

# EDUCATION MATTERS

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## NEW MEDIUM FOR IRISH TEACHERS

Welcome to "Education Matters". We hope you will enjoy receiving your free monthly copy of this new paper. In launching this newspaper, one of our primary objectives is to provide a platform for educators to communicate their news and views to one another. Currently there is little or no scope for them to do this in a publication that deals with the entire spectrum of Education Matters. The structure of the educators' day tends to bind him to his books and his students. He lives in a child-orientated or adolescent world, and, he has little opportunity for meaningful exchange with colleagues. It is hoped that this newspaper will go some way towards alleviating the isolation frequently experienced by educators.

Many men and women involved in education at First, Second and Third levels are gifted and dedicated people. Over the years they have individually accumulated invaluable expertise in given areas. More often than not however, it is a case for them of "living and dying unwept, unhonoured and unsung". Through this newspaper we hope to explore and exploit such expertise, for the individual's own satisfaction, and the corporate benefit of the readers.

We also hope to provide up the minute information on educational trends, and particularly to highlight

policy documents and discussion papers issued by the Department of Education. At present teachers have to rely for such information on sporadic and often sketchy coverage in the national media.

### SELF-ESTEEM

Not the least of our aims is to stimulate, entertain and motivate educators, who often have to battle to preserve self-esteem in an unappreciative ethos.

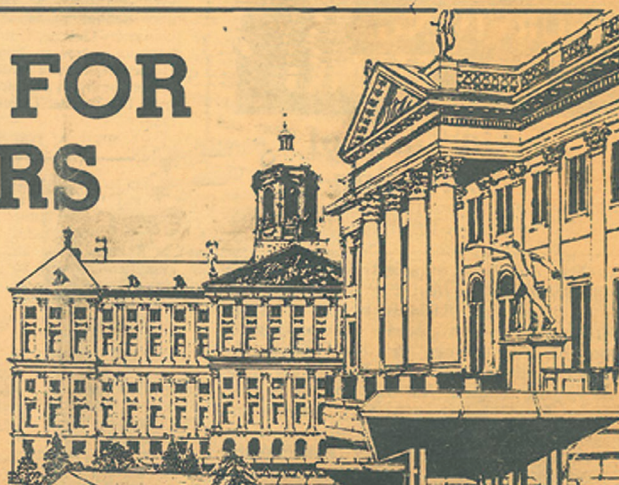
Vital issues such as stress in work, unmanageable numbers, lack of in-service training, feelings of inadequacy in the face of the new

technology, student apathy, the absence of a formulated philosophy of education within a particular school, lack of literacy at Third level, lack of integration between First, Second and Third levels, outdated curricula, the examination system — these and many other relevant topics will be aired in future issues.

### SUPPORT

This newspaper is essentially your newspaper.

We rely on your support and interest to make it a success, and invite you to write to the editor, sending your suggestions, comments and recommen-



**EDUCATION MATTERS**

**1987 - 2017**

and send your article to the editor at:  
Education Matters,  
56 Carysfort Avenue,  
Blackrock, Co. Dublin.  
Tel: 887247.

Our sincere good wishes to educators everywhere. If you wish to participate, or if you have any comments on the publication, please write to us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

## Talking with Gemma Hussey

Gemma Hussey is once again at the centre of the Irish educational scene, having been recently appointed by Alan Dukes to the Fine Gael front bench as Spokesperson for Education. A controversial figure in the eyes of many teachers, it was with considerable anticipation that I sought a conversation with her about matters educational.

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE



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# Thirty years of Education Matters

An absorbing journey



**Brian Mooney**

Editor, Ireland's Yearbook of Education

Thirty years ago, in 1987, Phyllis Mitchell established *Education Matters*. She had perceived a need for a specialist publication which would bring together the various significant news stories across the education sectors, thus making it possible and easy for educators to keep abreast of all relevant developments, as well as providing them with a voice and opportunities for expressing themselves. There was no such vehicle in Ireland at that time.

## Gemma Hussey Interview

The first edition, in A3 newsprint format, featured Gemma Hussey talking to Phyllis about her three-year term as Minister for Education. Reading this interview from a 2017 perspective, along with a range of others with people such as Christina Murphy – a predecessor of my own in the *Irish Times* education pages – and a youthful Pat Kenny, it seems to me that the issues facing educators never really change, but that they renew themselves in every generation. This fact is alluded to by Gemma Hussey also in that first edition of *Education Matters*.

Hussey referenced her initiative to combat sexism and sex stereotyping in textbooks, and her initiative in establishing a working party to examine the position of women in Irish higher education. Today, these two issues of the unequal power relationships between women and some men in educational and other working environments, and the position of women in higher education, are at the centre of both national and international attention. On 6 November 2017, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, announced the establishment of a Gender Equality Taskforce and appointed this high-level team to prepare a prioritised three-year action plan.

In that same 1987 interview with Phyllis, Hussey defended her most far reaching decision as Minister for Education to close Carysfort teacher training college on the basis that the three [unnamed] teacher training colleges had been half empty for some time. Irish primary school teacher training has never recovered from that grievous mistake on her part.



Since 1987 the remaining teacher training colleges have seen CAO points rocket for the remaining available places and these colleges have had to provide eighteen months graduate conversion courses to make up for the loss of training places resulting from Carysfort's closure.

Furthermore, Hibernia College has established itself as the biggest provider of high quality postgraduate trained primary school teachers, training more teachers than the other colleges do collectively, and still there are no teachers currently available to provide substitution cover for normal absenteeism in our primary schools today.

Following on from that first edition of *Education Matters*, I have identified a small selection of my personal preferences from profiles published over the years. Amongst those is the profile of Christina Murphy.

### **Christina Murphy Profile**

Cut off in her prime, Christina Murphy was a giant in Irish education journalism, serving as education correspondent for 12 years, in whose footsteps I have been honoured to follow for a similar period as Irish Times education columnist and analyst. I was privileged to work with her on a three-part series on Irish education for RTE in the mid-eighties.

Christina's energy and enthusiasm are well captured in Phyllis's representation.

"I love the challenge of a daily newspaper, sussing things out, researching, digging for news." This verbalises exactly the driving force behind those of us privileged to write on education for the Irish Times. "I like to think that we set the agenda for education coverage."

As with the Hussey interview, the themes identified by Christina are as relevant today as they were in the eighties: "One-year H. Dip is not enough by way of training"; "The Junior Cert is limited by lack of in-service training and the absence of classroom based assessment alongside the written exam." She supports the CAO points system as the best working system we've got, as opposed to the subjectivity of interviews in a small intimate society such as ours.

Christina had a somewhat rocky relationship with teachers, seeing them as a bit defensive and under-appreciative of the privileges of the job such as short hours and long holidays. And yet she acknowledged the enormous difficulty of being a good teacher.

On one issue, in my opinion, she got it totally wrong: "seeing teaching as lonely and isolating, lacking the compensation of the give and take and interaction among colleagues". After over forty years as a teacher from September to June each year since 1976, I cannot describe how supportive and collegial teachers are towards each other. The staffroom is a place of laughter, banter and mutual support.

Working in *The Irish Times* at a desk in August–September each year, devising the story that will appear under one's name the following morning concerning this year's Leaving Cert CAO College offers, is by

far the most isolating experience you can imagine. As you look around anxiously for inspiration, every colleague is in the exact same place as you with their head buried in their screens, and with deadlines only minutes away. Back slapping banter and mutual support is nowhere to be seen.

### **Ray Kearns Profile**

Another excellent encapsulation of a giant in Irish education is Phyllis's profile of my good friend Ray Kearns. She captures the sheer energy of the man. Leaving school after the Inter Cert to work on the railway, he was a docker in the North Wall when, in his own words, "he came to the use of reason."

Studying Maths as part of an Arts degree in UCD by day and working the night shift in the docks, Ray still managed to win the trust of his student colleagues and was elected president of the student council. From there to the H. Dip, to James Street as a maths teacher, at which point most men would have rested on their laurels – but not Ray Kearns. He went to Pittsburgh on a scholarship to achieve his Masters in Mathematics, three more summers in Fordham and Boston College, and from there to Gonzaga as head of the Maths department.

What a journey Phyllis describes, but that was only the beginning. In 1969, he rented the old Sacred Heart School building on Leeson Street, and thus was born the Institute of Education. I walked through that door in September 1971, after a day's work in an insurance brokerage firm, to add Latin to my Leaving Cert to enable me to register as an Arts student in UCD. Every evening he stood inside that door, hand outstretched to welcome the students, smiling broadly as he encouraged us, while at the same time finding out how we judged our teacher. Thus started a friendship that has lasted a lifetime.

What Phyllis did not capture – because he keeps it well hidden – is Ray's innate generosity and decency. I cannot recount the number of times he has responded to genuine need that I encountered and brought to his attention by providing totally free education and support. On one occasion, following a request from me, he fulfilled the wish of a dying Leaving Cert student to secure a place in Law in Portobello College, and a few weeks before the student died, Ray organised a half day one-to-one immersion experience for him in the content of the Law programme.

### **Pat Kenny Profile**

Still in the 1980s, Phyllis interviewed a youthful Pat Kenny titling her profile "That Mega-Man". Pat's *Late Late Show* years were still in the future, but he had already presented the Eurovision song contest. I have worked with Pat in RTE since my UCD student days, during the summers in the early seventies, as Pat's TV and radio career was taking off. We have become good friends over the years as we worked together on various programmes, and I feel that I now know the essence of the man. However, Phyllis's profile of Pat Kenny has given me a totally fresh insight into the forces that shaped him into the giant of Irish media that he is today. The O'Connell years and the experience of arbitrary and unjust punishments, with leathers and dusters flying in all directions, is an experience lived through by most boys of my generation who served our apprenticeship in

Christian Brothers' schools in the sixties. The brilliance of his academic achievements is captured in her piece, winning scholarships three times – on entry to secondary school, following the Inter Cert, and into university – all by the age of 17. He won a further teaching scholarship to Georgia University following his UCD Engineering years.

Phyllis captures Pat's detached and analytic mind perfectly. To this I can attest. When preparing a set of briefing notes for Pat Kenny, you know instinctively that he will cover every salient point in the interview and will do so within the allotted time. In contrast, the late lamented Gerry Ryan would get into the first paragraph of your briefing notes and then take off in a completely uncharted direction, leaving you wondering what he was going to ask you next, and his production team frantically hand signalling through the glass wall to get him to return to the topic and keep him from going seriously over time.

### **Mick Lally Profile**

Another star of stage and screen profiled by Phyllis was the late great Mick Lally of "Miley Byrne" fame. A favourite photograph of my 95-year-old mother-in-law shows her walking into her daughter's wedding in the Old Ground in Ennis on Mick Lally's arm. Phyllis interviewed him after a morning's filming of Glenroe in Kilcoole in Co Wicklow. She vividly chronicles the filming of a scene from the show, bringing it to life in her colourful description. She had to drive into RTE a few days later to complete her interview with Mick.

Born in the Mayo Gaeltacht of Tourmakeady, Mick went to take his BA in Galway and then spent six years as a teacher in Tuam. In a sign of things to come, Mick became deeply involved with his pupils in the writing and production of plays. From there onto amateur theatre productions in Galway and in 1975 the birth of Druid Theatre, at which point Mick decided to go full time into the theatre. From there he soon emerged into the giant of Irish theatre he became. To me Mick will always be the unassuming host who, along with his beloved wife Peggy, would welcome you back to their warm and welcoming home off the South Circular Road after a night's performance in "Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme" in the Abbey.

### **Bryan MacMahon Profile**

One of Phyllis's own favourite interviews was with the great Kerry teacher and writer Bryan MacMahon. I am of Kerry stock myself, my grandfather was born on a small farm outside Killarney, went on to teacher training in Waterford and eventually to become a Principal of a small school outside Tralee. He passed the teaching gene onto three of his children and onto me in the next generation – so I read the MacMahon interview as an insight into my own roots.

Having read it and reread it, I find it impossible to summarise in a few paragraphs. I cannot do justice to Phyllis's capacity to bring this writer, lecturer, poet, sage and great teacher to life in a short synopsis. So I have decided to use my prerogative as Editor of *Education Matters Yearbook* (now renamed *Ireland's Yearbook of Education*) to reproduce the Bryan Mac Mahon

interview in full in this year's edition, as a celebration of the first thirty years of her stewardship of *Education Matters*.

In addition to the series of profiles which Phyllis created in the early years of the publication, several now-famous people – then third level students and recent graduates – cut their teeth on *Education Matters* back in the late 1900s, including Pat Leahy (Sunday Business Post), Cormac O'Keeffe (Irish Examiner), Dara O Briain (famous comedian and mathematical genius), and others.

In 1997, *Education Matters* and *The Sunday Tribune* entered into an arrangement by which the monthly publication would be distributed as a supplement within the national Sunday newspaper. This involved a print run of more than 100,000 and had the effect of bringing *Education Matters* to a far wider audience and embedding the publication as a significant news medium in the entire education establishment.

A couple of years later *Education Matters* moved on from the *Sunday Tribune* to enter into a similar type of arrangement with *Ireland on Sunday*. This lasted until the end of 2000 when Phyllis decided to transfer the publication to the internet, a medium which at that time was beginning to penetrate the Irish market.

### **Yearbook**

EducationMatters.ie was very successful – but there remained a yearning for the print medium. In 2006, alongside the website, Phyllis established *Education Matters Yearbook*. This was a 250-page book that chronicled the key events of the year in education in Ireland across all sectors. Six years later the value of this unique annual publication was recognised by NUI Galway. The endorsement and support of this long-established and highly esteemed university was immensely important in increasing the credibility and raising the profile of *Education Matters Yearbook*.

I have been writing the executive summary for *Education Matters Yearbook* since 2007 and three years ago I accepted the offer of the position of Editor. I have been supported by many great teachers in shaping the emerging style and structure of the publication, who value what *Education Matters Yearbook* is and can be into the future, particularly by my good friend and initial main sponsor over the past three years, Brian Mac Craith, President of DCU.

I cannot conclude this overview of the first thirty years of *Education Matters* without stating that it has been an immense privilege to have worked with Phyllis Mitchell for the past ten years. She has brought a rich vein of insight and scholarship to the world of Irish education, and has more than fulfilled her initial ambitions for *Education Matters* and *Education Matters Yearbook*.

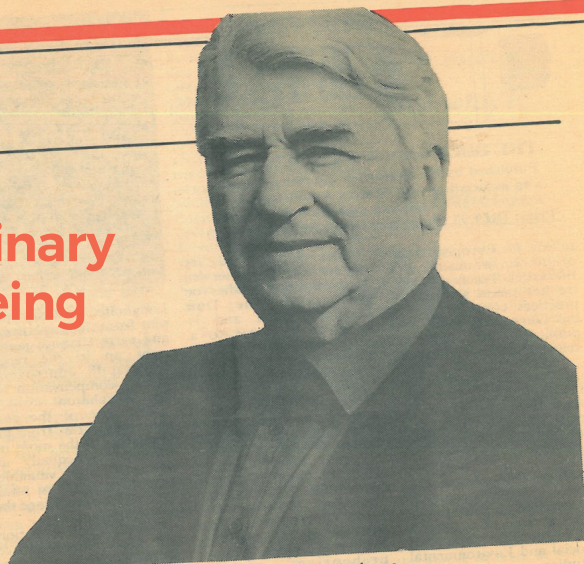
### **Education Matters Website**

In addition to the Yearbook, [www.educationmatters.ie](http://www.educationmatters.ie) continues to thrive, offering blog space to people interested in expressing themselves on education related subjects, a free download of the current edition of *Education Matters Yearbook* (now *Ireland's Yearbook of Education*), highlights from down the years, an events calendar, and – to pay the bills – advertising space.

## PROFILE:

# Portrait of an extraordinary teacher and human being

Bryan M MacMahon Spring 1988



**Phyllis Mitchell**

**T**his profile of the great writer and teacher Bryan MacMahon is taken from an early edition of *Education Matters*, the specialist medium for educators established by Phyllis Mitchell in 1987. Although the piece is 30 years old, it is in essence timeless. It is published here to mark and celebrate thirty years of *Education Matters*.

Bryan MacMahon's feet are deeply and firmly rooted in Kerry soil. Born in Listowel, seventy-eight years ago, he has lived and worked there all his life, as did his father and grandfather before him. This rootedness in a rural town has had a considerable influence on his personality, accounting perhaps for a certain down-to-earth solidity, and even pragmatism, in his character.

However, if Bryan MacMahon's feet are firmly on the ground, his head is surely in the stars. For his practicality is combined with a rare creative genius. He shows little trace of those characteristics associated with your proverbial mad artist, but nevertheless the irrepressible flame of his creative imagination lights up his personality and conversation, giving colour and vitality to his practical wisdom.

A husband and father of five, a teacher, bookshop owner, writer of poems, short stories, plays and novels and a lecturer – he has done the things he put his mind to superlatively well. Poet and sage, at 78 he continues to live a full rich life as writer, lecturer, guest speaker and adviser on literary subjects.

## THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TEACHER

In his time, Mr. MacMahon has taught all classes at primary level, from kindergarten to sixth. He has a keen appreciation of the potential influence of teachers, and maintains that properly selected and trained, given proper working conditions and with the backing of people who matter, teachers could change the history of a nation in one decade.



“Children can  
teach each other  
for a while.”

To be an effective teacher, however, it is necessary to have certain qualities. A good teacher must first of all have a gift of communication. If a man or a woman can rivet the attention of students, so that his or her words are penetrating them like lances, that person can teach.

Alongside this ability to communicate there has to be the quality of infectious enthusiasm. It is out of his own experience that Mr. MacMahon’s conviction regarding this quality of enthusiasm is born. A highly disciplined man himself, in his early days as a teacher he “ran a tight ship”. But as time went on, he softened. He quickly came to realise both with regard to his own five sons and with regard to his pupils that over-pushing them academically was not a good idea. Communicating one’s own infectious enthusiasm is a much more vital way of motivating pupils and getting them interested. For learning really is “caught, not taught”.

Nobody can give what he hasn’t got, or in the pithy words of King Lear: “Nothing can come from nothing”.

Mr. MacMahon maintains that to feed this all-important quality of infectious enthusiasm, a teacher must have an intellectual life after school which is vital and stimulating. He maintains that it is absolutely necessary that educators take up a second activity in the evening so that their intellect may be nourished and the process of their own development may continue. Not to have such interests outside school is to vegetate, for the teacher who confines his intellectual life to the four walls of his classroom is inevitably doomed to become as puerile in mentality as the children themselves, despite the onset of grey hair and the odd wrinkle. He will certainly fail to keep himself, in Mr. MacMahon’s words, “bright and shining for the children”.

## MOTIVATING CHILDREN

Mr. MacMahon has an innate understanding of the psychology of the child. During his teaching career he conceived thousands of clever ploys to whet the interest of the children and spur them on to the heights of enthusiasm.

One day, for instance, during the course of a lesson, he ostentatiously withdrew a small red notebook from his pocket. Then he paused, looked very mysterious and retreated behind the blackboard. After a moment he reappeared and continued with the lesson.

Not for long, however, for his face was again suddenly shrouded in mystery, and once more he disappeared behind the blackboard.

As these surprising withdrawals continued the children grew increasingly agog with curiosity.

“What are you doing, sir?”

“Now, that’s a secret.”

“Tell us.”

“No, no.”

“Please, sir, please.”



“Well,” said Mr MacMahon, dangling the proverbial carrot, “if you’re very good I’ll tell you next Friday.”

At last Friday arrived. Eager faces awaited the revelation of the secret.

“Hands up those of you who collect anything.”

“I collect stamps.”

“I collect old coins.”

“I collect shells.”

“Well,” said Mr MacMahon, “I collect words.”

“Can we do that, sir?”

“Oh, no! You’re too small.”

“No we’re not, sir.”

In the manner of Tom Sawyer manoeuvring his mates so that he could enjoy the apple while they painted the fence, Mr MacMahon gave a little to the cajoling of his pupils.

“Well, if you’re very good, next Friday I’ll let the six best of you collect some.”

The following Friday the six best were duly chosen.

“Don’t collect too many. It’s hard work.”

The following week the next six got their chance, and eventually everyone had a go.

The children got words from sauce-bottles, from advertisements, from radio, newspapers and from all manner of unusual places. They set up contests with each other.

“I have 4,365 words.”

“I have 3,000, but mine are better ones than yours.”

They started swapping them and fighting over them. They compiled the most astonishing lists of words. Those children ended up with a vocabulary that even Mr. MacMahon himself found truly amazing.

Nor was Mr. MacMahon’s ploy of mysteriously retreating behind the blackboard lost upon the children. They appreciated it for what it was – a cunning ruse to arouse interest.

Part of Mr. MacMahon’s gift as a teacher was the ability not only to arouse interest but to sustain it. In the word-collecting incident, for example, he drove home his advantage by leaving boxes of coloured chalk at the disposal of the children in the early mornings before class formally began.

When he would arrive into his classroom he would find his blackboards transformed into seas of surrealistic colour, covered with words both in English and Irish.

Mr MacMahon concentrated on the humanities in his teaching, and used the story technique extensively. No Archimedes himself, his interest in the Maths programme was slight. He foresaw that the time was coming when machines would be used for calculations. And those hours spent

The ‘Cúntas  
Míósúil’ was the  
bane of his life.

In this rich environment of riotous colour the children came on in leaps and bounds.

teaching pounds, shillings and pence – were they a waste of time now that we have the *punt*?

The power of the story, however, he saw as universal and timeless. It appeals to the imagination, and the power of the imagination is incalculable, for all of our creative impulses have their origin there.

Mr MacMahon made everything a story. He also placed great emphasis on discussing the story.

In teaching reading, for example, it is the discussion of the story which brings the text alive for the children. The teacher's own intellectual knowledge and experience of life renders the subject matter vitally interesting for the pupils. The discussion, however, must be original and questions should not be asked in a predictable form. Stories such as King Midas and Christ among the Doctors are among Brian MacMahon's favourites for children.

'What do you think of Midas?' he might say to them. 'I'll tell you something, if I had his money I wouldn't be here teaching you lot.'

With the passage of years, Mr MacMahon learned to look with a detached eye on a class and on himself in relation to it, and to ask himself certain questions:

Exactly what am I doing here? Am I living their intellectual lives for them or am I stimulating them?

And finally he learned to ask himself the all-important question: How can I educate these children without killing myself?

He found the mould which was there, and which was necessary, had sometimes to be broken for effective teaching. The craft arose from breaking the mould. It was necessary to develop an elasticity and learn to forget the timetable when this was appropriate. For Mr MacMahon the idea of 'lay-bys' within the school day was important, for a teacher must have a rest. Children can teach each other for a while. Or if a teacher is, say, very tired indeed, he should get a box of library books and let the children teach themselves.

At another time, a teacher might turn around and say: 'Ah, I'm tired teaching you lads; let's have a chat about something interesting' – and that might be the most important part of the day.

Mr MacMahon avoided using a pedantically correct School Language in talking to his pupils. He spoke to them in the natural colourful idiom that was a product both of his native Listowel and his own rich imagination. He also used his own wide experience of life to enrich the children. He got them into the habit of asking him about trips he made from time to time with the permission of the Department of Education to American and European universities in connection with his work as a writer.

These journeys were a source of great interest to the children, especially since Mr MacMahon whetted their curiosity with his vivid descriptions and racy anecdotes. Informally they absorbed details of geography, history, literature and the irresistibly attractive area of human relationships.

Mr MacMahon talked to his pupils and listened to them in a personal way, and occasionally had to tell one of them that he was crossing the line. But in forty-four years of teaching he never had any trouble that couldn't be speedily resolved, and he never sent a child home feeling under a cloud.

### **A CAREER THAT WAS NO BED OF ROSES**

Mr MacMahon's teaching career was not all a bed of roses, however. He had to contend with the rigid inspectorate system which all national teachers were subjected to up to recent times. Many readers who have worked in primary schools will recall with Mr MacMahon the way in which a teacher's work was rated in one of three categories: Highly Efficient, Efficient, Inefficient.

Moreover, retaining your mark, Mr MacMahon reminisces, was 'a terror'. For an inspector could at any moment consider himself justified in giving a teacher six months' notice of a complete examination. It was a penal, medieval system, copied from the British.

A good teacher must first of all have a gift of communication.

Mr MacMahon, who was marked 'Highly Efficient' at his first examination, had a proud and independent attitude towards the inspectorate system. He declares now that had he been given six months notice of retention of his mark, he would have walked out and put all his effort into his bookshop and his writing. He 'didn't give a hoot', for 'they would have been doing him a favour'.

He dared to be himself, and clearly this was a recipe for successful teaching, for he retained his mark of 'Highly Efficient' right through his teaching career.

Mr. MacMahon remembers the 'Cuntas Míosiúl', or monthly progress record as 'the bane of his life', it was like an examination of conscience – what did I do last month? And the real advances he had made he couldn't record at all. As for yearly schemes and weekly schemes, they are all right for young teachers, but after a while they become unnecessary, 'I could write it all in three words', he declares.

Mr. MacMahon had other hardships too. For over twenty years he taught in conditions of appalling squalor. Children and teachers 'were in mud up to their knees'. They had no heat and no fire. The school building was totally unfit for human habitation, let alone to serve as a centre for the development of young minds.

At last Mr. MacMahon took up the cudgels himself. 'We told them all off, including the parish priest, and after a terrible fight, backed by the I.N.T.O., we got a brand new school in Listowel'. He found the change of atmosphere in the new school astonishing.



The brightly painted walls and the big picture windows of the new building were in total contrast to the squalor to which they had been accustomed. Goethe, Steiner and Luscher have all elucidated the importance of colour and those giants in their field would have recognised a kindred spirit in this Kerryman, who, after consulting with his staff, addressed the pupils of the new school on the loud-speaker: 'I don't like school uniforms', he told them. 'Your Mammies will be knitting you jumpers for the winter. Please tell them I don't want any blacks or browns. I'd like violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, red, orange'.

Mr. MacMahon, who knew every person and every move in the town, was able to reinforce this message to the parents themselves in the course of casual chats in shop or post office. The following September, as 300 children filed into their shining classrooms the new school was a sea of brilliant colour. Inspectors seemed to blink on entering the rooms. In this rich environment of riotous colour, the children came on in leaps and bounds. Mr. MacMahon is on occasion more than modest about his own role in all this. 'There are times', he says 'when I think I was only a front man for a wonderful teaching staff'.

For the rest of his teaching career Mr. MacMahon felt as if he could breathe the clear fresh air.

## **A SECOND LIFE**

Mr. MacMahon's life has been an incredibly full one. For fifteen years he followed a routine that was truly astonishing. From nine o'clock to three he was a teacher. From four until nine he ran a bookshop. He walked for an hour and from ten until one o'clock in the morning he wrote. And he lived to tell the tale.

His wife once gave him what he now considers an excellent piece of advice. 'When you come in from school', she said, 'for God's sake go to bed and sleep for a while'.

He took her advice.

When he got up he would find the sediment had settled and the well was clear. He was able to begin his next activity with a *tubula rasa*.

The incentive of money played a role in Mr. MacMahon's long hours of labour, for he had five sons to raise and educate. On a teacher's salary alone he could never have finished their third level education.

His efforts to increase his income did not go unnoticed by the taxman, who harassed him in an arrogant fashion. Crippled by the super tax, Mr. MacMahon threatened to close his bookshop. He felt the penal income tax system was killing initiative in him.

But Mr. MacMahon's need to write was much stronger than his need to make money. The hunger of the imagination had to be appeased in him. If he hadn't had this creative outlet he would have been like a tiger in chains.

It is absolutely necessary that educators take up a second activity in the evening.

His first short stories were published by Seán Ó Faoláin in *THE BELL*. He wrote extensively for that magazine. He was welcomed by Frank O'Connor as a poet of merit, and he won *THE BELL* award for the best short story.

In 1948 his first book of short stories *The Lion Tamer and other stories* appeared in England and later in America.

His Play *The Bugle in the Blood* was produced in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in March 1949, and is still being produced.

In 1950 he published *Jackamoora and the King of Ireland's Son* in the United States.

In 1952 his novel *Children of the Rainbow* appeared in Britain, the United States and Canada. It was hailed as 'the richest and raciest book that had come out of Ireland for many years' in which 'the joy of living ran like a shout in the blood'. The book was published in German under the title *KINDER DER MORGENROTE*, and a dramatized version of it was serialised on Canadian and Irish radio.

His second collection of short stories, *The Red Petticoat* was published in 1955.

*Song of the Anvil* the choice of the Abbey Theatre for the international Theatre Festival in 1960.

His Play *The Honey Spike*, whose characters are Travellers, was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1961. It has won major national and international awards and is still being produced at Irish Drama Festivals. Bryan MacMahon is very familiar with the tinker way of life, and is one of the few outsiders who can speak Shelta, the secret language of the travelling people. (He prefers the pure name 'tinker', which means one who works with tin).

In 1970 he published *Patsy O and his Wonderful Pets*.

In 1971 his impressions book on Ireland *HERE'S IRELAND* was published in London and New York.

Another selection of short stories *The End of the World* appeared in 1976.

His latest publication *The sound of Hooves* and other stories has been greeted as 'exhilarating reading and a crowning achievement'.

Bryan MacMahon has appeared on radio and television on innumerable occasions, and has lectured at home and abroad on literary subjects. At present he is very much involved in the Arts Council's project 'Writers in Schools', and has responded to invitations to speak to students in many parts of Ireland. Many readers will no doubt recall their captivation at his gripping style of lecturing.

On the day of his retirement RTE brought their cameras to Listowel and filmed the programme *My Own Place*. A teetotaler all his life, Mr. MacMahon celebrated the event by tasting his first glass of beer.

## MACMAHON, THE TEACHER

Mr. MacMahon was a great educator of the young. But his approach to teaching was delightfully sane.

Mr. MacMahon sees teaching as one component of the larger whole which constitutes a teacher's life. Alongside of taking a healthy pride in his work, the teacher has to protect and respect his own energies, maintain his space and ensure his own growth. Otherwise the child is impoverished as well as the teacher, and ultimately it becomes a case of the blind leading the blind.

## MACMAHON, THE ARTIST

As an artist, Mr. MacMahon ranks among the greatest. Unlike the sculptor of classical Greece who wished to freeze only the idealised and perfect in stone, MacMahon is more akin to Rembrandt, who looked at life unflinchingly as it is, and recorded it all uncritically and with compassion. The beggar, the young girl, the celibate, the ascetic, the debauched and the innocent child all provide the "substance of his tale".

\* THE FACT ON THE FACT ON THE FACT RTCs to upgrade. It would appear that policy makers for these colleges have lost sight of their original mission - to meet the industrial needs of the regions and provide suitable training at local level - and that they are failing to appreciate the sterling work that has been successfully carried out by them over the years in the area of vocational training.

The binary system of third level education which this country enjoys is ideal in providing for all. The task of the universities has always been to cater for the academic minority and the task of the RTCs has been to provide an education in more specific skills, the kind of vocational training that is a greater imperative today than ever if the economic buoyancy of Ireland's industrial future is to be assured.

Last July the Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, set up a joint education/industry task force with representatives from the business corporations as well as education. Its purpose was to improve the supply of technicians for high-technology industries. This task force is due to report back to the Minister this month. Hopefully its recommendations will be the catalyst for immediate, decisive and radical action.

## Education Matters

The medium of contact and expression for teachers, parents, students and all those interested in education.

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## EDUCATION MATTERS relaunched with THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE



To celebrate ten years in print, the Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, formally relaunched EDUCATION MATTERS with THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE at a reception in Dublin last month. Pictured here are (left to right) Mr. Barney Whelan, Public Relations Manager ESB, - the official sponsor of EDUCATION MATTERS; Mrs. Gemma Hussey, former Minister for Education and member of EDUCATION MATTERS' editorial board; and the Minister for Education, Mr. Micheál Martin, TD. The reception was held in Regent House, Trinity College.

## What the media said...

### A very important programme: It woke me up!

A new, important view on discipline from Alfie Kohn deserves a wider platform

RTE gave us a fascinating *Open Mind* on 18th September (which I caught in the small hours of the 19th during those "Irish Collection" schedules for insomniacs or night workers). It woke me up.

US former teacher Alfie Kohn discussed his ideas with John Quinn - "Beyond Discipline: Challenging the Traditional Paradigm". Briefly, Mr. Kohn's thesis is this: traditional ideas of punishments or rewards for pupils are destructive. Rewards make selfish people, punishment teaches bullying.

Teachers should not be "in control" when one visits a classroom, one should have to look around to find the teacher who should be working with the students, not directing operations. We should not be "doing

should be a community effort.

"When the point is to prove how smart you are, to get a good grade or test score, there is less inclination to engage deeply with ideas, to explore and discover" - in short, to be really educated. Sanctions, Kohn says, don't teach about right and wrong, only about power and self-interest.

'One should have to look around to find the teacher who should be working with the students, not directing operations.'

Congratulations to the



Gemma Hussey

well-attended symposium in Dublin Castle last May) and to John Quinn and RTE for the radio programme.

There was such a packed hall for Dr. Kohn's lecture, he obviously touches a chord with educationalists here. Such is the importance of Mr. Kohn's very significant new approach, it deserves a much wider audience in mainstream radio and television broadcasting.

The population in general needs to hear a great deal more of him and his six important books. Will RTE get him back again on to the Late Late or Pat Kenny?

Sunday Tribune on September 7, what else was engaging the media in this first month of the academic year?

The significant news of the Catholic hierarchy's backing the new ESE programmes for primary schools was generally welcomed, nowhere more so than in the *Irish Independent* (19th Sept): news report, news analysis piece and second editorial. And John Walshe in even-handed fashion giving due credit to former Minister Niamh Breathnach.

'when the point is to prove how smart you are ... there is less inclination to engage deeply with ideas, to explore and discover'

The bishops were congratulated for "rejecting advice from conservative quarters." Is there any

Rewards make selfish people, punishment teaches bullying.

hesitation? The *Irish Times*' excellent Education & Living, on Tuesday, recommenced on 2nd September and was produced in lively format and full colour.

Yvonne Healy covered Alfie Kohn's thesis on 9th September. Síle Sheehy dispensed her wisdom every week and Andy Pollak addressed the challenge facing the first ever Minister for Adult Education, Willie O'Dea (23rd September).

On adult education - Green and White Papers are promised, while Mr. O'Dea warns that the Minister for Finance has the final say. In the meantime two figures stand out: AONTAS says that 40,000 people (most of them women)

finds that 25% of Irish adults surveyed have problems with deciphering simple instructions on things like over-the-counter medicines.

Mr. Pollak explains that the whole sector lacks a comprehensive statutory structure, has severe poverty problems, is scattered around among six main providers, has an accreditation deficit and is generally in need of a great deal of Mr. O'Dea's Tender Loving Care.

The *Education & Living* supplement is 16 pages of lively well produced material: well done, editor Ella Shanahan.

And if RTE continues with No Chalk no Chorus (Wednesdays at 12.30 on RTE Radio 1) in as brisk a fashion as it began on 3rd September, producer John McKenna will have done education a service in engaging the attention of those not in the classroom at that time.

He has decided that the general population has an attention span of about three minutes when it