to tell her that she had been chosen. Her commitment must be to him and his family, to all the children and parents of this community that she felt so close to. Through his offering she understood that her work had reached the people she most cared about; though the size of the school had diminished, her role had not. An individual
child's life had been touched, and that of his family. This was a lesson that she took deeply to heart.

Alice returned the following fall with a sense of renewed commitment to her job at William Crane. While for the next several years she continued to write fiction now and then, by 1959 she had given up producing her 'piddling stories', as she called them. She continued though, as she had since her classroom teaching days, to record and write about the children and teachers she met and lived with.

While Alice turned down the opportunity to devote herself entirely to a career as a professional writer and journalist, the skills she had gained in writing these economical tales stood her in good stead when, ten years later, she began to write the educational texts that became the Young Children Learning series. Each of the books in this series is filled with well-wrought stories of children and teachers in the life of the schools she had known. In a sense, her work as a writer came to fruition, after a long underground period ... not in fiction, but in the educational material that brought her words and stories of children to many readers throughout the English speaking world. She had honed her skill at narrative as a way to illustrate her educational approach and learning theory, in short, her philosophy of education. Teaching through stories became one of the hallmarks of her work.

In the last four years of her leadership of the William Crane Infant School, Alice continued to consolidate the innovative practices she had supported there, including
family classes, an integrated day, an emphasis on aesthetics and interaction with natural materials, and a curriculum that followed the lead of children. She continued to teach ‘voluntary movement’ and modern dance herself, and worked hard towards lifting the standards of the school in the area of language arts and mathematics.

1959, Last Year at William Crane

While initially the smaller size of the school had given some tangible benefits such as the creation of the ‘quiet room’ and smaller class sizes, by 1958, William Crane Infants School was suffering from downsizing in another way as well. The Education committee changed the age range of the infant school, so that children who turned seven before the end of the summer were sent on to primary school. This meant that children remained in the infant’s school for only two years, and again decreased the overall size of the school. In addition, some of the spare rooms afforded by these changes were in danger of being preempted by the Senior Schools at William Crane, something she described in her notebook as a ‘nightmare threat’, and one that could lead to ‘a school which no longer belongs exclusively to us’. Though she rallied her troops, by continuing, ‘We must not at any cost, let this state of affairs cramp our style’, it seems clear that the future of the

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43 From Philosophy of the Infant School: Entry for 1958-59, ‘As a freer agent I hope to make the Voluntary Movement periods a daily experience. The ‘movement’ gong will serve as the signal that “Miss Yardley” is taking Movement”, and any child who wishes to come, may. I expect that in time a regular nucleus of children, for whom this form of expression has particular appeal, will provide a movement group. We will see. Meanwhile do try to use the movement on poetry, painting, natural phenomena, worship, working skills, in fact the rhythms, moods and qualities of the living world around us and so enrich the child’s use of its own whole body.
infant school as an autonomous unit with the William Crane complex was no longer certain.

Alice was ready for a change. When she learned of a vacancy at the Brooksby Primary School, an institution that included both infant and junior schools, thereby serving from 4 to 11 years old, she jumped at the chance to apply. It was an opportunity to work with children over a longer span of time, and to see her philosophy and approach continue beyond the infant school age range.

In her last entry in the notebook she kept at William Crane, under the heading 'July, 1959', she wrote, 'Am taking over Brooksby Primary School in September. Here I hope to develop the whole Primary picture in a building which offers many modern facilities.'

Brooksby, as had been the case with William Crane and the Player School, was a new estate community. It was built in the fifties by the City of Nottingham in another attempt to resettle families from the inner city in a more suburban environment, and with a 'better standard of living'. The Brooksby Estate was in the village of Clifton, on the other side of the river from William Crane, and quite a distance from where Alice now lived in Wollaton Park with her parents. Alice was drawn to it in part because she saw the chance to help these incoming newly arrived families recreate in Clifton the sense of community that they had left behind in their old neighborhood. Noting that when the first families arrived, there was not even a church or any kind of public convenience on the estate.

Alice wrote in her memoir:
There were many problems and teaching was a challenge. When the Headship at Brooksby Primary School became vacant I applied for the job and this gave me an opportunity to work with an age range which included the 7-11s – a chance to watch the progress of approaches to learning worked out with younger children through to Secondary School age. (Memoir, teaching)

As it turned out, Alice remained at Brooksby for only two years. While she had some success casting a wider net in a bigger school, and pursing a more unified child-centered approach for both infant and junior pupils in the primary school there, she was drawn on by another new challenge; the chance to join the just formed Nottingham College as their only early childhood instructor. 44 Here, as a lecturer and tutor of students of infant and primary education Alice continued to hone and articulate her beliefs and philosophy of education, based on her long years of practice as a teacher and headteacher. She remained at Nottingham College until her retirement in 1975, following the publication of the Young Children Learning series that had established her as a singular and powerful voice in the field of early childhood education and philosophy. A full exploration of her written work, in relation to her lived experience, will follow in chapter 5.

44 Alice tells an amusing story of her recruitment for college teaching. A group from the newly formed college came to find her at Brooksby to interest her in the position. They wandered through the school with no sign of the head teacher in sight. Coming across a group of children in the hall, they inquired as to where to find her. “Oh, she’s dancing in the hall!”, they were told, whereupon they found her deep into a voluntary movement session with her students.
Chapter Five: Educational Writing

Notebooks: 1944-1961

Philosophy, Pedagogy, Documentation

As we saw in the previous sections, when Alice taught and was deputy head at the Player Primary School, from 1943 to 1947, she began a systematic habit of recording her ‘thoughts and observations’ in a notebook, documenting the results of trying out a variety of ‘modes and procedures’. She mentions in her memoir that while writing about her ideas in this first notebook, Schemes, 45 which she began in 1944, ‘the core of later philosophy was shaping’, and that ‘the struggle to express ideas encouraged ideas to develop’. (Memoir, teaching)46 Thus her ‘philosophy’ developed not only through her practice but also through the process of writing about it.

When Alice came to St. Ann’s in 1947 as head teacher, she was able to put her ideas into practice with greater freedom and authority, and this change is reflected in the Schemes

45 Here is an excerpt from the Schemes notebook under the title ‘A Plan for Reading’:
‘Introduction. The Place of Reading in the Infant School. Children between the ages of 5 & 4 are at school for the purpose of satisfying a stream of complicated natural desires and instincts. At this age, the child’s mind is one big question and living is an adventure. School must satisfy its questions and give full scope for its discoveries. Reading is the most powerful tool that teachers’ can help children to acquire. The desire to read has become instinctive and if the Infant School does nothing else it must fulfill this desire, and help the child to acquire one of life’s most valuable assets.’
notebook, which she continued to use until 1951, her last year there. When she left St. Ann's to become head teacher at William Crane, she started a new notebook which she kept until she left William Crane in 1959. On the right hand corner of its cover is a rectangular label printed in her characteristic small handwriting with the words, *Philosophy of the Infant School, 1951-59*. Apparently Alice gave this notebook its descriptive and summative title only upon its completion, and after she had decided to take on her next appointment at Brooksby. The notebook she kept next, during the two years she was head teacher at the Brooksby Primary School, which included both infant and junior schools, bore a different and equally descriptive title: *Diary of a Primary School*.

Entry after entry in each of these three notebooks, *Schemes, Philosophy of the Infant School*, and the *Diary*, are written clearly in her characteristic hand, half-print half script, the first two in ink, the last, the Diary, in ballpoint pen. (see illustration) Topics range from her personal thoughts about the grand purposes of education, to the pedagogical principles she stood for, and their practical expression in the day-to-day life of classrooms she knew well. Entries also include daily schedules as they evolved form year to year, typewritten sheets taped in under the heading 'activity programme': evidence of her plans for reorganizing the structure of the school day. As mentioned earlier, pointers for use of 'apparatus' and the teaching of movement are also included.

Consequently, as a body of work, the notebooks give tangible evidence of the development of her Alice Yardley’s educational thought as it evolved between 1944 and
1959. They are vivid testimony demonstrating her early implementation of characteristics of what came to be known as the British Primary School approach in the 1960’s and 1970’s in this country, and English Infant School Movement in the city of Nottingham.

In both the *Schemes* notebook from St. Ann, and the *Philosophy for the Infant School*, many of Alice Yardley’s entries were written as short reflective essays, often in preparation for the annual address she made to her staff, or for a talk to parents - on the accomplishments of the past year and her goals for the next. These first two notebooks also contain pages of detailed notes on developing pedagogy and practices in specific areas of the curriculum such as those pertaining to language, reading, writing, number, music, physical education and movement.

True to their titles, the last two notebooks, the *Philosophy* and the *Diary*, are quite different: the first lays out the basic principles of Alice Yardley’s philosophical position, and follows with extensive notes on how pedagogy and practice should develop as an expression of this philosophy. The Diary, in contrast, is revealing of a different aspect; it is more of an objective recording of current practice, rather than a theoretical treatise. In it we find detailed descriptions of what actually transpired at Brookby in a number of different teacher’s classrooms. In keeping with the focus on documentation, each project description is followed with a list indicating what ‘products’ were kept as evidence and documentation.
Philosophy of the Infant School, 1951-59

I quote extensively from this notebook, because it is the first comprehensive written statement of Alice’s thinking in her first years at William Crane, and is illustrative of the broad principles behind the approach which had found its first flowering at St. Ann’s under her headship.

As mentioned previously, this notebook begins with Alice’s statement, ‘The Child Reveals Himself’, and on the page that follows, under the heading ‘General’, Alice starts off with a radical questioning of whether school is actually the best place to educate young children. What follows is what appears to be a complete articulation of Alice Yardley’s goals for infant education at that time:

(2nd page of Philosophy for the Infant School, 1951-59)

General.

Why school? Is school the best place in which to educate young children?

Undoubtedly the finest education a child can experience is that which he obtains whilst living a full rich life in the company of an intelligent mother and father.
However economy of time, effort and materials demands the grouping of children and in order to ensure contact with intelligent adults, civilization demands teachers. Hence schools. Schools are a good place for educational pursuits and they offer a unique opportunity for children to learn the art of living in a planned society.

Perhaps the most essential principle to keep in mind is the necessity for the child to be preserved as an individual. With classes of 50 this borders on sublime idealism. But at all costs to ourselves, we must maintain this ideal. Each child must have the opportunity to discover himself, his own capacity and his personal approach to life.

In this segment Alice finds three purposes for school: to help the child ‘learn the art of living in a planned society’, ‘to be preserved as an individual’ and to ‘discover himself, his own capacity and his personal approach to life’. In summary form these are the central philosophical principles that formed the foundation of her approach to education, and that she built on in writing the Young Children Learning series of books. It also makes clear her appreciation of the ‘ideal’ education provided ‘whilst living a full rich life in the company of an intelligent mother and father’, that the family offered a ‘model’ of good education, and an acknowledgement, in all probability, of the kind of rich informal learning that she had as a child on the farm at Mablethorpe. It continues under the heading:
Is the school a sincere place?

School life from 3 to 15 years or more has a threefold purpose:

The Infant School – The child reveals himself

The Junior School – This self develops

The Senior School – This self is prepared

Throughout, school experiences should produce a zest for life sustained by inner peace and integrity. Each child must discover its own philosophy for living.

Educationally he is in school to acquire intellectual processes which generations of his race have brought to their present state of skilled beauty. Modern society confronts him with these perfected processes of Reading, Writing and Calculation. He must condense the developments of generations into a few years and he needs the benefit of the teachers’ experience to help him.

Time is too short to allow him to develop the processes entirely unaided.

But notice the supreme importance of the Infant School. The introduction. The only unqualified chance he will have of finding himself and his purpose.

We are aware of our tremendous responsibility.

Here again we see Alice starting with a thought provoking question, ‘Is School a sincere place?’ She goes on to assert the many ways that the Infant School is the foundation for
the rest of the child’s life. It gives him the ‘only unqualified chance’ to help him find ‘himself and his purpose’. This is the great responsibility of the Infant school, and is of ‘supreme importance’. It represents the infant’s chance to ‘reveal himself’ in every aspect. The next heading is:

The Child

What wonderful material we have. The three year old, or more often the five year old, bring unspoiled freshness of outlook. He shows keen and ready interest in everything which forms his daily existence. He is learning all at a tremendous rate. And let us keep this learning business in its true perspective. He is learning a thousand things, of which the all important Three R processes are but a few. If we provide him with a thousand and one things to learn, he will take the extra one thing in his stride. All is new. He takes things as they come into a mind which as yet, has no problems. I repeat, no problems. The snags and problems are in our minds, not his.

Individual children will learn these things at different times and at varying rates. He will set his own pace with complete indifference to our analytically planned grades and stages.

Alice points out children’s ‘freshness of outlook’; his ‘keen and ready interest in everything that forms his existence’, his eagerness to absorb and to learn. He will learn at a tremendous rate, not only the ‘3 R’s’ but from his interactions with all that is around

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47 Alice means Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, or Calculation as she sometimes calls it.
him. Individual children learn things at different times and varying rates, irregardless of
the theoretical model of learning in the mind of the teacher: “He will set his own pace
with complete indifference to our analytically planned grades and stage”. The next
heading titled the ‘The Teacher’:

The Teacher

The most important purpose as a teacher is to foster in our children the right
attitude to learning. Again the child gives the clue. Learning is a joyful discovery.
Reading an eternal miracle.

The attitude can only be right if it is sincere and honest. The first essential is that
the teacher should think and be right. She can base her judgment only on her inner
guidance and convictions. Her own observations and ideas are far more truthful
and trustworthy than any which are expressed by others, be they the leading
intellectuals of the land. If she follows her children and gives them what she
honestly knows is the best for them, then she is right.

The ‘right attitude to learning’ is one of joyful discovery. Teachers are in a position to
‘foster’ or discourage this attitude. The most essential quality in a teacher is that she be
guided by inner convictions, and by her own observations and interactions with the
children she is teaching. The ideas she has that are based on this intimate and personal
connection with her students are more ‘trustworthy’ than those who don’t know her
children, even if they are ‘the leading intellectuals of the land’. The key is that ‘she follows her children’ and gives them what only she knows is best for them.

This entry on the teachers’ role harkens back to an earlier one in Alice’s first notebook, Schemes, entitled ‘Experimental Year’, 1948. when Alice was in her second year as head of St. Ann’s, which I referred to in Section 3 of this chapter. Alice had just returned from a National Course on the implications of the 1944 Act, and began the new school year with the excited proclamation; ‘children free to show us, teachers free to follow children’. Now, four years later, with the knowledge of the many innovative and successful experiments that had flowed from this premise, she asserts with confidence of the teacher ‘If she follows her children and gives them what she honestly knows is the best for them, then she is right.

Head Teacher, Materials, Learning

The following three entries are on ‘The Head Teacher’, ‘Materials’, and ‘Learning’. The head teacher, Alice writes, has the responsibility ‘to provide and sustain that atmosphere wherein the staff are secure and free to provide for their children’, and in a practical sense to select, maintain and distribute materials. ‘Smooth running of the daily routine’, are her business and to ‘build the framework of the teaching establishment’.

A much longer section follows on ‘Materials’. Here Alice describes the importance of children’s use of the elemental materials ‘with which man has to deal and from which the
The fabric of his world is constructed. These include water, sand, clay, wood, constructional materials, paint, fabrics and paper, and tools such as scissors, hammers, paint brushes, pencils. He learns purposeful use of these materials, and through experimentation discovers how to use them 'for his own purposes and self-expression.' In using sand, for instance, he first explores its qualities; 'the child will shift it about, sift it through his fingers, wet it and make lumps. He notices its weight and quick response to gravity. He notes its moulding quality when wet.' He may leave it for a while, then come back to it and dampens it to form streets for his toy cars and lorries.

Alice describes this process of 'experimentation, absorption or rest period, followed by purposeful usage' as true for children at any age between 3 and 7, 'though proceeding at different rates'. During this process:

The Teacher observes and gives helpful suggestions, particularly when the experiments go astray, from her adult wealth of experience.

For the child the pursuit of his purpose involves analysis, consideration, observation, adoption and use of social situations or experiences. For instance he is interested in a clock say Big Ben, a vivid scrap of life-drama, or a dock yard. He attempts to analyse and reproduce these things. He considers his efforts and compares with the original. He observes more carefully the discrepancies. With confidence he now adopts a familiar knowledge and later uses his so found knowledge.
The Teacher suggests and offers help. She uses these wonderful opportunities offered by the child so naturally, to hand over tuition. The child learns in an easy natural way. The processes may seem a little longer but how much fuller and more real the result. How much higher the standard. Children enjoy perfection. They welcome assistance to achieve it.

Here Alice describes a child’s process of learning, through pursuing his interest, finding ‘his purpose’, and making full use of his powers of ‘analysis, consideration, observation’. With help from the teacher, he will ‘come to ‘adopt a familiar knowledge’ of his subject. The teacher helps, offering ‘tuition’ that builds from the child’s interest, so that he learns ‘in an easy natural way’. This kind of learning takes time, but it is ‘more real’, reaches a higher standard, and for the child, ‘perfection’. When children’s learning is driven by their own interests and purposes, and by their inner drive to mastery, Alice implies, they do not resist instruction, or assistance, but welcome it.

In the next entry, ‘Learning’, the social aspects of learning in an institution is emphasized:

School must stretch the child to his utmost. He must discover his own faculties and must learn how to use these faculties to their best and most economical advantage.
School contacts will teach him the discipline of a planned society. For
school society there are two rules and the faithful observance of these two gives
complete social unity. They are

I. Materials and equipment should be used for their original purpose. Used
not abused.

II. Anything which may cause injury or unhappiness to another person is
wrong and is not allowed.

Above all, he will learn the acquired skills developed by a civilized

As teachers, we can stimulate his intellectual curiosity. We can challenge
him to capture these skills. The challenge accepted, we can feed and assist in the
development and consolidation of their mastery.

The mission of school is to help children ‘stretch’ themselves to develop their faculties to
the fullest, while at the same time contacts with peers and adults at school will help the
child learn how to live in ‘complete social unity’, in a planned society with other people.
The child will learn how to take care of materials, and to be considerate of others. School
will help children learn the ‘acquired skills’ that will help them fit into a civilized society.
The teacher’s job is to stimulate the child’s intellectual curiosity, and to challenge the
child to develop and consolidate the skills needed to satisfy his curiosity.

After the initial entries described above, where AY sets forth some of the basic principles
of education she wanted to impart to staff and parents at William Crane, the notebook
continues with detailed plans for curriculum in the areas of English, Writing, Number, The Library, Reading Apparatus and Games, Notes on the Use of Materials, etc. (as previously described). Pasted in is also a green sheet on ‘Analysis of the study of Number in the Infants’ School’, an entry on Creative Periods, on ‘Music, Physical Work, and Dancing,’ and one under the heading ‘Spiritual Development’. Here Alice makes the important comment, ‘All whose work is dedicated to the care of children and their education, realize the supreme importance of their spiritual development. If it offers no Philosophy for living, Education is useless.”

These are followed by an assessment of progress made during her first year of being head at William Crane. In this entry, Alice writes, under the heading, ‘Twelve Months Later’, that ‘the keynote has been steady development’. She goes on, ‘We realize that school is the place where children learn how to become adults. Their purpose here is to grow and mature harmoniously within the three-fold pattern of body, mind and spirit. .... The school environment must provide for this and the most important feature of this environment is the Teacher. For the young child particularly, she is the pattern of an adult. Thus we are presented with tremendous personal responsibility.’

The Environment, Discipline

Under the heading ‘the environment’ she writes, that teachers ‘provide materials for experiment and creative work which will exercise imagination as well as manipulative skill. Equally we provide material which will arouse and stimulate academic pursuits and
incentives to aesthetic appreciation. Man's raw materials, the 3 R's, music, worship, all (are) a few of the available surroundings'. And continuing, under the heading, The Learning Pattern, Alice writes, that it emerges as children handle this material 'in their workshop'. Teachers come to realize that learning 'is a matter of experiment, absorbtion and sudden revelation, rather than a series of graded stage'. She goes on, 'We keep in mind a general plan which we find is repeated in natural learning but within the framework of this plan, each child, if he is to achieve his best, must learn at his own rate. The accent is on Learning rather than Teaching'.

This entry ends with a note on 'Discipline', with an unqualified assertion that:

Teacher imposed discipline, operated by fear, has gone and its place has been taken by that real discipline which comes from within. Here is something which will support the child under all circumstances. It is a discipline born of appreciation and consideration of other people. Again we realize the importance of our own attitude to this regulation of our every day living and the child's faith in self control is strengthened by his observation of our own.

These basic principles, about the role of school, the teacher, the nature of learning, spiritual development, discipline, and social learning, first articulated in the early fifties, formed the framework for Alice's educational thought as it continued to develop through her tenure at William Crane, in the two years she spent as head of the Brooksby Primary School, and during her years of teaching college students at Nottingham College, When
she was invited to write the first of the Young Children Learning series, *Reaching Out*, she drew upon this body of thought, extending it with a wealth of details drawn from her own experience and that of her teaching staff, and from her work at the college supervising students on 'teaching practice.'

Alice Yardley’s published writing in the Young Children Learning Series remains remarkably faithful to the philosophical groundwork that she had set forth in this original document, *Philosophy for the Infant School, 1951-1959*. Each of the four books in the first edition of the series, *Reaching Out, Discovering the Physical World, Exploration and Language*, and *Senses and Sensitivity* addresses one aspect of the body of her thinking on education for the young child, with many illustrative examples. The four books that came after, *The Teacher of Young Children, Learning to Adjust, Young Children Thinking* and the *Structure of the Infant School*, expanded on the role of the teacher in the modern primary school, working with children’s individual behavioral and learning patterns, children’s cognitive development, and the organization of the classroom and infant and junior school in an informal child-centered program.

**The Philosophy in Practice: Diary**

Alice Yardley’s philosophy and goals for education had been well formed by the time she took over the Brooksby Primary School. The Diary she kept during this period, between 1959 and 1961, gives evidence of the fruits of such a philosophy. For the first time in her notebooks Alice uses the terms ‘informal’ and ‘child-centered’ to describe the approach
being taken at Brooksby. The diary records a number of classroom projects and activities that Alice considered good examples of this approach in action. In fact, as I discovered when rereading her published texts, several of the entries in the Diary, which describe actual classroom practice as it took place at Brooksby, were incorporated into the text as examples of children and teachers at work in the modern ‘Infant School’. In the case of the description of children involved in a study of the solar system, previously cited in Section 4 as it appears in Reaching Out, was taken, almost word for word, from the Diary. In current research terms, they were the data upon which she drew.

The Diary begins with her first impressions of this large new school, and its impressive library and ‘hall’ for movement and dancing. She describes the community it served as a ‘satellite town’, a new estate community, which at that time, was still feeling isolated from the rest of Nottingham and lacking in cultural or social resources. The diary tells us that her staff consisted of nine teachers, three in the infant department. The majority of her teachers she found ‘young, terrifically enthusiastic and very demanding’ and that ‘Very quickly, they became a grand little team’.

The Infant Department, Alice writes, ‘was immediately grouped vertically. The infant teachers ‘welcomed the arrangement’, and, she writes, ‘we soon put the minds of parents to rest over the question of “why hasn’t so & so moved up, gone into top infants etc.” In the Junior school, change proceeded more gradually. However, after some rearranging of class groupings, ‘a measure of vertical grouping had crept into the Junior department.’
Alice didn’t hesitate to make another change. She writes:

Throughout the school, apart from the hall time and pianist allowance, each teacher was given a free timetable. Juniors and Infants were encouraged to make their own day and to use to the full time available and all school spaces.

Parents did have questions about this new approach, however. They had been invited to submit questions they would like answered at the first General Meeting on October 15th, 1959 Alice writes in the Diary:

I had prepared a speech expounding my educational philosophy. When I read the many questions submitted, I discarded the speech and answered them instead... After speaking for nearly 2 hours I had given parents a pretty good idea of what I felt about most topics touching school life.

Nearly 200 parents attended. Discussion was lively and constructive. At the close of the meeting one parent expressed on behalf of the meeting a vote of confidence in Our Educational Theory.

It is up to us to let them see how it works.

Following this meeting, parents were invited to visit the school in small groups, and to come in once a month on Wednesday afternoon, as they had at William Crane. In that
way, ‘the teachers and I can reach each parent individually’ Alice writes. She apparently felt that she had won them over:

I find the parents interested in education. They are cooperative and very ready to express gratitude and approval where the welfare of their children is concerned. Already many of them have made it their business to give tangible evidence of their confidence in our way of working.

Yet misunderstanding about her approach did persist in some cases, as Alice notes. Here is an entry dated January, 1960:

A boy of 7 was transferred here from Cantrell (running on similar informal lines). His mother said anxiously, “I hope he’ll settle here. You see at the other school he’s done a lot of learning but he hasn’t had any proper lessons.”

Parents’ tendency to expect ‘proper lessons’ from school and to discount their children’s ‘learning’ when it was not formal continued to be an issue for Alice. Her next entry though, describes one enthusiastic child who seems to have benefited from the ‘free timetable’ at Brooksby, in contrast to what he had known at the ‘very formal school’ he had attended previously:
An intelligent boy of 9 came in from a very formal school. By the end of his first week I found him absorbed in making a book about the weather. “I’m enjoying this.” He remarked. “I love doing nature.”

I asked him, “Did you take nature at your other school?” “Oh yes” he explained. “But it was all on the time table. You had the BBC talk on Tuesday. Then it would be nature on again at 2:20 on Thursday”. He proceeded to reel off most of the timetable by heart.

“Do you like our way of working” I ventured. He was enthusiastic. “Rather. You see when I’d done in the other school, I had to wait for the others. But here I can go on all the time.”

Another entry, ‘Cotton’, also tells another story of a child coming from a more ‘formal’ school:

Deborah came to Brooksby at the end of October. She was 9. She came here from a very formal country school where she had spent two years. Previously she had attended three other schools, all of which were run on formal lines.

We found her intelligent, with a good command of language. Her mechanical arithmetic was good but she had little understanding as to its purpose.

She was by no means sociable, tending to pursue work as an obligation. She had little interest in creative opportunities, finding difficulty in expressing herself even with words.
She lacked spark and any vital interest in her environment. She could not find in the informal atmosphere of her new classroom, the habit of school life to which she had been accustomed. The other children left her alone after their initial overtures had been coldly received.

We talked to mother. At this stage she thought that an informal way of working was ‘all right’ for the boy of five but ‘Deborah should be doing harder work.’ She too found difficulty in understanding an unfamiliar environment.

One day, about three weeks after Deborah’s arrival, a group of children engaged in picture making, were discussing materials. Cotton materials, of various textures, were shown to the children. Deborah volunteered the information that her father worked in a nylon factory and could get her some bobbins of cotton. From being an onlooker, Deborah became part of the discussion.

Father was helpful. He sent many samples of cotton and nylon thread in various stages. Deborah found a companion with similar interests. They settled down to a joint study of cotton.

The teacher sent for a “cotton box” and a wide variety of illustrative material. She gave the two girls a huge wall atlas. They selected a variety of informative books from the library.

The obvious outcome was the book, guided by individual work cards, which the teacher produced.

More important was the effect on Deborah. She forgot much of her shyness. From being a solitary child she became one of a small group, with a particular
friend sharing her interest. She even changed her mind about missing the School Christmas Party and was the first to bring her Party Money.

Book Kept

This story of Deborah not only shows how an informal approach to curriculum might develop from children’s interests and a teacher’s responsive provision of relevant materials, it also points to the social aspects of learning. The academic outcome, the group’s book about cotton and where it came from, was not as important as its effect on Deborah’s sense of being a part of a small group, and of making a friend. For Alice, the overall well being of the children, in ‘mind, body, and spirit’ was advanced as much by making a friend as it was by learning specific skills and pieces of information.

Other entries describe the work of two boys in making a 16 yard ‘strip story’ from a series of drawings that depicted a railroad journey they had worked out from an old railway guide, and that of a group of children who had developed a ‘marked interest in poetry’, organized a ‘Poetry Club’, and then put on a concert of poetry reading they had invited Alice to attend. One girl who was receiving Speech Therapy, Alice writes, read several poems ‘with scarcely a fault’. The programme for this event, and the original poems written, Alice notes in the Diary, were preserved.

Under the caption, ‘Some notes on various pieces of work developed by class teachers’ is the following description of a ‘Carol Singing’ Project:
Mr. Robson enjoys singing. He is, I believe, in a choir himself. Six weeks before Christmas, he organized a choir for carol singing. Practice was arranged on two evenings a week from 4 to 4:30. Attendance was voluntary. Most of his children came regularly.

The choir decided to go carol singing on the Estate. A plan of that part of the estate which housed the children in the choir was made (3 inch = 110 yards). The home of each child was placed. Much mathematical value here: 1/16 mile, proportion, numbering streets, areas etc.

Children wrote individually to parents, explaining what they were doing, when they would visit and where the money would benefit.

They wrote to the Watch Committee for Official permit. They wrote to the Vicar offering proceedings for Church fund.

A suitable anthology of 15 carols was made, each child making his own copy. The carols were timed & arranged in groups of three (three sung at each house visited.). The whole was planned in two, one hour sessions.

Takings were estimated and later checked. The sum of 2 pound, 10 shillings and 0 pence was duly sent to the Vicar, who replied.

A number of side interests resulted. Some study of Scriptural background to carols. One group wrote and produced a Nativity play, using the carols from the anthology; paintings etc. Looking back this pursuit had opened up practically all aspects of school work. The social value between children, children and teacher, school and home, was well marked. I considered it an excellent piece of work.
The carol singing project shows children responding to their teacher’s enthusiasm with their own, pursuing group and individual interests, and learning a lot about ‘all aspects of school work’. As well as learning to sing well, they were involved in reading, writing, mathematical computation, economics, social service, historical research, and biblical studies. For Alice, this was indeed evidence of the success of an approach that gave teachers the freedom to bring their particular interests into the school, inspire their students, and then help them to pursue and develop their own ideas. It is not surprising that she called it ‘an excellent piece of work’.

Mr. Robson was a teacher in the Junior department. In the Infant school, which consisted of three classes, by the middle of the spring term the infant teachers were asking Alice if they could develop an idea of their own:

Their aim is to pool and use to their fullest extent every facility on the infant unit (3 classes). They plan to reproduce in school a way of life as closely related to day to day home life as possible.

Room 1 houses the post office, Wendy Houses, Clinic etc.

Room 2 Milk Bar and Shopping Centre

Room 3 Work rooms, Newspaper office, Etc.

The children organized a bus service along the corridor, working out timetable, prices etc. Children borrow money to use in shops and buses from bank.
The 3 teachers are prepared to pool their own special gifts too, so that all the infant children can secure full benefit from anything they can offer personally. Dressing up corner, water play, clay, sand, etc. are all used communally. The children return to their class groups for the end of morning quiet and discussion time. In the afternoon they tend to gather again round their own teacher.

Supervision and observation of children is no more involved than when a single class group use hall, corridor extension etc. I must admit that the Brooksby infant Unit lends itself to this arrangement. I shall watch this experiment carefully. So far the children are working in an absorbed and profitable way.

It seems that very quickly, Alice had seen the school, both the junior and the infant department, grow towards a place where her educational theory and philosophy was in full flourish. Teachers were taking the initiative to experiment; setting up their classrooms to provide ‘real life’ experiences: children pursue their interests and projects without interruption by arbitrary ‘timetables’, and are absorbed and engaged in learning.

Another interesting entry shows Alice eager to get to know the older children in the Junior school. In her first months at Brooksby, in order to prepare to assess Junior children in the area of their mathematical knowledge, Alice took ‘a group of 10-11 year old children for two 1 ¼ periods each week’ for the purpose of introducing them to ‘some aspects of the study of shape.’ She found that it was ‘extremely educative and interesting
to watch the development at 10 yrs, of a line of thought I had already pursued with children of 6 & 7.' Later, in an entry for March 3rd, 1960, captioned 'Discussion on Mathematics', Alice writes 'we have decided to concentrate for the moment on developing Mathematics through the school'. Discussion of what is going on in each classroom with a listing by ages is included; 'scale drawing of ships', 'mapping holiday routes' 'making skirts', building a meteorological station, taking averages in self measurement, and the 'infant bus' are included as ongoing mathematical endeavors. She ends with a note on the role the Infant school played in preparing for the junior school, writing, 'It is vitally important that the Infant school should provide the motive for skills which must be developed in the Junior school'.

Throughout the *Diary*, the emphasis is on the concrete evidence that ongoing school activities were providing of the success of an 'informal' approach. By this time Alice Yardley's philosophy was well developed. The purpose now was to record for herself and for posterity the expression of this philosophy in the actual events and school wide practices that were taking place at Brooksby.

**Importance of Records: raw material for Young Children Learning**

This diary makes clear that Alice took considerable time and effort to keep accurate records of what children were actually doing in classrooms. As we have seen, the description of children investigating the solar system included in section 3, as an example
of curriculum in an ‘integrated day’ program, that Alice describes in Reaching Out, was taken directly -- almost word for word - from this notebook.

Discovery of this last notebook -- which happened late in my research - confirmed for me that all along Alice kept records of individual children’s and teacher’s work in some form, but the Diary’ for Brooksby was perhaps the only ‘log’ of ongoing curriculum that she still had in her possession.

However the following passage from in Reaching Out, which Alice wrote in 1967 -68, makes clear the importance these type of day to day recordings, as well as the ‘philosophy’ and earlier Schemes notebook, were in providing the raw material from which she drew in order to write the books that made up the Young Children Learning Series:

Indeed the major part of this study of Young Children Learning is a development of the records kept by the author during her fifteen years’ experience as a headmistress in Infant and Infant/Junior Schools.’ (Reaching Out, p. 105)

Throughout her work Alice makes clear her view of the part played by teachers’ reflections and documentation in the development of ‘a scientific study’ from which theory is built, and upon which the schools’ philosophy’ can take hold:
‘In many schools head teachers keep records of developments throughout the school as a whole. Careful observation of experiences, linked with accurate recording, constitutes the scientific study of the job. From these recordings theory emerges and in this way the philosophy of the school is established. (Reaching Out, p.105)

And in Discovering the Physical World, we learn something more of the kinds of records kept by Alice and her teachers, from which she drew for her mature educational writing. In this passage she indicates that the ‘headmistress’ – herself - was in many ways the ‘keeper’ of ongoing documentation:

‘The first records made by children are verbal. Something exciting happens, so they want to talk about it and usually they tell their teacher. In the early stages the teacher can be the child’s tool. Many of the incidents recorded in these books were written down by teachers, (my italics) and books for such entries were kept in the headmistress’s room. When a significant event occurred a teacher would fetch the book and enter it, or else send it written on a piece of paper for the headmistress to enter. Sometimes a child would make the report verbally, and in a few cases the child would write up the incident. Books made by children are also a valuable part of a school’s records, and the contents of such books are quoted frequently throughout this series. (Discovering the Physical World, p. 72)’
From these references in Alice Yardley’s published work, and from evidence found in the notebooks themselves, it seems evident that, in the ongoing development of her educational thought, her habit of reflecting on her philosophy of education, pedagogy, and of keeping written records of teachers and children at work, helped her to clarify her ideas. These reflections and documents, based in her personal experience as a classroom teacher and head teacher became the foundation on which she drew in her next position as a college lecturer, and ultimately, as the author of the *Young Children Learning Series*. 
Published Writing

Young Children Learning

Alice had been at Nottingham College teaching college students, supervising them on ‘teaching practice’, and giving personal support to her tutees for 8 years. In 1967 she was asked by her publisher Evans Bros to write the first book in what was to be the Young Children Learning series. It was with her advance for this commission that she put a down payment on a bungalow just being built in the nearby village of Keyworth.

Since 1959, Alice had been a regular contributor to Scholastic Magazine, and Child Education, writing articles on various aspects of teaching young children on such subjects as developing mathematical understanding, movement, and the benefits of having a male teacher. As she told me, teachers who read her articles often wrote to the publishers to express their appreciation, and this enthusiasm eventually lead her to the book offer from Evans Brothers, publishers of Scholastic, for a projected series on the topic of learning and the young child.

Gratified to learn of her readers’ desire to hear more from her, Alice launched into writing the first of the series, Reaching Out, shortly after she moved into her own bungalow in the village of Keyworth, about ten miles from the college campus in Clifton. The purpose of the series was, as Alice writes in the Author’s Note for Reaching Out, a studied consideration of ‘issues affecting the organization and work of the modern Infant
School".

Working every night from 7 to 9 p.m. and again early in the morning, when she woke at 4:30 a.m. to write for several hours before driving her car into Clifton, Alice completed the book while still teaching full time at Nottingham College. She wrote in pencil, then copied these first manuscripts on her small black typewriter, hunched over her desk in the glass windowed living room. She recalls one of her neighbors on the cul-de-sac inquiring of her ‘don’t you ever sleep?’ He had noticed her light on early every morning when he left for work, and late at night too.

The typed manuscripts for Reaching Out, like all those I have seen, show very few corrections or additions from the penciled first draft. Alice was remarkably able to organize her thoughts coherently once she put pencil to paper. She worked from an outline, and followed it closely. Following the completion of Reaching Out, she wrote the three next books in quick succession, each between 00 and 150 typewritten pages. All four books were written between 1967 and 1969.

Many of the themes that I’ve traced from the beginning of her life in the preceding sections are articulated in Reaching Out and the others in the original series, Exploration and Language, Discovering the Physical World, and Senses and Sensitivity, all published in 1970 by Evans Brothers. These themes are; freedom to move and explore (purple haze, brown paint, playground), the value of individual and personal self-expression (balls and sticks, brown paint), drawing out and honoring every child’s gift (Eric and the
ball of wool,), listening to children, following children’s interests, (writing books ‘about me’), the value of first hand experience (‘Coo, miss, a cow’), and the importance of aesthetic experiences (the boy and the harp). Woven throughout are observations and insights about the nature of the teacher’s role as she interacts and builds relationships with her students, and the joy of working with children as they learn and grow. In the introduction Alice Yardley makes clear the part played by her own experience in her writing:

‘Fundamental to these books is a careful examination of the teacher’s job, and frequent reference is made to the work she does and the responses she gains from the children. I have, therefore, recorded as simply as possible what I feel to be true about children and I quote extensively from personal experience and from the experience of parents, teachers and children I know well. My first intention is to capture the joy shared by adults and children who are privileged to live and work in the Infant Schools of today.” (Reaching Out, p.8)

Indeed, what we find in Reaching Out, and in her subsequent books in the series, are full and detailed descriptions of classrooms in action; what children were doing, and what teachers actually did to stimulate their learning, absorption, and engagement in ‘active purposeful learning’. Curriculum in the areas of physical science, nature study, geography, language arts, math, movement and music, and art making is shown through stories of individual children and teachers at work.
The schools and classrooms described in Alice Yardley’s books are not identified by name or geographic location, but by phrases such as ‘in one large infant school’ or ‘one head teacher’. Not even the city of Nottingham is mentioned. This has the effect, or at least it did for me, of making it seem as if these sorts of classrooms could exist anywhere, in any town or in any country.

When I first read Alice Yardley’s books in my small town of Starksboro, Vermont, I could easily imagine that the stories of children and teachers she described could be those of my own students and myself. Her deftness in articulating principles of learning and teaching in the context of individual classroom life meant that her readers could paint their own picture of the infant school approach she described. Her writing invited them to envision and feel how such an approach could work in their own particular context, and gave them the courage and tools to make it happen.
Reaching Out

The core of Alice Yardley’s values and beliefs about education, and the pedagogy and practice that she developed, are found in this first volume. In many ways, *Reaching Out* provides a framework through which to look at her mature educational thought. Consequently, I will lead the reader through the text, summarizing and discussing its contents in some detail. This synopsis represents my own paraphrasing and distillation of the key points Alice makes: quotation marks or indents are used when the words come directly from her text. This section will continue with similar but less extensive treatment of the subsequent books in the original series, *Exploration and Language, Discovering the Physical World, and Senses and Sensitivity*, as they provide or deepen understanding of her central ideas.

I have used here the original Evans Brothers’ edition of these first four books in the *Young Children Learning Series*. Throughout the series, Alice Yardley refers to classroom teachers generally as female, and the universal ‘child’ as male, a conventional practice at the time. When the books were reissued by a Canadian publisher, Rubicon Press, in 1988, editor Wendy Auger, with Alice Yardley’s permission, made some changes to refer to teachers as both male and female, and to use ‘she’ as well as ‘he’ in describing ‘the child’, reflecting contemporary gender-inclusive language. The names of teachers and children were also changed in some cases, to indicate greater ethnic and cultural diversity.
The Rubicon edition provided a great service in making Alice Yardley’s books, which were out of print, available to the public once again. For the purposes of this dissertation, I chose to work with the original edition, since it more completely reflects her own language and thought, and the children and teachers that she knew. British spellings have been retained (in spite of spell check functions!) wherever possible, such as in ‘child-centred’, and ‘neighbour’.

The Text: Reaching Out

The role of the teacher in the modern infant school has clearly changed. Now we see the teacher moving amongst the children, rather than above them instructing them. Children’s inborn desire and urge to learn drives his development. Learning has an experiential and a social basis, and originates in sensory interaction with the physical world, people, and things. The young child learns in an integrated fashion, in harmony with all parts of himself, his body, sensations, emotions, and intellect. Children’s primary mode of learning is through play. Playful processes of exploring people, relationships, materials and their environment, is seen as the basis for young children’s growing understanding of their world. These processes, and the concentration and deep engagement that precede and make possible internal understanding, need unbroken periods of time.

First comes the active exploration of the material, forcing it to reveal its true nature, then an internalizing period, a quiescent stage, then and a return to the material with purpose
in mind. The quiescent stage is the most important phase. It is here that knowledge of the material becomes part of the child’s mind; future use of the material is a byproduct of this. 48

Parents and teachers work together to bring together the world of home and school, and to build relationships that give unity to the child’s experience as he moves from one to the other. While at school, the teacher’s job is to preserve and celebrate the robust individuality of the young child: to help the child ‘develop’ all aspects of his or her personality, in a manner that is true to his individual and personal pattern. School represents only one stage in a life-long learning process. Children continue at school to learn from real things and from what they do: from personal experience, not from ‘being told’. While the pattern and sequence of stages are the same for all people, each individual is unique in the way his pattern varies from the ‘mythical’ average child, and must be taken into account. Development should be thought of in stages rather than ages, and each stage should be ‘lived fully’, not rushed along. Modern education aims to better tailor the system to the individual child. Effective learning depends on the teachers’ skill in timing, and attunement to children’s critical periods of growth, and sustained interest. The teacher (and adult) who listens, and who encourages the child to talk and ask questions, finds clues to the child’s thoughts and abilities, and is the child’s best educator.

Children are active participants in their own learning. As Dewey as written: ‘an end which is the child’s own carries him on to possess the means of its accomplishment ‘

48 Alice Yardley makes reference to Piagetian theory here.
Intentional learning is more effective than incidental learning. The environment should provide stimulation for aptitudes to emerge at the earliest possible moment; books should be available from the start. The more varied and interesting the environment the more the child reaches out to it. Learning is the bridge between the world within the child and the world which surrounds him.

Children are born with the ability to learn; it is our responsibility as adults and teachers to ensure the full development of these abilities, not by pushing the child, but by taking into account the child’s moment of readiness, and beginning there.

Individuality and the Development of the Person

The individuality of the child – the ‘perpetual phenomenon of human nature’, must be taken into account in planning for the education of young children. Children vary in many ways; size, intelligence, sociability, temperament, intelligence, creativity; while they can be persuaded to conform to the ‘cultural pattern’, their nature is to spontaneously express their unique natures.

The child deserved to be studied and treated as a separate individual, not a miniature adult. Child-centered education follows the thrust of earlier thinkers who put the emphasis on the child himself:
It took educational reformers such as Comenius and Pestalozzi to point out that children should be recognized in their own right and that those responsible for the upbringing and education of children should focus their attention on the child himself, rather than the image they planned to mould him into.

Many adults still believe that school is a place where a child is instructed into becoming a useful citizen rather than into becoming himself...The joy and satisfaction to be found in teaching is a by-product of helping a child to discover what he is as a person and then assisting him to become that person and nobody else. (Reaching Out, p. 26)

Teachers deny their individuality through imposition of adult ideas of ‘perfection’, and by telling them what to think when they have thoughts of their own. Children cannot be what they are not.

Belief in the value of the individual has a moral and religious basis. We matter because we are each unique, an expression of ‘a unique spark given us by the Creator’. People only know they live when they are respected and needed as special separate persons. Unless we feel we matter to others, life is meaningless.

We must help each child feel that she counts, that she belongs, and that we approve of her. How else can she be encouraged to become what she is intended to be? Above all,
we must help the child ‘discover her own individual pattern’, to like it when she finds it, and then to help her ‘nourish her individuality towards its ultimate maturity.’

Children need to learn to take their place in a complex society. Child-centred education is centred in the nature of the child, and its aim is the fullest development of the child’s personality.

The child’s sense of himself influences the ‘pattern’ of his personality, and those who are responsible for the child in his early years are inextricably bound up in his own idea of self. Personal relationships are the dynamic field in which children learn and grow. Children’s ‘self-idea’ reflects the ideas important others have of him. A child of attentive parents trusts new people he meets to respond to him with affection and interest, and often his trusting nature elicits a similar response in those he encounters. A neglected child ‘sees himself as a poor thing’ (p.27); a child of ambitious parents will need the school’s help to, ‘enjoy his work and make him concentrate less on striving after the approval of an adult’.

School offers the companionship of peers. Children stretch their minds to get along with other children, and to understand their different perspectives: they are stimulated by the exchange of ideas. In some ways, they learn more from being with them than with their teacher.
The teacher, because she is not the parent, can ‘spark off’ aspects of the child’s personality that might have remained dormant at home. If the child likes the teacher, what the teacher approves of in her will become more established. The child will model her developing self on the teacher.

Other adults in the school are important to children’s development; visitor, janitor, bricklayer. They are part of a widening group of relationships. All the child learns from them is fitted into the emerging ‘pattern’ of his person. They are helping him to reach out towards the adults he will become.

The importance of the environment

Opportunities for active learning and the provision of materials are essential, but when learning stems from children’s own interests, the quality of ‘active learning’ is inherently higher. Comparison of children at work in two different schools, both working with plentiful materials and chances for individual activity are instructive, as Alice describes:

Sharon and two of her friends arrived at school one morning carrying a jam jar. The toad at the bottom or the jar had been found in Sharon’s garden. Ten minutes later Sharon’s teacher rescued the toad from being committed to the aquarium. ‘Toads don’t live in water,’ she explained. ‘We’ll fetch the book on frogs, toads and newts from the library and find out how he foes live. You didn’t find the toad in the water, did you?’
Later on in the morning the toad was taken into the school service as a
treasure to share with the whole school. When the local inspector arrived to see
the headmistress the toad was brought in to show ‘Sir’ too.

‘She can jump,’ the children informed ‘Sir’. ‘She can jump high’.

The toad was placed on the carpet and a pencil extended in front of her.
Sharon tickled the back of the toad’s neck and she obliged. ‘Sir’ rose to the
occasion. ‘How high does she jump?’ he enquired.

The children fetched a ruler and decided that the toad’s jump was nine inches
which was ‘very high for anybody so little’. Sharon lifted Toad back into the jam
jar.

‘She doesn’t’ weigh very much,’ she said thoughtfully. With a fresh idea
in mind, the children went back to their classroom.

At lunchtime the teacher decided ‘it’s rather hot in here for Toad. I think
she’d be happier back in Sharon’s garden.’ Rather reluctantly the children agreed.

‘But they haven’t all seen what she can do,’ they complained.

‘You could write it all in a book,’ the teacher suggested. ‘If we put the
book in the library corner everyone who comes to the school can read about
Toad.’

In the afternoon Sharon and her two friends wrote their book. This was the
first book Sharon had made and she needed her teacher’s help with the words. ‘If
we’re writing a book about Toad,’ she said, ‘we must give her a name.’ The book
was illustrated and contained the following observations.
‘This is Prudens our toad...this is Prudens in the tank...We found it in Sharon’s garden...Toads lay eggs in a pond. The eggs hatch into tadpoles...Toads do not live in water...She can jump nine inches...She weights an ounce.’

Sharon and her friends were six years old. Between them during the day they had taken up perhaps fifteen minutes f their teacher’s time. They had used a number of other people and books to extend their discovery of toads. They worked in a classroom of forth children whose age ranged from five to seven.

What were some of the other thirty-seven children doing that day? (p. 50)

Alice Yardley goes on to describe Jose’ making a collage depicting a doll with a round cheese box face and a green velvet skirt.

She sat stroking to soft fabric scraps left in her hand and said, ‘She must have a cardigan.’

She spread out the scraps and started to plan how the complicated shapes could be cut from her meager remnants. Her mathematical ingenuity enabled her to provide the required cardigan.

An older boy makes a model of the Jodrell Bank telescope with an old sieve and pieces of wire. ‘At this point his creative effort was his way of finding out about the telescope’.

Later his teacher would give him a library book, but didn’t interrupt his ‘imaginative thinking’ at this stage. Another child ‘ five-year-old Keith’ at the ‘water trolley is tipping
water the water this was and that, lifting it against the light, in a jug and discovers the
water level remains the same no matter how he moves it.

‘He noticed his teacher and delight flushed his face as he explained: ‘It stays the
same, it always stays the same.’ He had discovered one of the basic principles of
the behavior of water and from now on the knowledge would be his. (p.50)

In a similar classroom in a different school, Alice Yardley writes, there are plenty of
interesting materials, and children are working individually and in small groups: five year
old Ian is laboriously filling in an outline of a giraffe with tiny bit of paper, something his
teacher asked him to do. ‘We’re making a frieze about animals and Miss C said I had to
make the giraffe’, he comments. Soon his patience is running out, and frequent glances
at the vast expanse still left to fill betray his lack of involvement in his teacher’s, not his,
idea.

Other children in this school are experimenting with a ‘heap of dry sand’, but their
equipment, only a bucket and a sieve, doesn’t take them far. At the weighing table
children are following instructions written on cards, and at another, four children are
making books about birds that are all identical.

Alice Yardley compares these two programs:
In the first school learning stemmed from the children’s interests. Sharon brought her source of interest into school and found means of extending it. Several kinds of learning in different areas – reading, writing, measuring and natural history, in this example, sprang from the same interest. Stimulating material provided by the school, and the teacher’s knowledge of its educative value, sparked off interest in other children. (p. 52)

Children are provided with choices, and then become ‘active agents’ in their own learning. The child’s sense of purpose leads in a number of different directions. Jose in order to make a dress for her doll had to do mathematical calculations to make sure to cut her one piece of fabric in such a way as to make the best use of it.

In the second classroom, ‘the teacher had decided in advance what the child should learn from the material she provided. The collage originated in her mind and she used the children to give expression to her idea. She even gave Ian material of the right color….’

Children in a school that has only the superficial aspects of an active program may be doing ‘art work’ but it is for purposes the teacher has set, not for their own. Limited equipment can curtail exploration, as well as too many directions as to how to use it.(p. 52)

In the end, spontaneous learning does not stem from whether or not the child is working individually, but from the ‘educational aims of the teacher. The mere provision of
material, equipment and individual work does not in itself constitute an informal
approach.' (p. 53)

There is a world of difference between instruction and self-activated
learning, between directed activity and spontaneous investigation. These
differences are reflected in the vitality of the educational opportunities offered the
child. The fundamental difference between an education centred in the child’s
needs and one based on formal tuition or training is the difference between
helping the child to understand and telling him what to do and think. (p. 53)

Preparation of the Environment

A good environment will offer material that sparks interests in the minds of children of
varying abilities and inclinations. It will enable children to further their interests,
challenge them, demand their utmost effort, lead them to further vistas, and keep them
perpetually reaching out to learn more about the world. A degree of frustration or tension
can enhance the quality of effort.

The environment should be rich but not over stimulating. Children need places to rest,
meditate, and which afford a ‘breathing space’ to consolidate their understandings.
Perpetual stimulation ‘allows no time for inner growth’. The ‘fallow’ periods are
essential for children to gain inner peace that sustains them, and harmony in their spirit.
‘The opportunity to reflect is essential to the development of sound thinking’.
The most powerful influence in any classroom is the mind of the teacher; this is where the design and provision of the environment starts. How the children use the environment and what they make of it reflects teachers' enthusiasm and interest. The quality of their knowledge depends on where she put the emphasis. Emphasis on the end product may bring recognition to the teacher, but it can dampen the process of learning for the child. A teacher whose ultimate aim is the full development of the children as people puts the emphasis on this process, and finds her success in the children’s ability ‘to live successfully’, not in their success at producing results. The two aims will lead to very different plans for how to prepare and design the school environment.

The child needs to find in the school environment much that is familiar and home-like, as well as new and more challenging experiences which will extend learning done in the home.

What the teacher provides in the classroom determines the direction of the child’s learning. She guides him towards educational opportunities but what he learns from them depends on his individual interest and ability. Because children are so different, the teacher must provide a wide range of experiences, including those outside the school; shops, the market, trees and living things, the sun and the atmosphere and weather, are all sources of learning. Most important are people. Children learn from each other, and every adult in the school is in some way his educator.
The teacher must not only equip the child’s environment but must be fully aware of the learning possibilities of environmental situations:

The teacher, as we have seen, does not decide what the child will discover but, if she knows what he can discover, by asking the right question or by introducing a further challenge at the right moment she will lead him almost unconsciously towards what can be found (p.56)

Exploration and construction with ‘man’s natural materials’ such as sand, water, and ‘bricks’ (wooden blocks), introduce children to a ‘great many scientific principles’, and ‘challenge the imagination’. Interesting simple equipment can how a child, for example, how water behaves. Work with clay and wood ‘are part of the child’s discipline’. They present problems that must be resolved in order for the child to learn to handle them and achieve her desired result. Working with these materials provides emotional and creative outlets, and dramatic play gives children the opportunity to act out real life situations, a place to work out, through imaginative role playing, their emotional and social problems.

All manner of painting media, and paper enlarge a child’s creative opportunity; and collage with a wide variety of media; fabrics, shells, wheat etc, may stimulate new ways to express children’s ideas and personal experience.

A well equipped writing table will encourage children to explore their use of words; make their own books. Interesting recycled (waste material) materials bring new ideas for
construction. An old wireless set leads to discoveries about magnets and copper wire.

Parents can help, and their contribution and its use help them understand ‘modern ideas’.

Books are the background to learning, and ‘how children use books in school is an index to the learning that is taking place there.’ Outdoor environments can be enhanced with inexpensive ‘junk’ material transformed into objects which encourage imaginative construction.

In every school there should be some corner reserved for the display of beautiful and unusual objects and the ‘lovely things made by children’s hands’. The presence of these things promotes ‘the growth of the spirit’. Children will learn to love and respect things which are ‘pleasant to see, feel and hear’. Such beautiful objects – a piece of good pottery, length of silk, a crystal jar, or a delicate piece of embroidery - can be left where children can enjoy them at their leisure.

Children cannot learn in a vacuum. They need a selection of materials that inspire learning, and that give them a sense of the underlying purpose behind them.

Vertical Grouping, Open Plan and the Integrated Day

When the child is recognized as an individual, vertical grouping makes more sense. It is a flexible arrangement whereby by each child is placed in the group which suits him best.
Teachers have time to let the child develop from stage to stage more naturally. Vertical grouping fosters family feeling throughout and ‘the school works together as a unit’.

Open-plan building encourages interaction and sharing between classrooms. Liberal ways of working encourage experiment with organization. This way of working demands more of teacher but they enjoy being stretched. “In all my experience I have never felt so near to my children. I go home exhausted every night, but I just couldn’t change back.” 49

The Infant school does not provide education in isolation. It is a link between Nursery and Junior School. ‘Its existence as a community is as a part of a total primary pattern.’ (p.66) Staff and teacher in each school work together to ensure continuity for children leaving one community and entering the next.

Teachers and children in the ‘Infant Schools of today’ do not relate to each other through organization, or by certain methods or theories. They are living together as fellow human beings, ‘eager to share vital experiences’:

Life here is based on the nature of the children and upon the teacher’s knowledge of the way in which they live and grow and learn. All that happens here is in fact an expression of the truth that “life educates”. (p. 46)

49 This teacher’s comment is also mentioned in Alice Yardley’s Memoir, see Chapter 4, section 3.
Children are not aware of time in the adult sense, and become ‘lost in the wonder of what they find’ and remain absorbed until they have made each experience a part of themselves. This is the mode of learning which comes most naturally to children.

Arranging the day as naturally as possible takes this into account. Creating a structure to the child’s day in school, so that children can pursue their own interests calls for thinking of the day as a ‘single span of time in which to work’. This is a more informal way of working, and the hallmark of an integrated day program.

‘Creative play’ in this school was a period on the timetable, taking place at the beginning of the day. It was followed by a period called the 3 R activities. In the ‘creative play’ period a group of boys converted an old milk-trolley into a bus. At pack-away time they were ready to put the bus on the road and wanted to make out a timetable for its journey. Instead of switching their attention to the work cards on ‘the clock’, which the teacher had prepared for them, she said they could carry on. By the end of the morning the boys had worked out a timetable at ten-minute intervals, had made tickets, a plan of the bus route and time sheets for the driver and the conductor.

‘A real bus does sixty,’ one boy observed. ‘Ours only goes slow.’

The teacher felt satisfied about the ground covered in their enthusiasm and felt justified in letting them use the time in this way. They were showing her the value of being free to carry an interest through and treat the day as a single span of time.’ (p.70).
Integration across areas in an informal program cannot be imposed but grows slowly and as a result of teacher’s growing confidence in children’s ability to learn in ways natural to their individual growth:

In other words, if we have faith in our children as active agents of their own learning it is they who show us the need for work to be seen in terms of absorbing and wide-ranging interests, and it is they who effect a gradual change in classroom procedure. (p. 70)

The teacher can begin with the physical appearance of the classroom, furniture and the range and quality of material. Imaginative materials and vital situations are the most effective agents of integration. Provided with absorbing and satisfying work, teachers gain confidence in ‘freeing children to ‘learn fully from what we offer, instead of learning only within the limits of the work we direct them to do’. (p.71). Following these basic principles, school becomes a ‘dynamic force’, adjusting to the ever-varying needs of children. Well-organized classrooms inspire children to learn to manage and be responsible for their materials and work.

The range of experiences provided in an informal classroom where the school day is integrated are conceived in terms of activities rather than separate subjects, real-life situations rather than subject bound periods.
Arrangement of the classroom to reflect this calls for creative ways to divide spaces for small groups of children to work. Tables can replace desks, and quiet areas for meditation must be included.

If children are to work happily in a ‘free atmosphere’ they need the security of good planning and organization. Children can be educated to take orderly care of their classroom, and the time spend developing responsible classroom habits is well spent. (See example of solar system)

A balance of group and individual participation is characteristic of an integrated day, and informal approach, A balance between teacher initiated interests and activity arising from the spontaneous interests of the children, enrich the program, though not easy to determine.

The following incident illustrates how interest can be activated by material produced by the teacher. During one ‘collective period’ at the end of the day she showed the children a wooden bowl that her father had carved from oak, beautifully made and polished to show the grain. The children responded with appreciation. The next morning when they arrived they found a display of ‘Wood’:

It contained the bark from various trees, a log of pinewood, samples of many kinds of wood and pieces of veneer, a beautifully shaped wooden spoon from Sweden, an Indian ring box made from sand-wood, a carved cherry-wood statue
from Japan, a baby’s rattle made in teak, a spinning-wheel, an old cart-wheel made from wood bound by an iron rim, a cider barrel and a rocking chair put together without nails.

This display led children to a number of areas of investigation. One group compared the floating quality of various woods, others to spin wool, find out what cider was, and how to make it. A number returned to the woodwork bench with fresh inspiration, ‘while one child painted a pattern clearly inspire by the grain of the oak in the bowl. They were learning through their various interests, but these interests originated in their teachers’ enthusiasm. ‘Work of this kind, where teachers and children are free of unnecessary restrictions, opens unexpected sources of discovery for both teacher and children. (p. 76)

Home and School: Mental Health

Education of the whole child calls for cooperation between parents and teachers, and a child cannot develop as she should if school and home are separated worlds, for her home life and the school life together create her living day. School must help parents build confidence in themselves and what the school is attempt. They need to know that their children are ‘our joint concern’. ‘Their children are our guests, and between them we help them grow’.
Parents can be invited into the school regularly, and day-to-day incidents often provide important occasions to communicate about children's progress, and to build relationships. Teachers can help parents through understanding of family situations, and suggestions for children's social adjustments and making friends.

'The mental health of individuals depends on the opportunity they have for the full expression of themselves as persons. Personal fulfillment is usually accompanied by happiness, and happiness in children is a sign that what they are doing is bring them satisfaction. Positive attitudes to life help a person to make satisfactory adjustments. Children who learn to view the world as a place which is full of opportunity and interest, and as a place where they can make full contribution, will be in a much better position than children who learn to fear the world, distrust the people they meet, and doubt their ability to cope with it'. (p. 59)

Teachers help children feel in harmony with their surroundings; and promoting their mental health depends on 3 factors: they must feel accepted as they are, they must find recognition of their needs as individuals; and the quality of relationships in the school community should enable children to learn from other personalities. The teacher herself provides the link between the child and the experiences offered in school.

In making the sometimes difficult transition from being in the care of their parents, and entering into the world of school, the teacher helps the child become absorbed in
something in the immediate environment. This takes their minds off themselves and what they are leaving behind. Integration of the personality depends on self-acceptance. The teacher accepts all that the child is.

Freedom in the modern school is not the same as license. Freedom means freedom of choice within certain limits. In equipping the environment the teacher guides the child in choice of activity; but the child is free to select a job, which interests him. Then he becomes responsible. He can apply for help but is independent much of the time.

The child’s self-chosen job is important to him and he focuses on it with attention and concentration; he has not time to waste on ‘anti-social behavior’. The freedom of choice and the ‘discipline of the chosen task create the atmosphere for active methods of teaching. Once the job is chosen, the teacher ensures that the child fulfill his responsibility to complete the task to the best of his ability.’

Geoffrey was academically weak, but he was interested in knitting and completed a square for the blanket which was to be sent to the refugees. He then said he would like to make a book bout his knitting, so the teacher stapled a few pages together for him, using as the cover the piece of pink card he had chosen himself.

Then minutes later the teacher found Geoffrey’s book. On the first page there was a drawing the size of a pea and a bit of scribble in one corner. Geoffrey
was missing. She found him watching the rabbits. ‘I couldn’t write “Knitting”,’ Geoffrey complained.

‘You know what to do if you want help with a word,’ she reminded him. ‘I made the book for you with a piece of my bet card. We agreed, didn’t we, that you would write it all down? I will help you and we’ll do a page each day until it’s finished.’ Geoffrey was extremely proud of his book when it was finished and kept it to show Mother on visiting day. (p. 87)

The flexible environment of the informal school encourages children to be individuals, and when not expected to conform to a ‘recognized pattern’, it reveals both children’s assets and their idiosyncrasies. It also gives scope for dealing with problems and helping children solve them, (physical problems such as deafness, stuttering, or enuresis, and broader social problems such as an unsatisfactory role in the family group, faulty relationships, or poor physical environment). The influence of the home, and parental attitudes, though, can limit what the teacher can do to help. The teacher can build the child’s confidence by giving him praise, and small jobs, which make him, feel responsible.

Deficiencies in any aspect of the child’s life lead to disturbance of personal growth. Growth and development and learning are interrelated and inseparable. Emotional health along with all other aspects of the child is dependent on complete and satisfactory development.
Central to the child’s environment is his teacher. What she is as a person matters more than anything else. In her the child needs to find integrity and that harmony of the person which supports him in all circumstances:

Many of our children come from homes where adults are in a state of conflict, and where there is little harmony: they depend on their teacher for a measure of serenity.

Sometimes, for a child to be near a quiet person is in itself enough. The most positive contribution the teacher can make to the mental health of the child is to be the right kind of human being, possessing an inner serenity which helps to establish a balanced emotional climate for the children who depend on her. (p. 90)

The Gifted Child and the Slow Learner

Gifted children and the slow learner have much in common. They differ from the norm in that they learn at different rates, but they generally follow the same sequence as all children do.

Intelligence can be measured in terms of differences in performance. The child’s capacity to reason, to benefit from past experience and to perceive relationships, is accepted as evidence of intellectual capacity.
The relative importance of heredity and environment has not yet been established. The blueprint of future development is laid down at birth, but environment plays a vital part in the attainment of potential. The brain if starved of stimulation cannot develop intellectual capacity, intact and effective sense organs provide the link between the environment and the mind. Interest plays a part: Intelligence moves along paths associated with our interests.

Intelligence is shown in the nature of children’s responses and problem solving ability. Curiosity and understanding are expressed in many ways, but most reliably in children’s use of words; their language development. A broader definition of educational development which went beyond academic attainment should be considered; children’s physical ability or slowness is equally important. We could define four types of intelligence: verbal, mechanical, social and creative. Some children are gifted in many of these areas. Others in very few.

Gifted children should not be made to conform to our idea of the normal pattern. Their gifts need to be acknowledged and provided for. Slower children are slow only in relation to the group. There may be many reasons; intellectual capacity, physical defect, impairment of sensory apparatus, muscular coordination, a congenital defect of lack of oxygen during birth. Other children have emotional problems stemming from poor relationships with people the child depends on.
Children growing up in poverty and without a stable caretaker are living under conditions which offer little chance for personal fulfillment. When there are no books in the home, and a low level of subsistence, academic progress is hindered. Whatever the cause, the child’s slower pace must be accepted. Rather than drilling in number facts, for example, she needs the ‘stimulation of a vital environment yet with time for consolidation, for reflection, for assimilation. Hurrying will only hinder the development of difficult processes such as reading and number. Though early diagnosis is essential, we must give these children a chance to develop among normal children, and not separate them out (before seven) Some may need special treatment, but many can be educated more adequately by belonging to normal groups. Often slower developing children given time will reach a socially effective level, proving that slower learning is a ‘self-curing disease’. (p. 95)

Their most desperate need is to acquire the skill of reading. Some children from homes that are materially well off also have trouble reading such as Marianne with her ‘expensive little dresses and pretty hair style’ whose superficial brightness blinded her teachers to her need for remedial reading instruction. However, given helpful conditions, time, and a sympathetic teacher, most children can learn to read, ‘ and so lead an adequate life in a literate society’. (p. 97)

Gifted children and slow learning children both need to be accepted as members of the group, yet provide for their particular requirements. They need understanding teachers,
parents, and suitable methods and materials to alleviate emotional as well as intellectual difficulties.

Gifted children may not fit their parents' ideas of what they should be like, in order to be socially successful. For the girl who loves math, and has little interest in clothes, and the boy who prefers books to football, growing up may present great problems. Some teachers feel threatened by children who are more intelligent than they are, and fail to see that she can help a child more intelligent than herself, and that there is great joy for herself in doing so. ‘It takes a mature person to rejoice in the academic achievement of others.’ (p. 98)

Many gifted children are desperately unhappy through lack of understanding, and their gifts are lost to society. They learn to hide their knowledge, or their special abilities may languish if they are not recognized. These children need the opportunity to explore their gifts and develop them, and they need the challenge of minds as sharp as their own. But they are still children and they need to grow socially and emotionally within a normal group if they are to become whole in personality. They need to be loved, accepted and respected for what they are.

As individuals we can realize our potential only through belonging to a community. For some this takes longer than others. ‘Whether we become what is in us to become depends on many things. What we possess at birth will develop and flourish, or deteriorate, or become warped, according to the opportunity offered by our environment. Parents and
teachers are made more fully aware of the joint nature of their responsibility when their children learn at different rates.' The individual develops in community.

The Teacher’s Job

The teacher of young children needs to be a specialist in children. She needs to be an authority on children in order to assess the findings of researchers and theorists such as Isaacs, Piaget, or Bernstein, and to estimate the claims made by promoters of new technologies and strategies for teaching in the field. Primary teacher often have great insight into children, but their intuitive and emotional thinking must be supported by a foundation of knowledge and intellectual understanding.

The teacher is not a mother substitute, and her role is very different from that of a parent. Not being emotionally involved in the child’s life in the same way, the teacher can stimulate intellectual development in the child, and challenge her into fresh growth.

Through her professional training, which includes the study of educational psychology, sociology, history and philosophy the teacher learns to take a more detached and informed view of education than the average person. She will see the research worker as an ally, and will know that there are many different forms of organization and methods in education, yet she will understand that ultimately her own judgment and personal philosophy will be called upon to make decisions and solve educational problems. As she learns to read and evaluate, write and discuss, she will become more secure in what she
believes, and develop a sense of conviction. ‘Above all she will study, and continue to study her children so that in the words of the Plowmen Report she may ‘bring to bear on [her] day-to-day problems astringent intellectual scrutiny’ (Par. 550).’ (Cited in Reaching Out, p. 103)

Because the teacher’s job involves her essentially in the ‘human situation’, she cannot expect to solve all the problems presented by people. In spite of all a teacher has learned about child development, she will constantly come up against behavior she cannot explain and disappointment she cannot rectify.

Education for the profession of teaching entails becoming articulate about one’ work. Teachers should be able to explain to parents, administrators and Directors of Education how children learn to read in a modern classroom, why a piece of equipment is needed, and to describe her work and ideas to students in training. She must carry in her mind a map of her profession. (see Notebooks)

Only the mature personality is secure enough to encourage individuality in others. Rather than dominating children to fulfill the teacher’s own expectations, the mature teacher will help the child ‘to become himself’, and will regard children as ‘separate individuals in their own right.’ A sign of personal maturity is the ability to make a relationship in which ‘each person helps affirm the personality of the other’. The quality of relationships which exist in a teacher’s class or a reflection of her own person. (p.104)
Individualized Records: Keeping Track

In order for teachers to know that each child is making the best possible use of his environment and that he is making progress, the keeping of records is essential, particularly where the children work on individual lines. A class diary and a record for each child, give guidance to the teacher who writes them. Headteachers, (as Alice Yardley did) may also keep records, from which theory and practice grow:

‘Careful observation of experiences, linked with accurate recordings, constitutes the scientific study of the job. From these recordings theory emerges and in this way the philosophy of the school is established. Indeed the major part of this study of Young Children Learning is a development of records kept by the author during 15 years experience in Infant and Infant/Junior Schools. (p. 105)

The teacher works from a foundation built on her beliefs about human nature and the philosophy she has found for herself, and the part childhood plays in the process of human development. The work done by children and teacher must have direction, and a purpose. The purpose we find for education is the purpose we find for living. The purpose of education is not to move towards a particular end-product, but to grow in faith ‘a faith that the fullest use of the moment will ultimately bring to use the full development of the person with the life he is given.’ (p. 106)
Successful teachers have one quality in common; the sheer joy derived from the job they are doing. Teaching offers the joy of knowing, from time to time, that we have played an essential part in the growth of a person. These are moments when the teacher knows 'a door has opened in the child’s life', and that make the teachers’ job ‘one of the most demanding and rewarding of experiences’.

Exploration and Language

Soon after completing the manuscript for Reaching Out, Alice launched into the next book in the series, called Exploration and Language, probably in the year 1968. In it she expands on the foundational concepts articulated in Reaching Out, with a particular focus on the how young children developed language in service to the their urge to communicate and make sense of the world. With adults alongside who understand children’s capacity to playfully and joyfully explore language and its uses, learning to read and to write can proceed in an organic pattern, as one unified process.

Alice Yardley considers language as an aspect of the total development of the child, and makes clear her view that the way in which a child learns to use ‘his mother tongue’, must be seen as a ‘living experience’, and never as a subject to be taught. The emphasis is on learning by using; speaking English is not simply a skill, but ‘a power which binds the child’s world together’.
Although the recognition of words in the form of reading and the use of words on paper in the form of creative writing are given due attention, they are treated a part of a versatile power to communicate which enables the child both to develop the world of his mind and to experience his real world. (p. 7))

The early stages of development of a child’s understanding are shown through his ability to develop the use of language ‘to abstract, to symbolize, to create a world of imagination from the material he garners through his experience of things and situations’. Our civilization is shaped and held together by words:

If words were taken away, the world as we know it would disintegrate. Skill in the acquisition and use of words is the prime aim of education in the schools, and children’s need to survive and thrive depends on developing this ability. (p.9)

Development of language is the way children make sense of their surroundings; at the earliest stages (infant and toddler) meaning is embodied in sensory and emotional experience, ‘and the ultimate quality of his thought is founded on such sensory comprehension’. When the child starts to name things he has begun to impose order on his environment. Words stand for sense impressions that are pooled together and grow into ideas and the quality of these ideas ‘depends on the intensity and variety of the experience which preceded them and with which they will continue to be associated’ (p. 4, new edition)
At all stages words offer the child opportunity and pleasure. He has every encouragement to develop his skill in using them. Most children are able to conquer the complexities of their native language:

'Few people fail in the early stages while learning language is part of living. It is later, when language is sometimes taught as a subject or attempts are made to isolate the study of it, that failure appears.

The faith of adults and teachers that the child will learn to speak is his greatest aid.

In a 'good home' children are encouraged to chatter. They are talked to and listened to, and their parents know intuitively 'that this early chatter is the basis of learning'. Schools can extend these opportunities, and in the modern school:

'Teachers no longer consider the silent classroom to be a symbol of good control and their children are no longer denied their most effect means of discovering, through speech, what the world and the people who live in it are about. (p. 9)

Children in informal modern classrooms talk to each other, and to their teachers. One head mistress tried to spend time making personal contact with each child in the school. She felt this was more important than asking children to read aloud, that it does far more for the child's linguistic development than 'by hearing slower readers labour over dull pages'. 50 (p. 85). In speaking they could be helped to clarify their own understanding of

50 It was in fact Alice herself, whom she is referring to here.
phenomena and ideas; a more meaningful task than stumbling through someone else’s ideas and thoughts.

When children are channeled too quickly into use of written forms, their exploratory urge is diminished, ‘because they are expected to record on paper with words when verbal recording is as much as they can manage’. In Chapter 10, ‘Words in Use’, Alice Yardley illustrates this principle with the following description of two different pairs of children at work:

Two boys were experimenting with water. With the aid of a nail and a hammer they pierced holes in the base of equal sized tins, one hole in the first tin and two in the second. They filled both tins with water and counted slowly as they emptied. One tin emptied on the twenty-ninth count, the second ran on until they had counted fifty-five. They described the situation as: ‘If the tin has two holes, it empties in twenty-nine, but if it has only one hole, it takes fifty-five.’ Their teacher, overhearing this, suggested: ‘you can write about your experiment in our Discovery Book. I’ll help you to say it properly.’ She spent ten patient minutes with the two boys, bending their description to an acceptable form which she wrote down for them to copy. They struggled on for the rest of the morning and eventually earned the approval of their teacher. They avoided the water experiment for the rest of the week.
In another situation, a boy and a girl were making similar experiments. This time holes were pierced down the sides of a tin. There was great excitement when the tin was filled and allowed to empty. 'It spurts right out. It' more at the bottom. When the tins get nearly empty the spurts get little.' Their teacher joined them in their discussion. 'What happened?' She encouraged them to describe in greater detail, helping them here and there with a more appropriate words and introducing the term 'jet'. She then reminded them of an earlier experiment. 'Do you remember how you siphoned water out of the bucket? You could siphon water from this bucket into the tin and keep it full for quite a long time.' Their experiments continued and their vocabulary increased to include the terms 'water pressure' and 'adjust'. Verbal recording was far more appropriate than written or even pictorial recording at this stage. (p. 65-66).

An exploratory stage should precede more formal uses of words for writing purposes. For very young children who delight in rhythmic and repetitive words, “feeling permeates the child's use of words”. A child of six will acquire words such as hippopotamus, supersonic, and evaporation simply because he enjoys their rhythmic sound: for him the have a kind of magic, and ‘he will master them when words like to, at, in, bad, sad leave him unmoved”. (p. 66) By the time the child leaves the infant school, he ‘should be handing words with confidence and know enough about them to be able to play with them and use them imaginatively.’ If children are given the time to explore language at this time, and their delight in words in sustained by the responsible adults around them, ‘words will never become a worry’, but a source of mastery and pleasure. (p. 67)
Use of Stories as Exemplars

When I first read *Exploration and Language*, I was particularly struck with the following passage, typical of Alice Yardley’s method of exposition. In the first paragraph she makes a theoretical statement about how children come to make materials serve their purposes, and reflect their unique personalities:

Through these early years the child explores any materials which come his way. With effort and patience he discovers that he has power over materials, he can find out what they will do, and then he can make them serve his purpose. As a result of his manipulation there is often an end-product and this provides visible evidence of what he can do and what he is like. His end-product differs from the end-product of others. It is as unique to him as his personality is.

This is followed immediately with an example of a child working first at home and then at school, (undoubtedly drawn from Alice Yardley’s own experience), which illustrates the preceding statement, and gives evidence for its relevance:

Jane, aged three, was given a piece of pastry dough to keep her busy until the baking was done. Jane kneaded, rolled and shaped it, and her finished cookies went into the oven. Her biscuits were clearly different from her mother’s. Her aunt coming into the kitchen, said, ‘Are these Jane’s cookies? I’ll have one of
these. They’re a funny shape but they’re scrumptious. You’re going to be a good cook, Jane.’

When Jane came into school she spent hours handling clay. Even after she had made her initial discoveries she was contented to knead it and pummel it, making a shape and then squeezing it out of existence. One day she sat in front of her lump of clay completely absorbed, watching it shape under her fingers.

‘I’m going to make a man,’ she murmured. ‘I’ll squeezed out this place for his head...Now he must have some arms...and some legs...’ She talked as she worked and eventually sat back.

‘I’ve made you,’ she smiled at her clay man. ‘I must give you a name because you’re a real man. You’re Bumps.’ In her role as creator she had implanted a grain of herself in what she created and therefore she loved it. Having created it, she named it and so confirmed its existence. (48, 49)

Alice Yardley has set the scene and given us the character of 3-year-old Jane, deeply absorbed, pushing and pulling on a lump of clay from which she eventually fashions a crude human shape, talking to herself as she works. She names this self-made character ‘Bumps’; it is part of her but giving it a name ‘confirms’ its existence in her world. Through language she has encompassed and confirmed her own experience, in naming the crude clay shape she gives it life, and expands on her sense of what she can do and who she is. Alice Yardley sums up in the following paragraph:
In the crude creative work of our children we see much of what they are as people. Listening to the child's creative use of words, in the form of speech, provides us with the best clue to the child's personality. Later he will also learn to put these things on paper.' (p. 49)

Children create and construct their understandings and express their personalities through spontaneous and exploratory ways of speaking and naming. Soon they are ready to write words of their own choosing.

Writing the words

Words chosen by the children themselves do not need 2 dimensional illustrations; they are already illuminated by the child's inner vision: 'The very saying of them lights their mind for these words are the material of their mind. They are the ones they are ready to recognize in printed form.' 51 (p. 97)

Such words are more interesting to children than lists of phonetically similar words, or 'collections of words thought up by a person who has never met either the child or teacher "(p. 97). Children can learn to read and to write their own chosen words:

'The words which a child finds most interesting are those which he has discovered himself. Helping the child to write his own words on paper shows him

51 This idea is very similar to that expressed by Sylvia Ashton Warner's concept of 'key words' described in her seminal work 'Teacher', published in 1963.
not only the purpose of creative writing but also helps him to understand the
nature of reading. Reading and writing are two parts of a single process and
develop side by side in the modern Infant School. Many children learn to read as
much through their own writing as from printed books. (p. 108)

Copying words from a good model provided by the teacher can be an appropriate way to
acquire the tool of good handwriting, and to begin. But very soon children will want to
write independently. When children first try to put down their thought on paper, we
expect immature standards in appearance, spelling and punctuation.

‘Our first aim is to encourage free translation of ideas into written form.’ Children
understand the need for higher standards of accuracy and legibility when they know that
what they have written will be read by others, in the form of published books available to
all in the classroom or school library.

Alice Yardley documents a number of examples of children’s spontaneous writing,
developed either as part of a ‘whole situation’, or as ‘a link in a chain of activities’:
Graham, whose father wore a hearing aid, made a book about what he discovered in the
‘sound corner’, experimenting with rubber bands, a tin and string telephone, and a tuning
fork. He illustrated it with drawings, and his teacher gave him the right word to
‘crystallize his ideas’, but he wrote the text himself, using his own spelling:

‘When we pluck (the rubber bands) it makes a buzzing noise. The little
rubber band makes the loest noise...the longer we stretched the rubber band the
hiyer the noise...we have just made a telephone. When the string was stretched
tightly we could hear better...when we sturck the tuning fork it made a buzzing
sound...When I struck the tuning fork and tucht it tickled me...the buzzing I
heard is called vibration and vibration makes sound...The sound is cuzed by
eeletrick carunt...When I put my hand on my throat I can feel it vibrate that is
what makes my voice.’ (p. 120)

Another child, ‘Janet’, fascinated by large solid, wooden, geometric shapes went round
the school finding "spheres", and then wrote a fairy story incorporating marbles, planets
and toffee apples (p.121) Children made up books of maps, showing different places
nearby, and put together books of their own poetry, formed from collections of words
they had made:

“Blue sky, blue sky,
White clouds, white clouds
All of those are very high
But none are higher than they sky”

“Starlight:
Candle-light:
Little Jesus Lord of Light.”

52 Alice Yardley included this child’s poem ‘Blue Sky’ in her own collection, “Infant and
Junior Poetry’. (See photocopy in Documents, #9)
And by the time they are seven, many children are writing stories of considerable length. In one school they wrote ‘novels’ arranged in chapters, built round a plot or a character and employing the accurate use of dialogue: ‘The Adventures of Timothy and Tim on a Bicycle’ and ‘The Odd-Job Man’ were the titles of two of these.’ (p.122) Each of these books found its place of honor on the library shelves.

Children also composed their own prayers for school service:

“Dear God help me to be good and always kind to ather pepol and when I grow up help me to be kind to my children. I have always wonted a little baby but I cannot have one becus I am too young. “

In these ways, and by inspiring in them a sense of the beauty and majesty of words, teachers can ‘liberate in their children the power to communicate imaginatively what they think and feel.’ (p. 122)

Reading

In a chapter on the ‘Joy of Reading’ Alice Yardley traces the history or children’s literature, from the hornbook, to the primer, to the spelling book, popular in 1750, and notes the relatively recent emergence and proliferation of picture books. Along with the four recognized methods of giving systematic help with word recognition; the alphabetic, phonics, ‘whole word’, and ‘sentence method’, best used in combination, she discusses
'modern methods' such as ita, (initial teaching alphabet) Dr. Gattegno’s (inventor of the cuisenaire rods) ‘words by color’, and teaching reading by programmed instruction. Each have their merits, she writes, though arguments in support of an approach which may persuade adults, may not take into account that ‘the logic of children does not run along adult lines’.

Alice Yardley makes the argument that method and materials are not nearly as important in learning to read for most children, as ‘the person who helps’. Learning to read is essentially an aspect of a child’s relationship with adults or sometimes with especially gifted children (p.129). Sharing this adventure with someone the child loves brings joy to the experience and ‘helps to develop healthy attitudes towards literature in later life’ (p. 129)

Children learn about language and reading and writing from adults. How the child feels about those adults and how they treat her ‘make the difference between effective learning and failure’. Parents and teachers are jointly responsible for education. And because children are very dependent on adults, particularly those they love, the attitude of parents and teachers to anything they do is of supreme importance.

53 Alice Yardley writes of ‘Beryl’ learning to read with the help of her older sister (Alice herself!)
54 Alice Yardley warns here too, of the danger of extolling too loudly the skill of the early reader... ‘If they can learn at the age of three and enjoy reading as part of their exploration of life around them, then we should help them. We should not, however, consider these children necessarily more favoured than the child who reads later. We should avoid that glow of pride for the child who reads at four and the inclination to extend only tepid praise for the skill of his five-year-old brother in making a picture or in swimming.’ (Exploration and Language, p. 130)
Helping children meet and enjoy good literature is the most encouraging thing that adults can do to help children become literate; as well as the work of the ‘great masters’, folk stories, legends, ballads and parables are immortalized because they contain ‘an authentic core’. Stories are perhaps the greatest means of communication between people; they play the leading part in our introduction of literature to the child. Stories should be selected with great care and treated ‘as part of the child’s social development.’ Stories should be exciting, develop characters the child would like to live with, be authentic in detail and atmosphere, have humour, and be packed with dramatic action. Above all, the story ‘should be well written, using words which please the child and extend her or his vocabulary, and with an opening which makes the listener sit up and take notice.’ (Exploration and Language, Rubicon, p.100).

Only the best is good enough for children, and this can include the teachers’ own creative efforts. When teachers create their own stories, they can invite children to share in creating one ‘to their own taste and mood’:

As the story is re-created between teller and audience the child should become part of the story, so that he extends his own experiences and learns more about himself as he enters into it.’ (p. 131)

I found this passage interesting in light of the interview process Alice and I built together. She was the storyteller, and I was the audience. She told me the story of her life and
work. Yet as the story was told to me, I also participated, asking questions, responding intensively or with humor to a certain part of the story, or adding something from my own experience to the conversation. Her past and its stories came to life again in the intercourse between ‘teller and audience’. My part in its recreation undoubtedly influenced the manner in which it was told, the slant of interpretation that emerged. And over time, I myself became ‘part of the story’, an active character in it, like the ‘child’ in the passage above. Certainly in the course of, my work on Alice Yardley’s educational and life story, I’ve ‘extended my experience,’ learned more about myself, and how my experience compares and deepens my understanding of my subject. These various modes of identification and its resulting self-definitions have allowed me to learn more about myself. Over the course of our research partnership, I entered more and more deeply into Alice’s story, and ultimately found myself a character in it as well.

Discovering the Physical World

In this book, the third in the series, Alice Yardley reinforces the concept that children need to explore and experience their physical world, in order to develop the mental structures with which to think about and order the physical world. In so doing, they become skilled in the tools of mathematical and scientific thinking. Discovering the Physical World contains numerous and detailed descriptions of young children at work in school, experimenting, observing, building theory, and expressing their evolving ideas about the physical world and their relation to it. Children go about their own investigations and discoveries, and resourceful teachers ‘follow children’ on their
exploratory journeys, extending the breadth of their opportunities to experience phenomena, as they experiment with measurement, time, shape, the soil and living things, water, air, light sound, heat, they body, and the ‘way things work.’ Beginning understandings in the areas of geography, and history are also touched on, and how studies of many subjects lead from one discipline to another in an organic and natural pursuit of knowledge is an underlying theme.

As she did in Exploration and Language, Alice Yardley writes of children making books and recordings of different kinds about their discoveries, and observing phenomena with the use of instruments and tools, such as a simple portable thermometer. In the chapter ‘Finding out about heat’, we see two six year olds deeply engaged in measuring temperature:

Vicki and Margaret were devoted to their thermometer, and for some days almost lived with it in their hands. Vicki noticed that it ‘went up in two’s’ and suggested, ‘Let’s write that down’. She was thrilled to discover that this was her “times two” table and persisted in writing it out again and again. After recording the temperature daily for a week the children were counting freely in two’s and ten’s.

Vicki and two other friends then wrote out the “times ten” table from the thermometer. This interest in tables grew, and the group then worked out a number of tables. Margaret wrote down the “times six” table: it continued past 12
times six to 13, 14, 15, 16 times six. The teacher, glancing over her shoulder, remarked, “We usually stop at twelve times, Margaret.”

Margaret continued blissfully, “I don’t mind how far I go,” she responded. For this group of children, tables were their friends. At the age of six Vicki could walk into a room and say, “It’s about fifteen in here. It’s not very warm.” (p 72)

During a study of light, one group of children take apart a television with the help of an expert older brother. A student makes a pin hole camera and develops a negative under the teacher’s desk. Others collected words, ‘the language of light’, sounding them and chanting them, ‘ray, beam, gleam, moonbeam, dawn, aurora, spark, flash, blaze, flame, shine, litter, twinkle, flare, shimmer, scintillating, translucent, limpid glossy, iridescent.’ A little girl wrote a story about a baby sunbeam, who had lost his home, turned himself into a rainbow, went to Africa where ‘it dried up all the rain’, and turned back into a sunbeam. This story went on, Alice writes, filling a book of twelve pages, and ‘aptly illustrated’.

Each of these activities and projects are connected by children’s interest and urge to discover, and the integrated nature of their study is evident. Referring to the varied manifestations of these children’s explorations of light, Alice Yardley writes:

We might call this study of light, science. We could just as readily see it as English, or art, or mathematics, or divinity. The child’s discovery of the world is
always an experience which involves all these disciplines. (Discovering the Physical World, p. 64)

In another school, where children were studying light and color, and its manifestation in the paintings of Manet, Gauguin and other artists, their interest was caught by the following incident:

One summer day, the headmistress appeared in school wearing a new glazed cotton skirt. It was patterned with swirls of tropical colour – flame, scarlet, gold and purple. The children gathered round and enjoyed the richness of its colours; they stroked it and handled it with great respect.

The next day the headmistress brought the skirt to school and pinned it to the wall in the hall where the service was held. It provided the focal point for the service, which centred on the appreciation of light. The children responded with these comments:

‘It’s all light, like the Glory Light.’

‘It’s gorgeous. The colours are exciting.

‘It has all the colours of the sunbeam in it.’

Then one child volunteered: ‘It’s like the Gauguin book. It’s your Gauguin skirt.’

(p. 84)
In this description, I believe, Alice Yardley is talking about herself. It was she who wore a bright skirt to school, and pinned it to the wall of the hall the next day. The scene it paints, the small children gathered round their leader, stroking her skirt with fascination and admiration, is one of intimacy and shared wonder, of the ‘communion’ between teacher and children that was so often felt in these infant classrooms. The headmistress’ appreciation of their interest is manifested in her bold action the next day: she pins her own skirt, with its ‘swirls of tropical color’, to the wall so the children could examine it more carefully. She follows their lead, and allows them the latitude to explore and to respond with all their imagination, senses, intellect and feeling.

In the last chapter of *Discovering the Physical World*, Curiosity and Wonder, Alice Yardley describes what she believes lies at the heart of children’s learning:

‘In this book we have followed children in their process of discovery, and we have been led in a number of unexpected directions. One child’s curiosity about light led him into the fields of science and mathematics, painting, history and geography, reading and poetry making; it filled him with wonder and brought him to the threshold of worship. His curiosity leading to discovery, was a unifying agent of his learning. It proved yet again the wholeness of the child, the continuity of his growth, and the integrated nature of his understanding. (p.138)
As it has throughout, the language of ‘following the child’ prevails. This means that adults help children ‘reach the heart of things’, in order to understand the ‘unified whole,’ rather than looking only at separate pieces:

If we follow the child we do not fall into the trap of turning science merely into an analytical study of the world. We do not study the firmament simply in order to fix the stars in it, whilst forgetting the splendour of the sunset sky. We know that real education consists of a single study – the exploration of the world we’ve inherited and of the things which live in it. In pursuing this end we reach the heart of things and become at one with our universe. We are brought to an understanding of it as a unified whole and as an independent miracle of completeness...(p.138)

Teachers’ active interest in what children are doing is essential. They take the time to furnish their own minds, so that they can lead children towards finding answers to their questions, or take them a stage further in their enquiry. Their enthusiasm will help both the children and themselves make best use of every opportunity. (p.139)

When teachers share in children’s explorations and try to reach through to their minds ‘and to understand the thought processes shaping there’:
...we discover with the child and so keep alive between us that spirit of enquiry which will help us to preserve our sensitivity to the majesty and wonder of our living world. (p. 139)

Exploration of the physical world is by its nature, not only a scientific but a spiritual quest. It is accomplished through the practice of ‘freedom’ to think and feel and act in the world, by giving children real choices, and real experiences: not telling them what to think, but encouraging them to ‘find out’.

True freedom is described in Alice’s recordings of children’s explorations in both *Exploration and Language* and *Discovering the Physical World*. In these two books the critical side of Alice shows her in ‘resistance’ mode; she is critical of a conventional emphasis on product, and on literacy over other forms of human expression, exemplified by a convention such as ‘reading aloud’ that she sees as lacking in value and meaning for children. For this ‘resistance’ to the conventional to be effective, however, teachers must offer children valid and rich resources and choices, and to share their enthusiasm for investigating phenomena and questions with children.

In this light, giving children freedom is not abdicating responsibility for them, but rather taking on even greater responsibility to journey with them, to make sure that as their teacher, one’s mind is ‘well- furnished’ with whatever is needed to provide further information, support and resources.
This kind of learning models the sensitive reciprocity that plays between mother and child in learning language. Mothers teach their children the ‘reproductive virtues’, in the sense employed by philosopher Jane Roland Martin (1985) of caring, concern and connection, virtues that are too often neglected in the ‘production’ model of education.

The reciprocal interactions of teacher and child, while they happen outside the family circle, nevertheless are equally grounded in such reproductive virtues, and reflect the primal parent-child relationship which is the basis for all learning (Yardley, 1971, Buber, 1955, Read, 1943). Education is relation. And in relationship there is always the promise of unexpected discoveries, in Alice Yardley’s view. The teacher enters into a relationship with a child, listens to his or her questions, and follows the child into new fields of enquiry; she is not simply training the child to ‘reproduce’ the old knowledge territory.

There is another way in which the ‘reproductive’ values as Jane Roland Martin describes them, find voice in Alice Yardley’s approach. This is in the emphasis on the education of feeling and the senses, or aesthetic education, a topic she dealt with in the next book in the series, aptly titled, *Senses and Sensitivity*.
Senses and Sensitivity

This was the book that Alice told me, was her favorite. It was the one she had not planned ahead of time, but that allowed her to express her most deeply held beliefs about education and the role of the arts. She described how when she was writing *Senses and Sensitivity*, some of the language she used seemed not to be consciously formed by her but to come directly ‘out of her own mind’:

I knew what I meant in my mind.. my reaction.. but to put it in words was another stage .. but then I do clearly remember (voice rising with excitement) being taken over! Hearing the words told me …in my mind...(soft hushed tones). They didn’t come out of the ether.. they come out of my own mind. But the ideas were formulated more clearly to me as I wrote... ...And I mean, sure, even when you talk you don’t know precisely in advance what you’re going to say .. eh, it’s a creative process.. (Interview, November, 2000)

In *Senses and Sensitivity*, Alice Yardley attempts to describe the nature of her understanding of the spiritual element in education and life, and how closely linked deeply satisfying sensory experience is to a sense of personal and spiritual fulfillment. In the introduction, she writes:

‘I have felt at liberty to express some of my deepest beliefs about the nature of education and to record many profound experiences which have enriched my life

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as a person. I have grown increasingly aware that helping children to become all
that they are capable of becoming is a way of life rather than merely a vocation
which provides a means of living. (p.8)

Helping children ‘to become all that they are capable of becoming’ means instructing
children in the language of feeling and emotion, as well as knowledge and skills. The
education of feeling, and of the senses, is only possible when the many forms of human
expression, including art, music, movement, as well as language, are embraced and
valued, and then shared with others. A well-informed mind is of no use, either to it owner
or to society, Alice writes, ‘unless its contents can be liberated’ through all the fields and
variety of human communications – through art, music, language, religious and spiritual
expression, and movement.

We are told of Sarah, who, on a ‘showery day’, had seen a series of rainbows in a
mountain valley, as they ‘echoed one another along the valley’. In school that day, Sarah
paints a series of paintings using many colors, then selects green to depict the vivid
greens of the grass and trees as she remembered them appearing ‘at the end of the
rainbow’. Alice Yardley writes:

Her final picture was green in a hundred different shades. Then she turned to
words and beneath her picture she wrote:

When it rains the people say
I wish it was another day.
But don’t be sad on a rainy day
When the rain’s gone away a rainbow
you will find."

Alice Yardley ruminates upon Sarah’s attempts to communicate though her painting and
poem what she had seen and felt:

What a person takes from any experience is entirely personal and unique. It
remains forever private and can never be completely conveyed to another, and yet
humans (man in old edition) strive with constantly to share what they (he) have
with others. By so doing they enrich their private experiences, for the more
articulate they become about their thoughts and impressions, the greater is their
satisfaction in them. When we help children to acquire a wide variety of ways in
which to express themselves we help them to deepen each moment of their lives.
(p. 11)

It is the expressive arts that bridge the chasm between each person, bring personal
satisfaction, and enrich each moment:

In Herbert Read’s words, “The aim of education is (therefore) the creation of
artists – of people efficient in the various modes of expression” (Education
through Art). (cited in Senses and Sensitivity, p.23)

The ‘creation of artists’ is also enhanced in the infant school by providing children with a
‘quiet room’, where they can be ‘alone with the wonders of life’. This is one way to help
children develop sensitivity to objects of beauty and aesthetic value; as they contemplate and interact with these objects, children develop ‘real feeling’ towards them. In such an environment, rich in aesthetic opportunity, children’s sense are stimulated and educated:

The work of the masters, displays of good form or colour or materials, objects to satisfy the sense can be set apart in a place where children can come alone and unsupervised, to make their own relationship with what they find.

Books, sewing materials, puzzles and music making are also available here, where children can appreciate a ‘peaceful retreat from the more vigorous activity in the rest of the school.’ While providing an aesthetic environment is crucial, it is the attitude of the teacher towards helping children ‘build up sound attitudes towards things of value’ that matters more than anything else.

Foundation of Belief

Developing ‘sound attitudes’, not only towards ‘things’ of value’ but towards other human beings, is part of the teacher’s and headteachers’ job. Alice describes a head teacher who made ‘care of others’ the theme for a whole week in the morning services.

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55 Here Alice Yardley is describing the ‘quiet room’ she set up at William Crane (see section 4).
56 The 1944 Act requires each school to begin the day with an act of corporate worship. There are many ways of interpreting this regulation, and it may be found that other times
(similar to our ‘assemblies’ in American schools) in her primary school. Another time, during ‘service’ the headmistress invited children to tell the gathered assembly about what they had made in school, which was at that time displayed in the hall. Several children come forward to share their creations, including an ingenious robot and an embroidered table cloth. Their classmate Vivienne hasn’t brought anything and declares that she isn’t good with her hands. After an awkward silence the headmistress, remembering Vivienne’s supple movements in dance class, tells her and the assembled children, ‘Your hands make beautiful pictures all by themselves’.

At the next service, the headmistress further develops the idea of ‘individual differences’, telling the children, that ‘parents and teachers, like god, are glad that each child is different because each one is beautiful in some special way’. Several children come forward after the assembly, inspired by this idea, to talk about what they are good at, their own particular contributions. In these ways, Alice Yardley writes, ‘children are helped to accept and respect themselves’, and are then in a position, ‘to understand and be concerned about others’. (p. 65).

in the day are often more appropriate, or that all children in the school may take part in service at the same time but not necessarily in the same place. Small intimate groups in different parts of the building may provide the feeling of ‘where two or three are gathered together’ in a way which is impossible when the whole school is involved. In one school the headmistress held a voluntary service on one day in the week. A cow bell warned the school of the time of Service, and children came in small family groups from different parts of the school. The atmosphere of a voluntary service has a quality not found in the routine service. (p. 64)
Sharing their questions and feelings about such subjects as death and sexual experience, good and evil, heaven and hell, and receiving thoughtful answers and responses from their teachers, help children fit these things into their ‘map of the world’. Sharing what she feels and thinks with others helps the child ‘confirm herself to herself’. The whole life of the school ‘centres on helping the child to become fully aware of himself and to appreciate the very stuff of life, including its spiritual nature.’ (p. 52) School and teachers are in a unique position to open up such possibilities:

The young child is capable of a very wide range of feeling, and his impressions of the world are fresh enough to make each sensory response a very meaningful experience. In this pure form emotional response comes very close to creativity. St. Mathew realized this and saw the ideal state as one of recapturing the child’s simple oneness of spirit: ‘Except you become as little children’. As teachers, one of our greatest privileges is the opportunity we have to enter into a spiritual experience every time we share with the child his worship of the curious and beautiful world in which he finds himself.’ (p. 71)

The Nature of Inspiration

Children are inspired when their efforts are received with genuine enthusiasm and sincerity. The teacher’s own enthusiasm for life ‘will spark off life in the children she teaches’, as when she shares a favorite poem:
The Sea Shell

Sea Shell, Sea Shell
Sing me a song, O please!
A song of ships and sailor-men
Of parrot and tropical trees;
Of islands lost in the Spanish Maine
Which no man ever may see again,
Of fishes and coral under the waves,
And sea-horses stabled in great green caves...
Sea Shell, Sea Shell,
Sing me a song, O please!

Amy Lowell

Such a collection of words may evoke in the child, ‘a feeling for the deep, mysterious surging of the sea’, or unexplored worlds, peopled with ‘strange and exquisite life’.

(p.81)

The teachers’ love of words, music, art, and the natural world help the child develop sensitivity to these things. She has ‘prepared his mind for the spark and provided an atmosphere in which he feels free to respond.’ (p. 81) Saturated with ideas, feelings and impressions, ‘he will find an outlet through some form of expression’.

When the relationship between child and teacher is ‘right’, the child’s inner resources can be fully explored. This relationship has nothing to do with power and domination:
...it is a relationship between people who give and take equally, each learning from the other. Teacher and children working together create the life of the school. Without this deep sense of communion life in school becomes sterile, and the results achieved are dull. (p. 82)

The teacher is responsible for providing opportunities for the child to discover his maximum capacities, and to ‘use his facilities to the full’ Children are helped to develop their ‘organs of sensation’, through which they sharpen their observation and recording skills, ‘as essential to the imagination as they are to science.’(p. 81) Ultimately, however, it is the child who must ‘select and synthesize such experiences as will prepare him for the moment when the spark touches him.’ (p. 82) The child in the end is responsible for his own learning.

The ‘spark’ that emanates from the teacher, fueled by her own enthusiasm for life in its many manifestations, is transferred through a vital current to the child. Pulled along in this current, the child works to find his way, to prepare ‘for the moment when the spark touches him.’ When it happens, it is this ‘spark’ that inspires the child to create, to learn, and to communicate his learning in a multiplicity of forms.

**Movement and the Young child**

Alice Yardley believed that movement was one of the most powerful forms of expression and communication for young children, and that it should be an integral part of the
curriculum of the infant school. Helping children develop skill and range in using their bodies was crucial to the education of feeling and of the senses.

Four chapters are devoted to movement education (movement and the young child, the language of movement, the nature of rhythm and pulse, and the body as instrument) and two chapters to making music, and appreciating the music-making of others. In writing these, Alice Yardley draws on her knowledge of theories of modern dance, and particularly Rudolf Laban's school of 'natural movement' which after World War II had been well-established in England. 57

The body's mode of expression depends on 'the person it embodies... the relationship between the person and his body.' 58 The child's physical self is primary:

This is perhaps the ultimate purpose of the human body: to serve as the tool by which the personality is shaped. The teacher can nourish the child's mind and provide good opportunities for the exercise of his emotions, but it is the child's body itself which teaches him and which leads him to become the person he is. The good teacher is the one who can help the child to become fully aware of his

57 'Turning away from classical dance forms, and stereotypical 'giants and fairies' kinds of improvisatory play, Laban's approach invites children to explore movement in terms of 'time and weight, and as taking place in space'. (p.91)

58 Here Alice Yardley presages feminist thinkers who emphasize the body as a knowledge source, emphasizing the intimate connections between the physical self, knowledge, and human development.
physical person and of all it can accomplish. The child who knows his instrument well will play it well. (p. 120)

Older children in one primary school (strikingly similar to the Brooksby Primary School) are part of a ‘voluntary movement’ class organized by the head mistress. Inspired by the movements of figures on Greek Friezes, and a study of African tribal dances, they make up their own ‘ritual dances of their own and were able to experience the elemental power of movement’ This lead to a full scale study of life in Africa. Another group of children respond through dance and mime to the music of the Pyr Gynt Suite.59

Creative dance movement can be ‘sparked off’ by a story, an idea or a sensory experience, such as the sound of the wind or ‘even the scent of honeysuckle’. It can take place outside as well as inside (and often does in England, where children stay in school through the end of July):

A group of little girls were playing on tricycles along the drive. One child suggested, ‘Let’s make a barrier with soil and see who can run over it’. Soil from the neighbouring garden was piled across the drive. But many things lived and moved in the soil, and Madeline became absorbed in the scuttling activities of a beetle. ‘Ugh!’, she exclaimed, and began to wriggle; ‘I’m a worm,’ echoed Peta, and she curved her way in and out of Madeline’s movements. Jean stood still.

59 Alice Yardley created a booklet of photographs and texts, showing young children improvising a dramatic movement sequence to the Pyr Gynt music suite at the Brooksby Primary School while she was head there (see in Documents, #11, &12).
'I'm a tree,' she decided, 'and you are in the soil round my roots.' She then began to sway: 'It's a bit windy,' she explained, 'there's a breeze, and it's going to rain.' Julie took up the idea of rain, and when she pattered round Jean Madeline and Peta searched for shelter. The tricycles were forgotten, and the indefinite patterns of movement began to take on form. The little drama was repeated a number of times and eventually became 'The Garden Dance'. Throughout the months of summer 'the Garden dance 'remained a favourite game, to which each fresh development in the garden added a new dimension. The discovery of a pod of peas swollen to maturity, of a bee taking honey from an antirrhinum flower, of the pampas grasses rustling in the wind, all provided fresh material to weave into the dance pattern. These little girls relived, through their own movement, their observation of the ever-changing garden. (p. 94, 95)

Real life experience is accessible through the body, and its senses. Children's impressions are sound when they have handled the 'real object'. There is no substitute.

Whenever it is possible we should put into the hands of children real objects and let them teach him what he is capable of learning form them. The teacher cannot, of course persuade the Amazon to flow through the playground or bring London Bridge into the classroom, and in this kind of situation she must resort to representation. Even so, the symbol can only convey its message about reality if there is some experience in the life of the child to which it can be attached.
However small the scrap of reality may be, we give the child something to touch, hear and enjoy at first hand; and then we can extend his experience with the aid of symbols. (p. 129)

Learning from reality means ‘accepting the whole of life, the heights and the depths, the rough with the smooth’. Happiness is not an end in itself, but a ‘by-product’ of ‘satisfactory living’. Frustration and disappointment, distress and failure, experienced within the safe protection of loving parents and teachers, can be seen, not as enemies but as ‘essential forms of stimulation’ to the developing personality of the child. The child learns in this way that facing up to difficult problems is halfway to solving it. Parents and teachers who let children ‘learn for themselves’, are showing ‘a very high order’ of love for them:

If life is to mean anything at all to children, they must have access to the full range of its experiences. Only then can they be said to live and to have the opportunity for full development of their personality. (p. 130)

Self-Realization

Inner serenity is the result of self-realization, and self-realization is manifested by the maximum use of potential, ‘only then are we at our best and capable of making mature relationships with others’:
The development of personality and ultimate self-realization depend on human relationships. The natural process of becoming oneself can take place only in the human situation, so that this process is subject to constant interference. Perhaps the most important circumstance is love, for full development of the person takes place only in an atmosphere of love, given and received. (p. 124)

When such an atmosphere is not present, or withheld, children may become incapable of loving, of making relationships. When parents and teachers can love their children and students without self-interest, and don’t try to bend them to a predetermined idea, they are giving them the support they will need in order for their unique personal patterns to unfold.

This allows the child to experience a ‘unity of self’, and an experience of integration with his own experiences. He can become absorbed in a piece of music or gardening, or molding clay, and be completely caught up; forget himself. When we are torn apart by conflicting directions and ‘selves’ inner direction becomes impossible. One truly lives when ‘all that goes into making life is unified within the person’. (p. 126)
Section Three

Summary of Alice Yardley’s Philosophy of Education

In the preceding section, my purpose was to condense and summarized the major points touched on in the four books published between 1970 and 1973 that make up the original texts of the Young children Learning Series. In this section, I present a synthesis and overview of Alice Yardley’s philosophy of education drawn both from these texts, and from the three notebooks that Alice Yardley kept as a practicing teacher and headteacher. While the ideas that drove her thinking are best represented in the texts themselves, the value of such an overview is to demonstrate the consistency and coherence of her educational thought.

Values

Each individual is unique and valuable

Alice placed the highest value on the individuality of each person. Childhood is a time when the child’s ‘unique nature’ is in full bloom. The child, she writes, ‘does not hesitate to show us what he is and how he feels about people and things’. Too often school squashes these spontaneous expressions of individuality, and forces conformity. School must become the place that offers children, not conformity, but the chance to discover
many aspects of his personality, capacity and personal approach to life. Education has the responsibility to respect and deepen the uniqueness of the individual child. As Herbert Read has said, there are two purposes of education that are irreconcilably different. One holds that the child ‘should be educated to become what he is, the other, to become what he is not. (Read, 1943, p.2-4) School must give children the chance to discover ‘what he is’, and not be forced ‘to become what he is not’.

Goals

In order to discover herself in all her capacity, education must provide for development of the whole child, in body, mind and spirit. This is possible only when there is harmony and integration between all aspects of the self, physical, social, mental, and spiritual. School should offer children a holistic education that pays attention to every area of a child’s development, and not favor one aspect over another.

The aim of education is self-development; development of the unique self, and the whole self. Education should also the means of self-expression through various modes of and mediums. Each person will develop according to their own pattern, and go on to find their particular and unique place in society.

Philosophy in School
The Child

School must also tend to the spiritual development of children. It must offer children a philosophy of living, otherwise it is useless. When children live fully in the moment, they are learning a ‘philosophy of living’. They are learning to trust their place in the world.

In the end, who a person is, their personality, represents all that they have learned as an individual. ‘Living, development, learning, and personality are all aspects of a single process; the individual’s attempts to survive and flourish in the world. *(Reaching Out, Rubicon, p.26)*

The Teacher and Headteacher

What the teacher feels about education stems from her basic assumptions regarding human nature and the philosophy she has found for herself ‘as a person gifted with life’.

If the work done by teachers and children is to have meaning and purpose it must have direction. The purpose we find for education is the purpose we find for living. It is not so much a question of working with an end-product in view as of growing in faith – a faith that the fullest use of the moment will ultimately bring to us the full development of the person within the life he is given. “*(Reaching Out p. 106)*
The teacher of young children today has a radically different role from that of her counterpart in the past. She is no longer seen merely the preserver of knowledge, the transmitter of culture, the instructor in basic skills. Because what she holds to be true about education is what will guide her in her work, it is the first responsibility of any teacher to 'seek out her own philosophy'.

Headteachers have a responsibility to develop a school wide 'philosophy', an approach to pedagogy and institutional practices that reflect their beliefs about what is most important in educating children. This is a process rather than a set of ideas. It is not something thought up by the head and imposed on teachers and children. It starts when the head teacher makes a sincere attempt to know and understand not only the adults and children in the school community, but the circumstances in which the school operates. What evolves is unique to each school situation.

**Purpose of the Infant School**

In the infant school teachers help the child in the process of self-discovery, it is where 'the child reveals himself.' In school the individual discover his gifts and is supported in developing them. School must do all it can to 'preserve the individuality' of the child.

As a result of these opportunities afforded by the school, the individual’s gifts will be revealed to him and to his community, and will be given back to the community, and
thereby enrich human society. This process does not happen in isolation: the individual can only fully develop in interaction with other human beings. Both teachers and children help the child in school learn ‘the art of living in a planned society’, and how to be an adult. The art of living in a planned society involves social emotional learning, intellectual learning, and spiritual and physical learning. Each of these aspects of development must be provided.

Children develop through their relationships with other children and with adults. In an informal program children can develop personal relationships that teach them how to value others’ perspectives, to work collaboratively, and how to communicate their ideas and thoughts to others. They become part of a community. (social emotional learning)

Beginning in the infant school the child acquires, and in a condensed amount of time, the intellectual processes which human beings have historically developed; reading, writing, calculation etc. These processes are part of his cultural heritage. Teachers are needed to help him acquire these skills. (intellectual learning)

School must offer children the chance to develop their physical skills and abilities. Children’s confidence and zest for life is intimately connected to their continuing abilities to gain in physical coordination and strength. Learning is not possible without the freedom to move and explore the world through acting in it and on it. (physical learning)
School must offer aesthetic experiences: movement, art, and other media through which the child can broaden her range of expression, and modes of thought and feeling, and become more fully herself. Through the conscious cultivating of the senses and sensibilities unique to each individual, the infant school can be a place for the ‘education of feeling’, and self-expression. (spiritual and aesthetic development)

Theory of Learning

Alice Yardley believed that human beings have an innate urge to learn that is based on their primary drive to live. Because the child is helpless he must learn. Everything that he will ultimately achieve as an adult must be learned. For the young child learning is a complex coordinated experience. It is the vehicle through which she makes sense of her world, and, while she exhibits common stages with others, her pattern of learning is her own. (Reaching Out, chapter one)

In the process of learning, the child-learner goes through a series of stages; exploration, absorption, integration, purpose. First there is experimentation, then absorption of ideas and information, often accompanied by a quiescent or rest period, resulting in integration of the new experiences into the child’s broad understanding, and then a return to the activity with clearer and more specific purposes in mind.

Freedom to do and think is essential to true learning. Only in conditions of freedom can human beings discover all they can be. Human nature is inherently interactive and that
learning is a social activity. Education is about relationships between people; the listening teacher is a catalyst to the child’s emerging identity. The child should be ‘liberated in the relationship, not bound by it’. In this way, the child’s taste for ‘adventurous living’ is intensified.

Each child has a ‘keen and ready interest in everything that forms his existence’, he is eager to absorb and to learn, and he will learn at a tremendous rate from his interactions with all that is around him. The child has ‘freshness of outlook’ and is able to ‘set his own pace with complete indifference to our analytically planned grades and stages’ The child knows what he needs to know. The child’s way is right and best.

**Relationships with Others**

The development of personality and self-realization depend on human relationships, Human beings develop most fully when they are in an environment and with loving people who encourage them to ‘live fully in the moment’, and only then can their unique personal patterns unfold. Living fully in the moment, involves not only personal experience but sharing those experiences with others. While our own experience can never be completely conveyed to another, the more articulate we become about our thoughts and impressions, the greater our satisfaction. When we help children acquire ways to express their innermost thoughts and feelings, we are helping them ‘deepen every moment of their lives,’ and to experience a ‘unity of self'.
Through these forms of sincere and authentic communication, children reach out towards the human community. In these ways, we understand that child-centered education does not mean education which is dominated by the separateness of the individual, but education which relates the individual to his fellows. *(Teacher of Young children, p. 72)*

**Pedagogy**

Because children have an innate urge to learn; they will absorb and engage in all that is offered them in a ‘sincere’ manner. Children learn through playful exploration and experimentation, and through direct experience. Learning is pleasurable and joyful; children want to do it, and they will reach towards ‘perfection,’ put their utmost effort into their work, when they are truly engaged.

Children learn in relationship and through interaction with people, material, ideas and the physical environment around them. Every child learns differently, according to his or her individual ‘pattern’. They learn self-control when they are trusted and taught to see other’s perspectives.

Children learn as they continually adjust to their changing environment. As they grapple with the real life experiences they encounter, the people, physical materials of the world and their own growing understanding, they construct their own sense of the meaning of what they see, hear, and feel, in ways that are individual to them.
Each human being needs to find a sense of purpose, and education helps him or her to
‘reveal’ – discover – his or her individual ‘pattern’

Implications for Curriculum

The educational environment must be rich in possibilities for pursuing different avenues
of exploration, experimentation, and expression. Interesting and plentiful materials are
essential to learning. School needs to offer children experiences with man’s ‘natural
materials’ and the ‘discipline’ that they teach.

Curriculum should be integrated across areas and discipline, and should be tied to the real
life of the child. Wherever possible direct experience of phenomena is preferable to
indirect teaching about it.

Children need independence and choice in the classroom. When they make curricular
choices for themselves, and set their own questions and challenges, they engage more
completely in ‘active purposeful learning.’

Children learn best when they have a personal stake in it; when they write their own
books, design their own experiments, do research on topics of their choice. Teachers
provide guidance and help them pursue their own ideas.
Children need time and an unhurried pace to follow their interests to the deepest levels, and to fully absorb new information and ideas. The school day should be seen as a unified whole, as it is in an ‘integrated day’ approach, not broken into many subjects.

Children develop most fully when they can express themselves in many different ways, not only through language. They need to move, and to express themselves through a variety of aesthetic mediums; the visual arts, dance, music, and movement.

The school should resemble a family in its informality. Children learn best when all the adults in their lives are in easy and natural communication. An informal learning environment invites strong relationships between all its members, and a sense of communal responsibility.

Implications for the Teacher

The teacher is of supreme importance at this crucial stage. She is a model of personal responsibility. Through her enthusiasm and knowledge of child development, the teacher fosters in children a joyful attitude to learning. The teacher follows the lead of the child; she gives them what only she knows is best for them. She observes and learns with them. She is a discoverer alongside of them.
The teacher shares her inspiration and personal interests with her students, as they do with her. She and the child are caught up in a common pursuit; they share a ‘communion’ of spirit. Mind stimulates mind, and each discovers the full extent of personal capacity.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

Relationship between stories and texts

One of the questions I had during this project was whether the stories that Alice told me during our interviews, the personal stories of her teaching life, would be identifiable as her own in her published work. Since she never wrote in the first person, and when describing an incident drawn from her own experience used the euphemism of ‘one teacher’, or ‘in one infant school’, these stories were often hidden in the text. Over the course of coming to know her well, however, I collected a variety of clues that helped me in my search.

In fact, there were many instances when, in rereading Alice Yardley’s books, I found references to events in her teaching life that I recognized, thinking point moments she had described, curriculum innovations, and children she had known. The teacher who brought her rock collection with the beautiful crystal to school, the headteacher who pinned her bright skirt to the wall for the children to admire, the school where ‘glass partitions’ were opened, described Alice in the schools were she taught and lived. And of course, there were the children. Eric for instance, and the moment of his transformation while winding the ball of yarn, appears in three different contexts in Reaching Out, Exploration and Language and Learning to Adjust. On the other hand, the story of the
little boy and the harp, found by his father the garbage collector and given to Alice for the
‘quiet room’, never appears. This intensely personal story that had framed her decision to
stay on at William Crane, to recommit to the community there, still lived in her memory,
however. As she had said to me at the time, “I still see him, standing there in front of
me!” She hadn’t needed to write it down.

What I did find were metaphors and favorite words that Alice used both in our
conversations, and in her notebooks and published writing. These terms spilled over from
one form to the next: spark, pattern, scope, canvas... In their metaphorical power they
convey a unity of thought over time and place. Oppositional concepts also reoccurred
both in her speech and writing, shaping the discussion of how the approach to teaching in
the infant school compared to more conventional practice:

Stillness/movement
Conformity/uniqueness
Formal/informal/
Pouring in/drawing out

A consistent theme running throughout the multiplicity of forms with which I came to
know Alice, was the concept of freedom. In the interviews, the words she used was
‘freedom’, describing her childhood on the farm and beach, and the sense of possibility it
gave her, and how she wanted such an experience of freedom for children in school. In
her published work, though ‘freedom’ appears often, the word she chose most to characterize her broad mission and hope for schools, was ‘liberation’.

**Forms of liberation**

While Alice did not use the term ‘feminist’ to describe herself, she did consider herself the beneficiary of the women’s suffrage movement, the goal of her mother’s generation, and therefore someone who had been given the chance for greater independence and agency in an era of new possibilities for women. Certainly in the arena of her public life, though she chose to act in the world of schools for young children, traditionally a woman’s world, she moved forward into it with enormous energy and a sense of a mission. The purpose of school was to give children a chance to explore the full range of expression and possibility that might be available to them. Children in the best kind of school would be liberated to follow their own ideas, liberated to express themselves, and liberated in their relationships with adults.

Not only children of the poor, but middle class children as well, had been oppressed by their social circumstances, by conventional expectations, and by the narrowness of educational opportunities afforded them. In the infant and primary school, Alice believed, the old social order could be upturned and reshaped. These schools might become, in Kathleen Weiler’s language, ‘sites for social change’.

Alice Yardley’s approach moved education away from a social reproduction model, where the role of school was to insure the smooth transition of the reins of power from
one generation to the next, to an interactionist developmental model.

This model supported the possibility for new cultural forms, brought into being by children’s own choices, activities, expressions, and ideas. It was also built on the primacy of relationships in the learning process, and on the dynamic and reciprocal relations between teacher and child. Teachers moved freely among children, they listened to children, and helped them find a voice with which to articulate new ideas, new questions.

In this sense Alice participated in an ‘emancipatory project’, (Weiler, 1988) that would give the children and families of Nottingham another view of society, one in which the development of the whole person, and his or her ‘self-fulfillment’ might take place in an open, egalitarian social order. Her aim for children in school was that it be a holistic, full-bodied, and joyful experience of life in all its manifestations. School was not an institution that produced a uniform product, but one that embraced individuality, and welcomed a myriad variety of human expressions.

This concept is illustrated with the story Alice Yardley tells in ‘Exploration and Language’ of Jane, who comes to school and fashions a character out of clay to whom she gives the name, ‘Bumps’. She comes to school to create a world peopled with characters of her own devising, with ideas that she can give a name to, and then find ways to connect her language to what she sees and knows, and to the people around her. Alongside an encouraging, listening teacher, Jane makes a contribution that reflects who she is. She makes a contribution to the totality of human expressions that make up the world of her school.
In other ways, Alice Yardley’s vision of school resists educational conventions that were prevalent during her time, and that continue to persist. In these schools, different conception of time, and space, are enacted; it is a world in some ways outside of conventional time, and one that embraces a more fluid and organic view of space than we see in most present day classrooms. The hierarchy of master and student is superseded with a form of collaborative effort and communion between teacher and child. On the last page of The Teacher of Young Children, the first of Alice Yardley’s books that I read, and the one that most completely addresses the role of the teacher in contemporary education, she writes:

If there is any general conclusion to be drawn from these reflections, it is that the teacher of young children today has a radically different role from that of her counterpart in the past. She is no longer seen merely as the preserver of knowledge, the transmitter of culture, the instructor in basic skills. She must be flexible in her thinking, able to accept and evaluate new ideas and to adjust her approach in the light of what she understands about the society in which she live and works.
Teachers need to be flexible thinkers, capable of critical evaluation and openness to change, and sensitive to social context, but at the core of the teacher’s job is its personal nature:

...the individual shapes her role according to her unique personality. What she holds to be true about education is what will guide her in her work, and it is the first responsibility of any teacher to seek out her own philosophy. Personal conviction is her compass, and her own resources as a person determine the way in which children in her care can learn.

When I read these words, as a beginning teacher, I found them revelatory and empowering. It wasn’t just about what skills I had, what knowledge I could import. Who I was as a person, what I believed, was part of my teaching self, and was a crucial factor in my student’s experience. I wanted to be a teacher who listened, who cared, and who children could rely on to be excited with, to learn with, and to share their lives with.

Alice ends *The Teacher of Young Children* with the following words:

Child-centred education is not the antithesis of teacher-centred education, for while the child remains at the centre of the teacher’s thoughts and aims in education, the teacher remains at the centre of the child’s world in school.

(*The Teacher of Young Children*, p.108)
Alice, who never married or had children of her own was the center of many children’s lives, just as she had many children in her life. They peopled her world with their paintings, their dances, their highjinks, their deep absorption in learning. She thought through them. They educated her, just as she educated them.

She had made a choice to be a teacher in an period between the two world wars, the ‘liberal feminist’ era, when women were coming into their own as independent individuals, and the profession of teaching offered some independence and financial security. While her life choices were circumscribed by the exigencies of her family’s needs, and her acceptance of the limitations imposed by her gender such as the ‘marriage bar’ that kept married women out of teaching, she embraced her chance to be all that she could be within the conditions of her time. Teaching offered a social network of like-minded people, and her fascination with the world of children only deepened over time. It was intellectually challenging, and she rose to that challenge with full emotional conviction, and found it richly satisfying. She never expressed regret at having never married. ‘I’ve had a good life’, she told me, more than once.

It was clear to me that Alice was an intensely social being, and through the time that I knew her, she had many visitors and phone calls from friends and neighbors, colleagues and relatives. On the cul-de-sac where she lived in Keyworth, she organized all the neighbors to meet every afternoon in the home of one who was housebound, for tea and to ‘check in’ with each other. In her late seventies, she organized a group called the ‘Past-Carers’, who went to visit medieval villages throughout England and France, and
whose members became a close knit group with whom she worked closely. In her life and in her work, she understood and embodied the principle that it is our relationships with others that gives meaning to our existence, and that create the spark of our intellectual life.

Relationships – informal learning

In her emphasis on relationships, Alice Yardley, like Pestalozzi before her, saw the home environment, in its ideal form, as a model for school. The informal and caring relationships that children experience at home with their family members should be found at school as well, in an expanded and extended network. She shared this conviction with Dorothy M. Alderson, a colleague and fellow infant school teacher, who wrote in 1950, in regard to the relationship between teacher and child, that ‘unless there is easy contact and a relationship amounting to love between them, spontaneous, creative activities, as we understand them, are impossible’ (1950, p.4).

The term informal, used often by Alice Yardley and other proponents of the British Primary School and Infant School approach, implied that in school children might find rich and varied relationships, freedom of movement, and a choice of activities and projects that followed the trajectory of their interests, beyond that of a formal curriculum.

While Alice Yardley was not alone in articulating a vision of school as a place where a ‘liberation of learning’ in an informal environment could be developed, and took her
place as a member of the Plowden revolution, she was one of the first in the history of early childhood teaching to put this vision into practice in the forum of the public school. She was ahead of her time in developing a number school practices that are even now are on the forefront of progressive educational thought. Beginning in the 1930’s, these grew from her commitment to ‘following the child’, and the habit of careful observation, written reflection, and documentation of what she saw in the lives of the children around her.

A Progressive Educator and Innovator

From our current perspective, many of the innovations which Alice Yardley successfully implemented in Nottingham’s large inner city schools, with populations of 400 to 500 children, and classes of over 40 children, continue to be on the forefront of progressive thinking among educators today. In their current iterations, some of these innovations are visible in the following educational ideas and their manifestations, in both public and private school contexts:

- The integrated day - one feature of this common today in most kindergartens is the ‘center-based’ classrooms, where children can make choices from a number of activities for a good part of their school day. The ‘project approach,’ in which children pursue a single or common interest across many areas and time periods, is another contemporary ‘integrated’ approach.

- Family classes - what we often call in the US ‘multi-age classrooms’, or in some cases, ‘looping’ where one teacher has the same group for over a two or three year period (a feature of the Waldorf schools, inspired by Rudolf Steiner)
- Physical education and movement programs, integral to the whole curriculum of the school, what we might call now a ‘Physical Fitness’ program

- An approach to language arts that emphasizes reading through writing – an early model of the current ‘writing workshop’ approach that helps children learn the skills of writing, editing and publishing as they work on their own pieces of writing

- A practice of keeping careful records of children’s work in all areas of the curriculum, their process and expressions, including their art pieces, in an effort to document children’s thinking and development for evaluation purposes, an approach very similar to what is now ‘Portfolio Assessment’: one that uses ‘open, naturalistic evaluation methods’ to evaluate children and programs (Hein, 2005, p. 180). A highly evolved program for documenting children’s ongoing development over the course of their lives in primary school is in place at the Prospect School in Vermont.

- A habit of reflection though writing on practice; leading to the possibilities for teachers of taking action that is rooted in thought, and the development of clear goals and missions for such action. These processes are the basis of contemporary ‘teacher-research’ and ‘action research’.

- An approach to scientific investigation, very similar to what we now call an ‘inquiry approach’ to learning, one in which children’s observations lead them to questions, which lead them to more questions, and in which the goal is for them to construct their own understandings of phenomena, not to be told by the teacher what to think (Worth and Grollman, 2003)

- Responding to the individual child, what is now called ‘individualized instruction’. This was at the heart of Alice Yardley’s child-centered education and continues to be one of the core principles of a progressive approach, reflected, in one example, in the ‘Responsive Classroom’ materials disseminated by the Northeast Foundation for Children (Charney, 1991). In today’s publics schools, by federal mandate, the IEP, the ‘individualized education plan’, is the core structure for designing curriculum to meet the educational requirements for every child with special needs.

- A movement towards gender equality: in Alice Yardley’s infant school, boys and girls choose from many activities; a boy makes
bread, a girl catches a toad and measures his jumps, Geoffrey learns to knit, and Jane to do woodwork.

- Focus on the arts and on aesthetic and spiritual education, as integral to all aspects of the curriculum, and to the development of many avenues of human understanding and expression. Current manifestations of these principles are seen in Howard Gardner’s theory of ‘multiple intelligences’, and the arts-based curriculum of the schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy, founded by Loris Malaguzzi, and described in One Hundred Languages of Children.

In 1978, when I first read about the English infant schools that Alice Yardley described in her books, I was filled with hope that public elementary schools in the US could also reflect a more humanistic, progressive approach to education, a more adventurous and profound image of what society can be. The promise of ‘open education’, a model build largely on the British Primary School, was still alive at that time, and had made some inroads in this country. Yet open education faded with the new exigencies of the current era of accountability and the difficulties of putting into practice an approach that required teachers committed to its mission, and trained in its implementation. Government policy in the eighties in this country turned towards a narrower view of educational purpose, and England, following suit, by 1988, had ushered in a conservative government intent on a new set of reforms that focused on building a standardized national curriculum complete with ‘key stages’, tests at every level, and a single-minded focus on literacy and math skills instruction.

In spite of a national turning-away from open education since the 1960’s and 70’s in this country, however, while still a small minority, there are many public schools in the US that follow progressive educational ideals, along the lines of Alice Yardley’s work in the
infant school, the and British Primary School Approach. Here in Cambridge alternative programs such as those at Graham and Parks school and Cambridgeport have thrived.

The Mission Hill School in Boston, started by Deborah Meier, has developed Portfolio based assessment for their graduating high school students, long term self-chosen student research projects, and integration of the arts throughout the curriculum. In Vermont, The Robinson School, the public elementary school in the small town of Starksboro, Vermont, where I taught kindergarten, is a wonderful example of what is possible in public school in this country. In 2003, the district and school staff applied for and was granted a three year federal Comprehensive School Improvement Grant to integrate the arts throughout the curriculum. The grant funds an arts grants coordinator, artists in residence, teacher-training workshops, and transportation and admission to local theaters and museums. Curriculum projects are designed in which the art and music teachers work closely with classroom faculty. Artists in residence are in regular attendance. The results have been impressive and encouraging. A group of 34 students, 4th and 5th graders, traveled to Washington D.C last weekend to represent Robinson, Starksboro and Vermont by performing a dance they had choreographed at the Kennedy Center. Such successes are hopeful signs that the progressive vision of Alice Yardley can be realized.

Liberated in the Relationship

In the introduction to this paper, I reflected on the nature of my relationship to Alice Yardley over the period that I knew her, and how in many ways, we embarked together
on a research journey whereby aspects of our identities were enriched and expanded in
the course of our project, From Alice I learned to be a researcher, a biographer, an
ethnographer, and a friend. From me, Alice took on the role of research subject,
chronicler, autobiographer, mentor, and friend. Together we became more than we were
separately.

Alice said in one of our interviews, reflecting on the broad question of life’s purpose:

We all have our point of specialty … our gift…and the only purpose we have
been given that gift for, is so that we shall educate it in a way that will be of use
to everybody else. And you need to be of use in the world, not just because of the
other people, its because of yourself. We need fulfillment. We need self-
fulfillment. And it’s only through using what you’ve got, in its best sense, so to
speak, that you get that, isn’t it?

We had together developed, in a sense, our communal ‘specialty’, the gift of listening to
each other, and constructing something new together, that could be of use to the world. A
story of teaching, of thought, and of a life, shared and well-lived. Alice Yardley’s story,
and, in a different way, my story.

Side by side, Alice and I were ‘liberated in the relationship rather than bound by it’ as
Alice had written of the best kind of relationships between teacher and student. Because
of the support we gave each other, we experienced an intensification of our experience as
learners. Our research partnership had brought us both the ‘delight in adventurous living’ that lies at the heart of the educational journey.
Appendix

Chronology of Research Trips

1996, August, one day visit

Travelled to Nottingham, and took a bus to Keyworth to spend the day with Alice Yardley. Tea at her house on Crantock Garden, lunch at the local pub, walk in the Nature Reserve surrounding the village.

1999, late July, August, one week visit

Arrived at Heathrow Airport, London, rented car, drove to Stanton on the Wold where I stayed at Laurel Farm, a bed and breakfast establishment walking distance from Alice’s house in Keyworth. I visited and interviewed Alice, who was fairly immobilized after a recent hip operation, five times over the period of a week. Alice introduced me to her friend and colleague, Dorothy Aldersen Glynn, the author of ‘Creative Play in the Infant School’ (1968). I spent an afternoon visiting Dorothy in her home in Wollaton Park, talking about the English Infant school, how she had met Alice and their work as colleagues at Nottingham. In the middle of the week, I drove through Lincolnshire to the town of Mablethorp, using a map that Alice had lent me, and the routes she recommended. I spend an afternoon in Mablethorpe, found the road Alice lived on, her house, ‘Sylvia Bungalow’, and visited the school she went to between 8 and 11 years old. Videotaped and took photographs. That evening, I drove to Louth, where Alice attended King Edward VI between 1924 and 1932. I spent the night in Louth, and in the morning drove to Lincoln, where I visited the cathedral there, returning to Stanton-on-the-Wold that evening.

Fall semester of 1999 wrote an ‘oral history’ documenting Alice’s childhood and years at college, based on notes I had taken during our interviews. I sent this to Alice, who read it for accuracy, returning it to me with several small changes. (see ‘oral history’ in appendix). I also made a booklet of photographs, ‘Following Alice’, of my trip in her footsteps as she traveled to school in Louth, from Mablethorpe every day, first by train and then by foot.

In March of 2000, I talked to Wendy Auger, the Canadian editor of alice yardley’s published work in the Young Children Learning series. Wendy sent me four videotapes of Alice Yardley teaching a group of visiting Canadian students of education on a ‘course’ in the Lake District in 1978. Communicated with staff of the Froebel Institute in Nova Scotia, where Alice had also gone to teach during summer sessions, after her retirement from Nottingham College in 1975.
June, 2000,

Three weeks during which I had 7 interview sessions with Alice, and a driving tour with her and Dorothy of the countryside around Keyworth, ending with a pub lunch. In Nottingham, I visited the primary school, with an infants and junior school, now called ‘Brocklewood’, on the site of the old Player school where Alice had worked between 19431 and 1946. Interviewed the head there Evelyn Potter, who had known of Alice Yardley’s teaching and published work at Nottingham College. During this visit I was a paying guest at the home of Stevie and John Vanhegan, Stevie was faculty at Nottingham-Trent University.

Visited the Crossdale Primary School in Keyworth, and interviewed and audiotaped the headteacher, Chris Conway, who had been a student of Alice Yardley’s at Nottingham College. I also paid a visit to Brian Beale, who had worked with Alice on workshops for visiting American students, and his wife, a primary school teacher. This research trip was sponsored by a travel fellowship from Lesley, and a stipend from Nottingham Trent University, which I had contacted. Dr. Morwenna Griffiths arranged for me to have access to an office and the library. Started taping recording and transcribing my interviews with Alice. Gave Alice a revised version or the ‘oral history’ incorporating her changes before I left.

Traveled to Cambridge to visit Visited Homerton College, Cambridge, where Alice had received her teacher training, 1932-1934.

November, 2000

Arrived in the aftermath of flooding of the river Trent. Came to Nottingham for three weeks, and stayed again with Stevie and John Vanhegan who had become friends in West Bridgford, Nottingham. By invitation from the head of the Educational Research department, Dr. Morwenna Griffiths, I gave a presentation to research seminar at Nottingham Trent University on my work with Alice Yardley. One of the participant’s mother had been a student of Alice Yardley for a course on teaching three and four year olds. I contacted her – Ruth Newsome – and drove to her house to interview her. I also interviewed the head of the primary education department at Nottingham Trent University, Graham Impey, who had been a young teacher in Leicesteshire in the seventies at the height of the British Primary School movement.

Nottingham Trent University sponsored my visit, and arranged for me to have access to an office of my own.

Faculty members, Mary Hayes and Ann Bloomfield, and Karen ? shared with me their experiences during the sixties and seventies during this period of change in primary education. I attended a conference at the university on ‘faculty teacher partnerships’, where Ann Bloomfield gave a presentation about teaching interpretive dance and movement in local primary schools. I talked to Ann about Alice, with whom she shared a
commitment to the role of the arts in education, and an interest in movement and dance. Alice brought me to the monthly gathering of her colleagues from Nottingham College.

One Saturday, during this visit I drove up to Sheffield, in Yorkshire, where Alice was born. I brought back a booklet –‘memories of a daughter during the first world war’ and a collection of Yorkshire recipes. These I presented to Alice on the occasion of her birthday, November 14th. On this day I took Alice out to lunch at the local pub in Keyworth.

While I was in Sheffield, I stopped at the memorial monument in front of the town court house which was strewn at its base with hundreds of red paper poppies in rememberance of Armistice Day, November 11th, small ornaments that I had seen that many passers-by had pinned to their coat labels, and that Alice had been given by a neighbor too. While in the Stop and Shop in the checkout counter buying groceries that day a voice announced over the loudspeaker, ‘There will be a minute of silence in honor of Armistice day’ Everyone stopped what they were doing, cashiers, customers, and simply stood, serious and unspeaking. Being in England, in Nottingham and Sheffield at this time of the year – November –brought home to me the way that this war and the next – have effected this island people.

Alice introduced me to her sister Beryl, her nephew Michael Yardley, and Michael’s daughter, Rebecca, who came to visit with her husband Mark Brown, and their son, Anthony.

During this extended visit, Alice loaned me a number of documents and photographs, including booklets which she had put together showing children dancing, using playground equipment, and participating in an ‘integrated day’, which I copied and returned to her. We also looked through photos together, establishing dates and names for key events and people in her personal and professional life.

Suggested to Alice that we talk once a week on the telephone. We agreed on a time, Sunday at 1 p.m. her time, (8 a.m. for me in the US). We continued these phone call sessions without interruption until December of 2001.

July, 2001

Presented my work on Alice Yardley at the International Standing Conference on the History of Eduction, in Birmingham. Following my presentation, travelled to Nottingham for five days and had four sessions with Alice. On my third visit, I set up the tripod and videotaped Alice and myself during our interview.

December, 2001

Telephone Dorothy Glynn to learn that Alice had fallen, and was in the hospital. Several weeks later, she agrees to move out of her home in Keyworth into an assisted living facility.
February, 2002

Dorothy Glynn informs me that Alice has decided to sell her house, and that had told Dorothy that she would like all her educational materials to be given to me.

April, 20002

One week stay in Nottingham, in order to see Alice, now in an assisted living facility, Belvoir Dale, about 20 minutes from the village of Keyworth. I spend three afternoons there visiting Alice, taking notes but not taperecording. She tells me that she is happy to give me her educational archive, and that I have her permission to make whatever use of it I can for my work. She is reluctant to come out for a drive with me.

Hazel Menzies, Alice’s friend in charge of managing the sale of her house in Keyworth, and I look through Alice’s books, documents, and educational archive. I pack up all that is relevant to her educational thought and work to send back to my home in Cambridge, or store in the attic of my friends Stevie and John Vanhegan in Bridgeford.

Spent one morning and one afternoon at the Nottingham City Archives looking at minutes of school meetings, and other documents, from the William Crane Schools, Player Primary, and St. Anne’s Well Road School in Nottingham.

August, 2002

I learn from friends of Alice, via email, that she is not well, and has stopped eating. Her nephew Michael has come to tend to her. Several days later, I received a message that she had died.

August, 2002

I travel to Nottingham to attend Alice’s funeral. I visit several of Alice’s friends and colleagues, including Hazel Menzies, Dorothy Glynn, and Bob Hammond. Hazel Menzies shows me a notebook pad in which every page is filled with Alice’s small pencilled writing. This turns out to be a ‘memoir’ she wrote shortly after her retirement form Nottingham College in 1975, which I had not known existed.

I spent an afternoon in Eastwood with Alice’s great niece, Rebecca Brown, and her family, who gave me some additional educational material to use in my work.
Dates for Alice Yardley

1912 Alice B. and Charles Ewart Yardley marry in Sheffield
1913 Alice Yardley is born in Sheffield
1914 World War I begins, England enters the conflict
1918 Alice starts school
1918 November 11, Armistice day - end of the war
1919 Beryl Yardley is born
1922 In March, moved to Mablethorpe from Sheffield
1922 Attended village primary school in Mablethorpe
1923 Took exam for scholarship to King Edward VI Grammar School
1924-1932 Attended King Edward VI Grammar School
1924-1933 National railway strike
1929 Terence Ewart born
1932 Starts at Homerton College

Teaching Career

1934 September First teaching job at Forest Fields School, Nottingham
1935 January Began teaching Reception Class at William Crane Infants East School
1943 First promotion to Deputy Head, Player Primary East, Teacher of the "practical class" and in 1946, Acting Head
1947 St. Anne’s Well Road Infant School, First Headship

1950 Alice’s mother, Alice Bennet Yardley, aged 64, takes over a new class during shortage of teachers

1951 Appointed to the Headship of the William Crane Schools Infants East School

1959 Appointed to the Headship of the Brooksby Primary, at Clifton Estates, infant and junior classes

1961 Accepted position as lecturer at newly formed Nottingham College

1967 Moved to Keyworth

1973 Partially retired from Nottingham College; worked part time for two years

1975 Retired from Nottingham College

1975-1994 Taught workshops and courses for early childhood teachers in Canada, the United States, and in England

Publishing Career

1955-60 short stories published in Psychologist, Nottingham Guardian, Reveille, others

1955-70 articles published in Early Childhood, Child Education Quarterly, The Teacher, Teacher’s World


1970-73 “The Teacher of Young Children”, “Young Children Thinking” “Senses and Sensitivity”, “Learning to Adjust” published by Evans Brothers
1973-76 “Structure in Early Learning”, “The Organization of the Infant School”
published by Evans Brothers

1973 Alice Yardley’s books in the Young Children Learning Series, published
by Citation Press, Scholastic Magazines, New York

1988-89 Young Children Learning series, first eight volumes, published in revised
edition by Rubicon Press, Oakville, Ontario

1972-73 Sabbatical leave from Nottingham College to travel around the world,
partly sponsored by her publisher, Evans Brothers: visited Australia and
New Zealand (autumn term), Nigeria (January), Israel (April), summer
(Canada)
Memoir

(transcribed in the summer of 2005; chapter headings are as follows: conflict, farming, learning, teaching, survival, and an unfinished section on ‘education’)

Section on Teaching

At the age of 17 I was obliged to decide on my future career. I yearned to become either a journalist or a secretary, but the country was in the throes of a deep recession and my father was on the verge of bankruptcy.

At that time teacher training was virtually the only means whereby an impoverished student could extend her education. Local authorities provided a loan which covered College expenses over the two years and was repayable from salary during the first year of teaching. During the last 2 years in school I had applied for a received a subsistence allowance of 10 pounds per year and this covered extra expenses such as clothing and travel.

Homerton in Cambridge was an all-women’s college. There were only 80 students in my year of entry 1932 and the number was reduced to 60 the following year. The course led to a Teacher Certificate specialization in Infant Junior or Secondary teaching and I opted for the Infant Course. The reasons behind this decision were not entirely child centered. I was more interested in the younger children but at the back of my mind I had the mistaken idea that the hours involved would be shorter, leaving me more time to pursue my alternative interests. In the end, teaching offered me scope for pursuing a very wide range of interests including writing and secretarial work.

College students today find it difficult to believe that young people in the 30s accepted the limitation of life as it was in Homerton. The Principal was a staunch devotee of strict discipline but she had an integrity which commanded respect. We were grateful for the opportunity to be student teachers and mostly we adhered to the rules. Breakfast at 8 am sharp was obligatory as indeed were lunch at 1 pm and supper at 8:30 pm. Then we could take it if we wished or entertain a visitor in the common room. We could go out for tea and tea shops in Cambridge which served Chelsea buns or walnut cakes were very popular. Sometimes there was free time in the afternoon but 6:30 to 8:30 was compulsory study time each in our own bed-sitting rooms. In many colleges students slept 2, 3, or 4 to a bedroom, even in dormitories but in Homerton we each had quite a pleasant bedroom in which to sleep or study. Mine was No. 74.

There were very strict rules about male visitors and permit to sleep out at weekends was granted only if for example a relative took you to a nearby hotel. During mealtimes the staff sat at a high table and note was made of any student who didn’t eat what was served. The wayward student received a summons to see the nurse for a check up.

Some benefactor had endowed the college with an unlimited supply of butter. A part from that the food was basic and sometimes very unappetizing even allowing for the general aversion showed by students for institutionized feeding. We depended on food parcels sent by parents and friends, and we often shared our feast with those less fortunate who didn’t receive parcels.
Educationally Homerton was ahead of its time. We were reared on John Dewey and trained to teach according to the project methods he promoted. In 1933 the Hadow Report was published and this event had a profound effect on training in Homerton. The recommendations in the Report emphasized the need to educate children according to their age, aptitude, and ability. It opened the way to (?) methods of teaching and deeper comprehension of the learning process. Had it been fully implemented the Plowden Report would never have been written in its present form.

An equally powerful influence on Cambridge at the time was the work of Susan Isaacs. Her observations based on her work in the Malting House, Cambridge in 1926 are at the core of all present day views on the needs of young children. What is significant is that her work was not given the recognition it deserved at the time. Her writing style is exquisitely simple because she understood at depth what it was she was trying to say. As a result the academics tended to disregard even denigrate it and although her influence seeped through it was rarely acknowledged until a much later date.

When on teaching practice in Cambridge we worked with children in small groups or individually and their work was integrated through projects. In retrospect I can identify the principles of modern practice in the teaching style established by tuition in Homerton.

I was not very happy in college. I have never enjoyed being a member of a crowd and although I made several good friends, I didn’t take happily to an institutional life. There was little solitude and I longed to be independent and set up a life of my own designing. What I most enjoyed was Cambridge itself, particularly walking along the banks and into the neighboring countryside.

From January onwards wave after wave of blossom snowdrops, crocuses, daffodils, cherry blossom, laburnum and lilac and always the beech trees and magnificent pink and white horse chestnuts. I loved the stone of the old buildings and there and then decided that I would explore every village and town in England before I died.

The other greatest pleasure of those two years was my infant brother, Terence, to whom I devoted the long holidays. I watched with fascination the extraordinary changes which took place in a child between the ages of two and four. He was impish, with a keen sense of humour which I recognized as a sure sign of intelligence. It was he who helped me to enjoy the prospect of working with young children.

College stirred in me ideas about liberating children from the repetitive monotony of learning by memorizing. I wanted to teach in a forward looking town and I applied for a job in Nottingham because it had the reputation of being progressive.

I spent the first term of my probationary year in a very pleasant old school in a poorer part of the city. My salary was 153 pounds and 18 shillings per year. This reflected a 5% cut imposed by the Geddes Axe which as a means of alleviating the recession imposed a 10% cut, 5% of which was restored in 1936. Of my one pound per week, I spent 51 on food and I often reflect as I pay (fee) for a cup of coffee today, that I lived on that amount for a week. I was given plenty of scope in this term by a warm natured and caring headmistress but I was told by the local inspector that this was a temporary job as I had been appointed to the William Crane School to teach the reception class which started in January. The William Crane Schools were newly built to a design which had received world-wide acclaim. The William Crane Estate was a slum clearance
area. Situated on a sunny hill on the city boundary, the houses were built of brick, with bathrooms and internal toilets. They each had a private garden. It was hoped that the new tenants would live up to their bright environment and the 6 schools were placed at the hub of the Estate, The idea being that they would act as a community centre and lend cohesion to a modern housing estate.

Each of the 6 schools consisted of a row of brick-built classrooms with one side adjacent to an open corridor and with French doors along the opposite side. These doors were supposed to be kept open unless the weather was too inclement, as the open air style classroom was designed to offer a very healthy workspace. One extra classroom had a sliding screen on 3 sides, with a coke stove in the centre of the 4th wall. This was for the then called ‘retarded’ children and was known as the open-air classroom. The architects seemed oblivious to the vagaries of the British climate.

I was told that this was a show school and at the back of each classroom there was a long blackboard on which the teacher drew pictures intended to impress visitors. The headmistress ruled the school with military rigour. She was not an unkind woman but she had very formal ideas. Perhaps it was unfortunate for her that she was appointed to this school where the eyes of educators trying to interpret in a somewhat confused way the findings of the Hadow report were on her and her school.

Children from the moment they entered at the age of 5 were subject to formal tuition in reading, writing & number. It mattered little whether they understood or enjoyed what they were doing. The aim was to pass termly tests based on what they had memorized. They were expected to stand, break off what they were doing and say ‘good Morning Mme. So and so’ when the head teacher entered the room. Each child wore a handkerchief pinned from the shoulder and each day commenced with handkerchief drill. In fact all the routines associated with the days of formal schooling were drilled into these infants from the 1rst day in school.

The staff was equally dominated. We were not allowed to wear makeup and go without stockings even in very hot weather. The head took pride in the fact that she underspent the school allowance. We were obliged to make every scrap of apparatus and account for each sheet of paper used.

We accepted these restraints at the time partly because it was not unusual but mainly because we were glad to have a job during those years of recession. Women also accepted the idea of remaining a spinster, for unless you married a man wealthy enough to repay the college loan to the Council, you were required to stay on the job until the loan was paid off and married teachers were not employable.

The influence of the Hadow Report was evident even in such formal schools as this. For one thing the younger members of the staff had been educated in Training colleges at a time when modern ideas about teaching and learning methods were beginning to be understood. The two youngest members, myself and a friend, left our colleges burning with enthusiasm to improve classroom procedures for young children and ready to experiment with or without the approval of the head mistress. There were little of hope of succeeding had it not been for some of our local authority inspectors and the following incident was typical of many.

Every Tuesday afternoon was set aside for painting. At lunchtime teachers set up easels and prepared the paint. A large sheet of kitchen paper was pinned neatly to each easel. When children arrived their hands were inspected for cleanliness. They were each
given a large brush and the first exercise was to practice posture. Heels together, head
held high and over the heels, the brush held at the correct angle. No paint was allowed
until posture was perfect.

Once the rigid position could be held the child’s attention was drawn to the object
which they were expected to produce; a collection of coloured balls perhaps or the bird
bath outside the window. The picture must fill the paper and a ‘good’ painting was one
which photographed the object as nearly as possible.

Periodically the HM walked up and down the corridor where windows on the
(corridor side of the room ?) room allowed her to check that all was as it should be.

The results are best imagined with many objects and human figures elongated to
reach the top and the bottom of the paper.

About this time there was a movement afoot towards liberating children through
Art. Marion Richardson and others before believed that children had good ideas which
during their immature speech days could be released through such art forms as painting. I
was anxious to try out this theory and so was my young friend on the staff.

I spread newspaper on the floor under the corridor windows and one at a time
children were allowed to paint freely. The rest of the class held correct posture with
renewed rigor so that the HM’s mind could be put at rest when she paraded and yet each
child could get a turn to paint freely.

The results delighted me and I hid them in the bottom drawer of my desk.

One day the local inspector visited the school “I am interested in the New Art,” she
told the H.M., “and I should like to mount an exhibition in town as a means of
disseminating these ideas. I am sure members of your staff will be able to let me display
some of the pictures from your children.”

The HM brought the Insp straight to me. Forthwith all children in the school were
allowed ‘free expression’ with paint. All the time that HM was well aware of our
experiments but it needed the Insp to reassure her that there was some good in them.

This was the beginning of a slow change towards improving the lot of young
children in school. We began to realize that children needed to understand the uses of
words and in particular of the printed word. Learning to read by memorizing word
patterns gave way to learning the reading process through personal writing. Individual
and class News replaced such drills as “I see a ----“ or “There is a house. I am a girl/boy
etc. I well remember the thrill of discovering that children could be as creative in making
their own writing and reading as they were in making speech. Drill in memorizing
number (bands, tenets?) gave way to understanding the composition of groups. On Friday
afternoon I always bought a pound of dolly mixtures. The children sorted them, ordered
them and grouped them. They parted and combined groups, set them in equal rows and
arranged them in pyramids etc. In short they used dolly mixtures as a means of
comprehending number combinations and then they ‘sold’ them to one another and were
allowed to eat those they earned through correct purchasing procedures.

In 1939, war was declared and this evil event was to prove a tremendous aid in
establishing the rights of children. Almost overnight our priorities changed. The lives of
children were threatened and long established academic demands or standards paled to
insignificance.

For one thing we were not allowed to have a concentration of children in any one
building. We taught them in groups of 10 housed in spare bedrooms of parents’ houses on
the estate. Much to our amazement groups of 10 in 3 shifts and (or?) for 2 hours each per day made as much progress as longer class groups had during 5 hr (hour) days.

We worked with the children beyond the heavy handed authority of the H.M. and felt free to grow close to them and treat the as individual people. When eventually we brought them back into school this freedom of approach continued. Perhaps it was the reinforcement of window panes which proved a turning point.

During an air raid it was splintering glass which caused much of the damage and civilians were obliged to reinforce window panes with adhesive tape or netting. My friend and I went into the HT’s room one day and found her staring in dismay at several rolls of this adhesive netting. “How ever are we going to do this job,” she anguished. ‘The school’s all glass. Just cutting the stuff into small pieces is going to take days.” She suddenly looked old and very vulnerable. We brushed her aside. ‘Just leave it to us,” We took charge. “We’ll get the lot sorted out.” From that moment she capitulated and it wasn’t long after that she retired, but not before the school was inspected by a team of HMI’s.

This team visited for 4 or 5 days and with the thoroughness which characterized Inspectors. They probed, observed and questioned. The final verdict was communicated to the head and the minute they had departed she came into the staff room with a very long face. “Not good,” she reported. “They said my organization was good but apart from that they were not pleased with what they saw.” The reaction of the staff was most unexpected. We actually rallied round her. In spite of all we had suffered under her command, we respected her and resented outside criticism when we knew that according to her own principles she was doing a good job. There is nothing to compare with the way an outside enemy can unite a threatened community.

Other factors arising from wartime conditions were stirring the conscience of a nation about the welfare of its children and in particular of those who lived in the poor parts of big cities. Evacuation brought impoverished families into the homes of the more affluent and the other half of a nation were forced into recognizing the plight of many families so far ignored. The outcome was the Education Act of 1944 which was based on the principle of equal opportunity for all.

Shortly before the Act was published I was appointed Deputy HT to a school on the Player Estate. The people living on this estate were amongst some of the poorest in the city of Nottingham. Many came to school through the worst weather of winter wearing only 2 pairs of old socks on their feet. This school was the first in the country to provide free breakfast and this service was to continue for many years. Bread and dripping and cocoa were luxury to many of these children. News of the 1944 Act so excited us we almost forgot about the war. It was to be a charter for children and we were the privileged teachers who would help to implement it.

My class at this time was called the Practical Class. I had 44 slow learning children; actually all the non-readers in the school. These children taught me more in the 4 years I worked with them than I had learned in all the preceding years. They made nonsense of a reading scheme based on language totally alien to their personal speech. I never did persuade them to read ‘Jane fell in the mud,’ because in their vocabulary she could on fall in the ‘sludge’. I discarded reading schemes and apparatus and made each of them a book about themselves. They told me what to write in it and it follows that they could read it. For the first time in their school lives those children succeeded.
As the DH it was my duty to balance accounts for school milk and dinners. There were no school secretaries at the time and children brought 1/2 d each day for milk and about 1 shilling for dinner. Friday morning became a nightmare. With 44 less able children to be kept going at the same time, my ingenuity was taxed to the hilt.

In desperation I hit on the idea of having everything out of the cupboards so that their each child could be given something at which he could work independently, building blocks. Painting, sewing, model making rubbed shoulders with reading and number games. The children were happy and able to concentrate on individual tasks which matched their ability. They were learning how to learn and their attitude to learning improved tremendously. The integrated day had dawned.

I was also made well aware of the importance to children of their surroundings. During the war redecorating was non-existent. In fact the Player school which was almost new had never had its plaster walls painted. The walls in my classroom were spattered with milk stains and dirty finger marks. They made the whole room look dingy.

One weekend I took a tin of turquoise paint to school and transformed my classroom. When the children arrived on Monday morning they were delighted and watched one another critically lest any should as much as brush against the pretty walls. When the HM came in she didn’t know whether to laugh or frown. It was illegal apparently to interfere with the fabric of the building. Yet nothing happened to me and we all continued to respect and enjoy our brighter classroom.

Freedom to try out my ideas increased my interest in the modes and procedures, which would help young children to make the best of themselves. I began a diary or record of my thoughts and observations. Reading it 40 years later the immaturity of some of my comments astounds me. Yet the core of later philosophy was shaping. What I wrote then about the teaching of reading holds good today. (I believe this is the ‘Schemes’ notebook that Alice gave me, dates 1944-47, since it does contain a discussion of the teaching of reading) The struggle to formulate and express ideas encouraged ideas to develop. I longed for the day when I could have a school of my own in which to translate ideas into practice.

In 1947 my ambitions were realized. I was appointed HT of St. Anne’s Well Road Infant School in the poorest part of the city. The building itself was a massive stone monstrosity towering menacingly over narrow cobbled streets and huddles of tiny homes. The Junior School occupied the front of the building and the Infant School was housed on two floors at the rear. It boasted 3 sets of stone stairs. On each floor the classrooms were isolated from one another by moveable glass partitions. There was a pokey office for the Head with an inside window which opened into a tiny hall. We had part time use of the Junior School Hall which was vast and reputed to have been constructed on the plan of a German prison.

Outside two tiny yards were shared with the Junior School. These were surrounded by 20 ft high walls. Not a green thing could be seen from any part of either building or yard. Indeed the only claim to beauty for the whole area was the sky and those who worked in that building frequently refreshed their sights by looking upwards.

Children attending the school lived in slum property. Many of the tiny houses had no plumbing. Water was obtained from a communal stand pipe in the square between the houses and in winter frost often sealed the supply. The toilets were a row of shared privies. There was a bath house about 1/2 mile down the main street. The whole area was
demolished during the 50’s but not before a documentary was made as a record of early 20’s slum life.

Here then was a golden opportunity for instigating the kind of social and educational reform envisaged in the 1944 Act. I was fortunate that only dedicated teachers worked in these kinds of schools. This was before the days of designated priority areas and financial incentives. My team of 8 teachers were committed to the work of helping underprivileged children and their families. One was a dedicated older woman but the rest were young and extremely dedicated.

The years I worked in St. Anne’s Well Road were, as far as education was concerned, the happiest in my life. These were the pioneer days which led to the development of modern educational practice. They were days filled with challenge, fascinating problems, many disasters and an equal number of successes. The enthusiasm generated was so intense as to lift those who worked there completely out of themselves. Here was a cause which transcended our own needs. We went home exhausted each night but scarcely able to wait for the new day to begin. This may sound corny to many disillusioned teachers today. To us it was 100% real and what mattered most in day to day living.

We were given a great deal of support. For one thing, the building was so old and decrepit that providing we made sure it didn’t collapse on the children, we could do almost anything with it. We converted cloakrooms into private work areas, we opened up corridors, painted old woodwork in attractive colors, turned dark store rooms into viewing areas for film strips.

Perhaps the most important motivation came from the HM Inspectors. The Ministry of Education, as it was then called, mounted national courses to which they invited selected ‘key’ people who worked in small groups. Eminent speakers (on these courses) promoted their ideas for our consideration. No attempt was made to dictate how practice should change. The whole idea was to encourage thought and initiative and to disseminate innovative ideas through the schools. As a follow-up to these courses we were encouraged to form local discussion groups. We were given the go ahead for experimentation and guaranteed support. Those of us with experience of working with children who had been evacuated to country areas knew the advantage to the child of exploratory learning and education through first hand experience. Now we were free to test beliefs about children born of observation of them when they were free to be themselves.

My first move was towards improving the way the day was organized. A start was made by designating the first part of the morning Free Activities. During the second part of the morning, more emphasis was placed on English and Mathematics. The afternoon was given over to “Aesthetic Activities” during which each teacher developed her personal interests as a means of providing inspiration in the field of Art. The day ended with collective discussion and Service. According to the law of the land each day should being with R. E. (religious education) but even this requirement was waived by HMIs. The futility of trying to separate appreciation of things spiritual from other aspects of living became blatantly apparent.

We then looked more closely at the content of the environment. The financial situation in these post war years was extremely difficult and we had to improvise, make use of rough or inexpensive materials in order to provide concrete learning experience. A
great sense of excitement united teacher and children and absence from school on the part of either was extremely rare.

In order to maximize the distribution of our meager equipment, the partitions between the rooms on both floors were pushed open. The children quickly discovered the advantages of using all the facilities available and all of the teachers as well. A mode of organization we would now call open-plan or team-teaching grew out of the way staff and children worked together.

In a similar way, arbitrary divisions between the subjects of the curriculum broke down. A child engaged in constructing a doll’s house from waste materials was led into experiences such as measurement, consulting books, writing signs and notices, painting and modelling. Each activity became a starting point for learning in many directions. The day became integrated. What is even more important: what the children learned had meaning and was seen by them to be for their own purposes not merely a task performed to satisfy an adult.

Active purposeful learning needs space, and all available corners in the school were brought into use. Classroom doors stood open, cloakrooms and halls, storerooms and corridors, even the HT’s Office became part of the learning environment. Children were talking and asking questions as well as listening and answering questions. They pursued (insert unreadable) self chosen projects as often as they responded to teacher instructions.

Another organizational change was on its way. It was traditional practice in infant schools at this time to transfer children to a higher class at the beginning of each term in order to accommodate entrants. In a large school with an annual entry of say 490 children, some children had three different teachers in their first year. In order to establish a settled year of entry, it was decided to start the year with six reception classes, each of which contained a nucleus of six-year olds. By the end of the year the age range of these classes was 18 months and they became known as family classes.

After working with family classes for two years so many unexpected benefits emerged that it was decided to include the seven-year olds. In subsequent years each class contained children from each age group and incoming children were allocated to the class which best met their needs. Vertical Grouping had become established.

In 1951 the headship of my previous school, William Crane Infants Schools became vacant. I applied for the job because I saw in it the opportunity to free the school of the formality which persisted since my probationary years there. I got the job and found that my reputation had gone before me. “What do you want us to do?” the staff asked with considerable apprehension. My reply ‘Carry on as you are doing, but if anyone would like to experiment go ahead and I’ll back you up.’ I had already learned the educational realism of slow growth towards improvement. The human situation needs time if change and growth are to be worthwhile. In the end some of the most formal teachers developed the most interesting and enlightened procedures. Once they began to loosen up there was no turning back. ‘I have never felt so near my children,’ one teacher confided. ‘ and you couldn't make me change back to formal teaching even if you tried.’

Changes in organization were now well advanced. They reflected a new way of thinking about children and a set of believes based in helping each child to learn and develop according to its unique personal pattern. The days of pressuring children in order to obtain measurable results mainly for our own satisfaction were gone. We now began to look more closely at aspects of the curriculum and work towards understanding the
learning processes involved. The works of Piaget, Susan Isaacs, Tanner and many other educators helped to improve our knowledge of children and develop skills in observing them so that we could base what we were doing on what we learned about children from children themselves.

We also became increasingly aware that children learned as members of a family and of a community. I remember my first address to parents at a Christmas gathering soon after I had taken over. I tried to outline the nature of our partnership and suggested ways of working with them in the job of rearing and educating children. I persuaded them to bring waste materials into the school and then observe what the children did with them. Slowly the ideas behind what they called “cardboard box” methods began to make sense. There was still a long way to go in gaining the full cooperation of parents but the groundwork had been well covered long before the publication of the Plowden Report.

Throughout the ‘fifties’ modern practice gained momentum and recognition. Many visitors from within the U.K and from overseas came to observe, question, and discuss. The need to be articulate about what we were doing sharpened observation and helped us to clarify our ideas. Principles needed definition yet prescription must be avoided. There weren’t a set of rules which guaranteed the establishment of successful practice. If education was to serve children as individuals it must be devised within the context in which it operated. Procedures and practice must be flexible enough to change with changing needs and examples of good practice were not transferable between schools. These were difficult ideas to communicate to the general public and to other onlookers. Examples of poor practice were to be found in all parts of the system. Misinterpretations of such ideas as freedom, integration, discovery and the like led to valid criticism. Sometimes these disexamples were taken to be representative and innovative (innovating) ideas and practices had many enemies.

The Plowden Report served to publicize the best of modern practice and to provide public support for principles which were emerging. It did not in itself initiate practice although that is the way it appeared to many, particularly to educators in the States who now invaded English Primary Schools in droves. While the dollar favored USA visitors, courses based on studies of Primary Practice, degree studies, sabbaticals and the like were extremely popular. The interpretation of ideas found in the U.K. in American schools however, left much to be desired and some of our American enthusiasts did little to help promote practices which truly benefited the children.

Another problem was in the preparation of teachers to work in modern schools. College tutors who were suitably qualified and had sound experience of modern methods were not easy to recruit partly because there were few of them and partly because the salary incentives were marginal.

Inevitable the critics of modern practice publicized their views in black Papers, The Press and TV etc. and often gained a hearing. Research workers (seized ) the opportunity to scrutinize procedures before they had developed. There was a tendency to uproot the plant before it was established let alone mature. America was partly to blame. USA insistence on accountability leads in the school situation to putting children under pressure in order to obtain measurable results. This notion appealed to administration (administrators) in this country and pressure was brought to bear on teachers to emphasize academic results at the expense of the individual goals which matched the aptitudes of individual children. Add to that a contracting school situation in which
availability of jobs is at a premium and many teachers are tempted to relinquish or modify their ideals when security is threatened.

Not all teachers are defeated by circumstances. Here and there are schools which improve the quality of life for the children who learn in them. There are teachers who put the welfare of children before their own and these are the people who will bring early childhood education into its next stage.

During the post war years Nottingham created an overspill estate south of the Trent at Clifton. People were moved here from such areas as St. Ann, the idea being to provide them with a better standard of living. A sense of urgency resulted in families being transferred to Clifton before public convenience, apart from schools, had been provided. Indeed there was not even a church or any other form of community care (life) when the first families arrived. In the words of one person "It’s cold at Clifton. The kids are miserable and it’s a day’s journey to get to me job’. These families surely missed the rich warm sense of belonging which characterized the close nearness of slum life. When they were able they crept back.

The Clifton Schools became a main means of creating a sense of community in Clifton. There were many problems and teaching was a challenge. When the Headship at Brooksby Primary School became vacant I applied for the job and this gave me an opportunity to work with an age range which included the 7-11s – a chance to watch the progress of approaches to learning worked out with younger children through to Secondary School age.
Documents

The following documents have been photocopied from the originals:

1. Letter of recommendation for Alice Yardley from Homerton College
2. Letter of appointment and salary from City of Nottingham Education Committee
3. From the Schemes Notebook, ‘Experimental Year 1948 Entry’
4. From Schemes, ‘Daily Programme’ (appended to Experimental Year 1948 Entry)
5. Notebook cover, Philosophy for the Infant School 1951-59’
7. From Philosophy for the Infant School 1951-59, ‘Notes on the Use of Materials’
8. Entry from Diary of a Primary School Brooksby – 1959
9. ‘Blue Sky’ a poem from Alice Yardley’s collection of children’s writing, Infant and Junior Poetry
10. A page from Alice Yardley’s Memoir about arriving at St. Anne’s in 1947
11. Photocopy of cover of the booklets, ‘Movement Dance Sequence, Pyr Gynt Suite’, and ‘In the Playground’
12. Photos from ‘In the Playground’, and ‘Movement Dance Sequence’
13. Alice dancing
14. Portraits of Alice
15. Alice, 1944-51
16. Alice at Keyworth, 1999-2001
17. At the pub with Dorothy Glynn, the garden view from Alice’s living room
18. Pebble and Alice at the pub, November, 2000
MISS A. YARDLEY has a charming personality and always gets into a friendly relationship with her children. She works for true values, and is most careful to avoid anything that may cramp the future development of the children's minds. Her instincts are good and, for a beginner, the quality of the thought behind her procedure is very promising. She has power to inspire the class with perception of beauty in poem or picture, and is so quietly dignified and thoughtful in her treatment of the matter that they unconsciously receive the culture suggested, without a trace of sentimentality.

Miss Yardley is courageous and experiments with a view to discovering the best plans for the particular age she is dealing with. She has had varying ages and dealt well with the stages from four to seven years. In Reading and Arithmetic the work was well done; modern methods were carefully applied and a creditable amount of progress was visible. Miss Yardley is a gifted person and her children will be very well trained in such important things for small children as Drawing and Handwork. She sings for them and conducts profitable little rhythmic interludes.

Her dramatic power has been very well used for the entertainment of her fellow students, and she is not slow to help in community life generally. Her own gymnastics, and games are good. Her English and her Geography are very good. In Drawing she is good, using this power excellently in teaching. She is very original in all she does; her Handwork being full of vitality and interesting. Miss Yardley is inexperienced in many ways but has done good work and should make a very good teacher as she matures.

H. M. Sutton
Lecturer in Junior & Infant Method:
principal. W. H. Allan
CITY OF NOTTINGHAM EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

Offices:— South Parade,
NOTTINGHAM, 20th June, 1934.

Dear Madam,

I have pleasure in sending you below particulars of your appointment by the Education Committee at its Meeting held on the 16th May.

Will you please acknowledge receipt.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Miss A. Yardley,
Homerton College,
CAMBRIDGE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Salary per Annum* £</th>
<th>Engagement to date from</th>
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<td>Where required</td>
<td>Certificated Assistant</td>
<td>£153.18</td>
<td>1934. 27th August or 1st September, as required.</td>
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in such School or Schools as may from time to time be selected by the Committee.
1944 - 1951

Decided to experiment on lines suggested by Ministry with a view to finding the methods most suitable for our circumstances and children.

Basic Programme here appended. Children free to show us Teachers free to follow.
ST. ANN'S WELL RD. INFANTS SCHOOL

DAILY PROGRAMME

9.10 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. 
Free activities.
Children come in as they arrive and start straight away.
Younger children have use of Playground for bigger movement.

10.45 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. 
Noisy activities eliminated
Accent on English and Mathematics becoming more pronounced as higher age groups reached.
Four older classes quarter of an hour use of Playground for Physical Training.

12.00 p.m. to 12.10 p.m. 
Preparation for luncheon.
Morning prayers in rooms.

12.10 p.m. to 12.15 p.m. 
Dismissal.

2.15 p.m. to 3.15 p.m. 
Afternoon periods broken - use of Hall for Dancing.

3.15 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. 
Music etc., Further periods for English and Mathematics.

3.30 p.m. to 4.0 p.m. 
Religious Education.
Evening prayers
Collective service in turns 3.45 p.m. to 4.0 p.m.

Library open 11.0 a.m. to 12.0 a.m. and 2.0 p.m. to 4.0 p.m.
Optional Dancing Wednesday 3.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.
Optional Service 9.30 p.m. to 10.0 a.m. some mornings.
Optional Physical Training as arranged.

Head
Teacher
The Child Reveals Himself

Some observations on the school experience of the infant-age child, written from the background of the William Crone Schools.
Notes on the Use of Materials.
Provide the child with the nicest variety of materials procurable. Let him experiment with as many basic raw materials as possible. He should learn something of their origin - their use in modern society.
Sand for example should be provided in both its dry and wet states. The child should learn that it comes not only from the sea-shore but from the beds of rivers and from certain soils. He should know how it has been produced, how it is used for instance by the builder and the engine-driver, and so on.
Clay, which by the way is quite clean in use when the consistency is correct, should be connected with rocks and soil and with its uses in pottery. Simple tools can be provided - the child should be shown the various ways in which it can be used for building shapes by lump, coiled "snake", clays etc.
It should be allowed to dry out before paint or varnish is applied.
Paint should be kept clean and rich in color. It can be used both in liquid and powder form. It can be mixed with paste or papier mache or alabastine.
Show the correct use of the brush and how to keep the colors clean and fresh.
Some notes on various pieces of note developed by class teachers.

Carol Singing. (College Leaver: Mr Robson. One year training)

Mr Robson enjoys singing. He is, I believe, in a choir himself. Six weeks before Christmas, he organised a choir for carol singing. Practice was arranged on two evenings a week 4 - 4.30. Attendance was voluntary. Most of his children came regularly.

The choir decided to go carol singing on the Estate.

A plan of next part of the estate where housed the children in the choir was made (3 inch = 110 yds). The home of each child was placed. Much mathematical values, to mile, proportion, number streets, areas etc.

Children wrote individually to parents, explaining what they were doing, when they would visit & when money would be needed.

They wrote to the Estate Committee for official permit.

They wrote to the Vicar asking permission for church fund.

A suitable anthology of 10 carols was made, each child making his own copy. The carols were timed arranged in groups of three, (three sing at each house visited.) The whole was planned in two hour classes.

Takings were estimated & later checked. The sum of $5.10.0d was duly sent to the Vicar, who replied.

A number of side interests resulted. Some study of Scriptural background to carols. One group wrote & produced a
Blue sky, blue sky
White clouds white clouds
All of those are high
But none are higher than the sky.

from
Alice Yandley's
"Infant & Junior Poetry."
to formulate & express ideas encouraged ideas to develop. I longed for the day when I could have a school of my own in which to translate ideals into practice.

In 1947 my ambitions were realized. I was appointed HT of St Bede's Well in a part of the city. The building itself was a mixture of stone and brick, making many rooms have cobblestone and huddles of tiny homes. The Junior School occupied the first floor of the building & the Infant school was housed on the floor at the rear. It boasted 3 sets of shorter rooms. On each floor the classrooms were isolated from one another by movable glass partitions. There was a rec room for the head with an exterior window which opened into a tiny hall. No had put an use of the Junior school Hall which was said to be have been constructed on the plan of a German priory.

Outside two tiny yards were shored up. The Juniors. These were surrounded by 20th. high walls. Not a green thing could be seen for any part of the building yards. Indeed the only claim to beauty in the whole area was the sky & those who worked in that building frequented their rights bylooking upwards.

Children already the school lived in slum property. Many of the tiny houses had no plumbing. Water was obtained from a communal standpipe in the square between the houses & in the back yard sealed the supply. The loo was a runners of sand, dirt, and stones. There was a bath house which was made of a brick house with a brick down the main sheet. The whole area was demilished during the 50's but not before a documentary was made as a record of dying 20th. slum life.
Movement
Dance Sequence

Peer Gynt Suite No.1, op.46
by Grieg

In the hall of the
Mountain King — —

In the Playground
St. Ann's Well Rd.
Infant School
~ 1948 ~
Horizontal wooden ladder

Horizontal Pole

Steel frame

The Kings' Approval

Paying Court
to the Kings
Alice, the tall one

The Y.W.C.A. team which gave a display at Nottingham and Notts. Girls' Club Festival at the Manning School last night

Alice

Natural Movement Group
Alice in dance costume

Alice in her 30's
In door of caravan

Alice, Deputy Head at Player Primary School

Headteacher at St. Anne’s Well Road School
Alice in her garden, 2001, summer

Alice at her front door,
2 Crantock Garden
Keyworth,
August, 1999
The view from her living room

Alice and her friend Dorothy Glynn: lunch at the pub
On the occasion of Alice’s birthday,
November 14, 2000

“at the pub”
References


Yardley, A. (1973). *Young Children Thinking*. New York: Citation Press.