

With apologies to Wm Shakespeare

DEAR SIR,

I wonder if your readers ever come across the occasional A level candidate who persistently differentiates when supposed to be integrating? I have found the following a very effective cure (the threat to learn by heart, or write out several times, is sufficient).

To integrate,
 Or differentiate; that is the question:
 Whether 'tis better in th'exam to suffer
 The toil and trouble of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take pen against a sea of integrals,
 And, differentiating, end them. To finish all;
 In time; and with such ease eliminate
 The headache and the thousand problems posed
 By integration, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To finish all;
 To end: perchance all wrong: ay, there's the rub;
 For in the aftermath what answers come,
 When we have shuffled off these integrals,
 Must give us pause.

Yours, etc.

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Mathematics and the 10-year-old, by Murray Ward. Pp. 168. £4.25. 1979. SBN 0 423 50600 5 (Evans/Methuen Educational, for the Schools Council)

This book makes me uneasy: it makes me uneasy about primary mathematics and also about the quality of the investigation undertaken by the author. It makes me uneasy because it is ambiguous in places, it reveals prejudice in places and, although it appears to contain a great deal of information—in quotes, in tables, in listing of information about equipment, mathematical topics taught, children's performance and teachers' attitudes—there is little evidence of an analysis of that information beyond mere tabulation. Yet further analysis is essential if valid conclusions are to be drawn about the present state of primary mathematics, and even more essential if useful advice is to be offered about how to proceed into the eighties.

A cursory examination of teachers' ratings of the test questions (Appendix C) reveals a distinct bias towards computation, as too does an examination of the time allotted at each age to various stated activities (Table 7), where number shares the top priority with measurement. However, this does not appear to correlate very highly with children's performance on these topics (Appendix C). Moreover, Appendix B reveals that the most heavily tested topics in the 100 or so questions are again number and measurement. On the other hand, Appendix C also appears to suggest that the questions which interested the children most and which gave them most food for thought came closer to what many people think are the important mathematical ideas at primary level.

Having said all this, I found the idea of using students from three Colleges of Education to investigate the use of mathematical equipment in primary schools splendidly enterprising. It must have been very useful indeed to the students concerned. And during the earlier, descriptive part of the book the author does pose some interesting questions about the