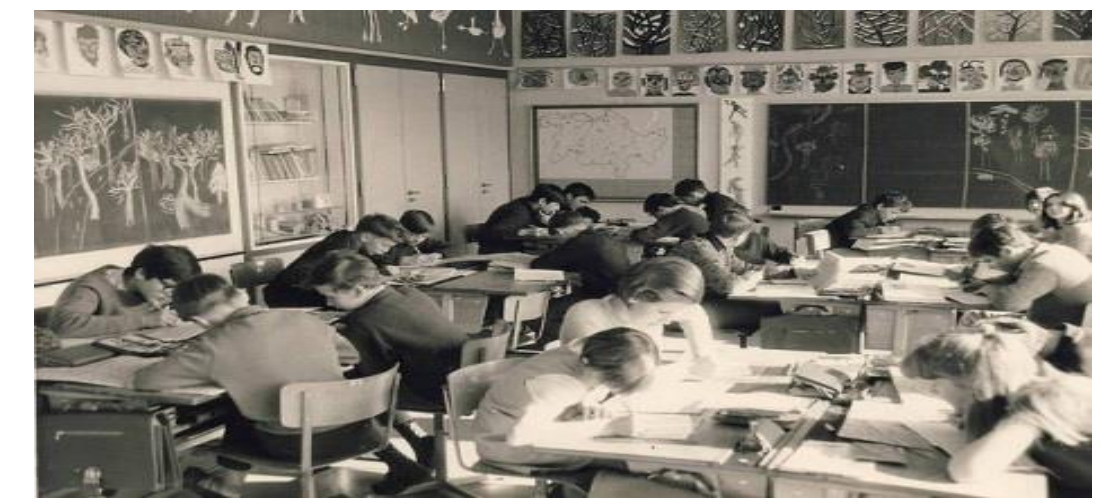




LANDMARK in EDUCATION: BRIDGET PLOWDEN'S REPORT on CHILDREN and their PRIMARY SCHOOLS, 1967

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Before the 1967 Plowden Report

Objective:

To assess how the report came to mould state primary education with reference to the previous and current system and how the 1967 Plowden Report influenced it by creating a child centred learning environment.

History of Education – Before and After Plowden

- Rousseau sounded the keynote for all subsequent efforts of educational process and encouraged the belief that childhood had its own way of seeing; thinking and feeling therefore meaning it was important in its own right. John Dewey (1916) aimed to 'promote individuality and to base education on the concept of children as children and not as future adults', this originated from previous thinking and extended the justification for children to be treated as children. Plowden reiterated this by centralising the report around the child .
- The Second World War rapidly accelerated change. Before the War LEAs (Local Educational Authorities) were granted control and were given powers to develop the elementary system. 1920 and 1930 saw a growth in the movement towards an end in the parallel systems of elementary and secondary education. The 1944 Education Act abolished the category of elementary and in words of statute organised education into three progressive stages: primary, secondary and further education. The institutional image of elementary schools became domestic in character and the view of child-centred education from before the war was given a visual manifestation as many new schools built meant traditional teaching methods could no longer be carried out due to the open plan and the resultant atmosphere.
- What is certain is that the experience of most children in first years of compulsory schooling is now very different from that of their grandparents in the years before, during, and immediately after the Second World War.

Research Methods – Archival and Secondary

The un-catalogued Plowden papers held at Newcastle University Special Collections were of great use to my research scholarship. These hitherto un-consulted papers gave me an insight into archival study and allowed me to access material quickly.

I spent three days consulting material held at the Institute of Education in London.

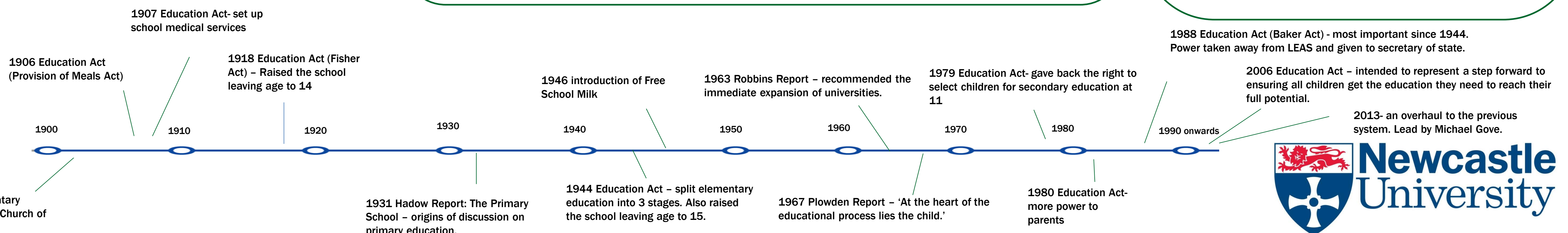


A wealth of secondary material was consulted and notes were compiled from these. A variety of papers and books were studied and complimented the primary material which was consulted.

Finally I visited a primary school in my local area, this gave me a great insight into how the Plowden report had influenced educational settings without the realisation of staff in schools.

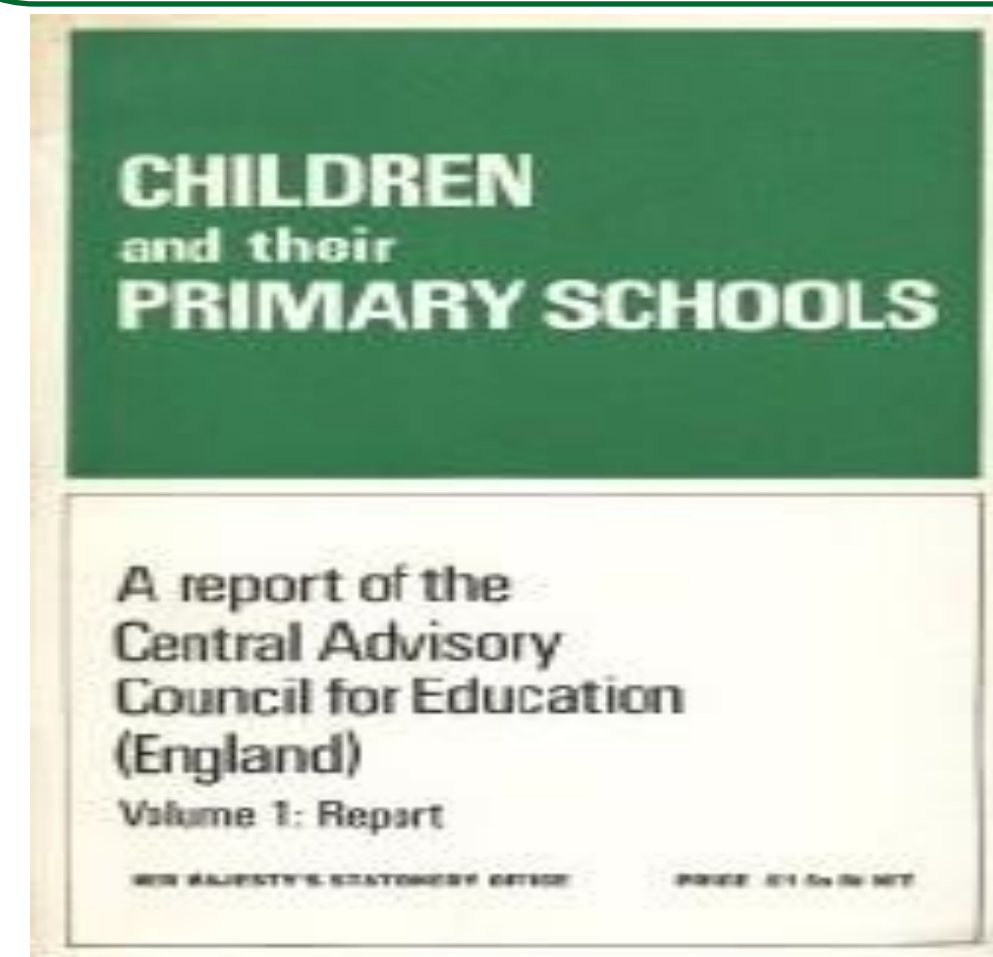


The Advisory Committee chaired by Bridget Plowden



Aims of the Report

- The Plowden Report was a 'report of progress and spur to more'. The two volume document encompassed a range of progressive recommendations that primary education could choose to adopt.
- At the 'heart of the educational process - lies the child' - for the first time in history children were to be considered as the main beneficiary of these new proposals, learning was to be through discovery and throughout the whole report this can be seen to shine through.
- It has to be remembered that although the Government commissioned the report - it did not necessarily adopt the recommendations and the reason for its commission was not for an urgent issue but that primary education needed addressing as it was there 'turn'.
- Plowden endorsed ideas that had already been considered in the Hadow Report, however she attempted to endorse these progressive ideas without misunderstanding. - unfortunately this was not the case.



Top Priorities

- Establishment of Educational Priority Areas (EPA's) - these were to ensure disadvantaged communities and children were offered an education which would set them up for future life and rival the best schools in the country. Plowden specifically asked that funding for this 'necessity' was to be found separate from general educational funding - in order for parents of middle class children not to feel resentment.
- Recruitment of teachers aides - this was to ensure teaching remained progressive and children received the support they deserved.
- Improvement of crumbling school buildings - the war had left many schools damaged, although reconstruction had many meant had been rebuilt, Plowden understood that many other schools were left and in 1967 were hazardous. Her plan was to create classrooms which would support child centred learning.
- Big expansion of nursery education starting as soon as possible - the foundation years did and still do contain some of the vital learning ingredients for future life.
- Change in the ages of school transfer to 8 and 12, establishing first and middle schools - this necessary intermediary stage ensured children were ready for higher levels of education and had reached sufficient maturity.

1967 onwards - After Plowden

Legacy

- At the heart of primary school education today lie many ideas enshrined in the report which we now take for granted. Without realisation teachers adopt methods which Plowden instigated and encourage the seriousness of play and excitement through learning. Long gone are the days where creativity was minimal.
- Some advocates persuasively argue that a revolution never took place after the Report was published and while immediate effects of child centred learning were not seen in many primary schools, the long term legacy of Plowden can still be seen in educational settings today and its influence has been widespread.
- Plowden was criticised by the Black Papers for creating undesirable trends, however literacy levels rose and so did child satisfaction while in school.

Conclusions

- While the Plowden Report's recommendations were not adopted from when published, its influence has been widespread.
- Critics have condemned the progressive methods outlined in the report however increasing evidence has shown that methods of teaching have on the whole increased understanding and satisfaction.
- Although some of the ideas were not new when published the Plowden Report ensured they were committed in writing, and schools have plenty to thank Plowden for even today.
- With changes to the educational system made by Michael Gove, 2010-present, primarily to that of primary schools Plowden has been revisited. Gove wants to ensure parents have the final word on where their children go, although this does not necessarily follow Plowden's ideals it extends her thoughts on parental involvement and how they can help a child succeed. Another policy which does extend Plowden's beliefs is the Pupil Premium, much like Plowden's interest in EPA's Gove wants to ensure that money is given to schools dedicated to support disadvantaged children.
- Overall it can be seen that Plowden's ideals have been entrenched in the British educational system since the 1970s and will continue to make an important contribution to progressive educational ideals.

