

(Note: the following is a brief summary of some work which Ludi intends to write up later this year)

I am talking only of attainment on reading tests in primary schools.

- (1) There have been consistent reports since 1945 that primary school pupils in larger classes attain better than those in smaller classes. These reports come from large-scale surveys of pupils in situ in schools, and usually employ simple comparisons: mean attainment of pupils in large (30-40) and small (20-30) classes; simple correlations; one-way analyses of variance.
- (2) The results are reported in the media without caveats, and have been used to create the impression that class size is not relevant to pupil attainment, in spite of the overwhelming professional and lay gut feelings that class size does matter. The results are blandly fed to trainee teachers, and administrators and the government are not unhappy about this.
- (3) Some recent research ("meta-analysis") has attempted to support the gut feeling in favour of smaller classes, but is technically very unsound. Such research reached the U.S. courts in 1980, with no lasting effect.
- (4) Technically sound methods do explain the contradictory results and point to smaller class size having positive effects even within the range 20-40 encountered in most schools. But these methods have not been employed to date.
- (5) The argument of the technically sound method goes like this:
 - (a) Class size varies within schools; varies from school to school; varies from Authority to Authority; varies from one year to another. But it does not vary randomly. Demographic trends affect class size; and smaller classes are an administrative tool, often used as an extra resource for pupils not likely to be achieving well.
 - (b) Within schools, class size varies: children who are attaining below the average are put purposely into smaller classes (and such classes are not usually explicitly labelled 'remedial').

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- (c) Between schools, class size varies: resources within a local authority are used to bring down the pupil-teacher ratio in 'Special Priority Area' schools, where children are likely to be attaining below the average. Higher absenteeism in schools with most low-attaining pupils further reduces their class sizes. Roman Catholic schools tend to have both larger classes and higher attainment.
 - (d) Both (b) and (c) induce a positive class size/attainment relationship - pupils in smaller classes doing worst. This can be shown empirically.
 - (e) Within an appropriate regression model that takes into account the effects of (b) and (c), the real educational effect of class size on pupil attainment can be estimated, and is in favour of smaller classes. Why this has not been done before, I am not sure.

I intend to write up the results both for a statistical and a teacher audience, later this year. Any Radstatter who would like an advance copy is welcome to contact me: Flat 12, Cunliffe Villas, Bradford, BD8 7AN.