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(A)

from CROSSING THE LINE

(from The Prologue)

the hump

there was a country
that was a country
that sat down and cried
in the middle sixties
because it didn't know
how to get rid of the
great big hump on its back

it tried everything
from pretending the hump
wasn't a hump but a
great big beautiful throne
to draping the hump
with a flag
(a proud flag and bloody)
and saying to the rest of the world
say – look at my hump of a flag

but the rest of the world
was up to its ears in work
busy darning old socks
and buying new ones
and no other country in the world
cared a fig for the humped-up flag

so this country
that *was* a country
cut itself a coat
to hide the hump
and the coat was ash-grey
(all the material to be had)
and it went round
with a little whiny voice
saying – *look look everybody*
(it thought everybody was listening
I've given my hump away

so the other countries
they just spit
and laughed
for the heap now looked to them
like a slag-heap
stuck up there in the air
and they went on
with their mending and buying

and shoved this old
gnarled country
out of their busy way

and a bitter argument
burst out in this country
that *had been* a country
about whether the hump
was there or wasn't there
and if it was there
whether it was an eyesore
or a mark of respect

and they fought
and they bit
and they tickled each other
and said much that was rude

but to this day
the nature of the hump
is not fully understood
and there is a movement
to wash it away
quietly with tears

meanwhile this country
that still wants to be a country
languishes
some say close on death
inexplicably being drowned
in the solution
it so desperately seeks

outside
there is much lamentation
but the sorrow is hardly real

(from The Voyage)

aden

tourists dream of bombs
that will not kill them

into the rock
the sand-claws
the winking eye
and harsh shell
of aden

waiting for the pinch

jagged sun
lumps of heat
bumping on the stunned ship
knuckledustered rock

clenched over steamer point

waiting for the sun to stagger
loaded down the hill
before we bunch ashore

calm
eyes within their windows
we walk
(a town must live
must have its acre of normality
let hate sport
its bright shirt in the shadows)
we shop
collect our duty-murdered goods
compare bargains
laugh grieve
at benefit or loss
aden dead-pan
leans against our words
which hand invisible
knows how to print a bomb
ejaculate a knife
does tourist greed embroil us in
or shelter us from guilt

backstreet
a sailor drunk
gyrates within a wall of adenese
collapses spews
they roll about him
in a dark pool

the sun moves off
as we do

streets squashed with shops
criss-cross of customers
a rush of people nightwards
a white woman
striding like a cliff
dirt – goats in the gutter
crunched beggars
a small to breed a fungus
cafes with open mouths
men like broken teeth
or way back in the dark
like tonsils

an air of shapeless threat
fluffs in our pulse
a boundary crossed
the rules are not the same
brushed by eyes
the touch is silent
silence breeds
we feel the breath of fury

(soon to roar)
retreat within our skins
return to broader streets

bazaars glower
almost at candlelight
we clutch our goods
a dim delusion of festivity
a christ neurotic
dying to explode

how much of this is aden
how much our masterpiece
all atmospheres are inbuilt

an armoured car looms by

the ship like mother
brooding in the sea
receives us with a sigh
aden winks and ogles in the dark
the sport of hate released

slowly away at midnight
rumours of bombs and riots
in the long wake
a disappointed sleep

nothing to write home about
except the heat

CROSSING THE LINE (extract)

viii

the enemy
dawn - yeats called the new day a beast
the frantic have seen it and torn down
their lives - lawrence heralded it
but hitler snarled - stalin and others
have painted the eastern sky with blood
to dramatise its rise
we have been slow
to drag our limping eyes from where
the old sun set - we saw it best paid all
our wealth to watch it in its glory
have been convinced that from prolonged
applause apollo would drag his cart back
up the hill to make an encore that would
supersede the real (have clapped our hands
to ashes) are going home disgusted with the
phoenix - choose to ignore the maggot
gasping in the dust
a world gasps there

there is no easy way to kick a skin off

it must be lived through - we have lived it
blind to what we have become
unable
to adapt ourselves to the smashed mirror
we have to trust our touch - we run our
shaking fingers through the landscape
of our parts and find a stranger's earth
it crumbles as we breathe
the wind
has thrashed itself against a rock
and ravished it to soil - we are affronted
by its texture try repeatedly to turn away

as in this poem i have and do not have
the strength to hold my image firm
resisting all the backward-pulling force
that wants to eat the future
i cannot
get this ship across the line - the waves
are building up - people are aghast
and point at me

you made the line
this granite monument - you held the ship
as hostage to your words - for us there is
no problem - the line is valid as a joke
we keep it in its place and cross it
every day - future and past have been
and both to come - north and south are alike
as sheets in a bed - only a child
sees an ocean in his spit - leave the line
and let us get to port

but having found
the words to rear the line up out of sea
i find i do not have the words to break
it down - the old is easy to decry the new
is difficult to coax into a shape to
show to others
if i could say convincingly
the line is crossed would it leave these people
as they were before or must the ship
stay here smashing its bows against the line
until these people change - are they the line
themselves irresolute and weak except
to change
in words are words a cure

(from The Epilogue)

the sun said

he came to uganda being english
looked around and said *this is england*
most people have different coloured skins

and there is more sunshine – but I shall act
with a compassionate blindness as if the ship
had sailed round and round the pool of london
and mombasa was only a fraction round the bend
from charing cross **– he waved his hand**
vaguely at africa and went at once to his work

the sun said *give him time*
uganda said *this man ignores us*
and he said *there are too many europeans*
the african is like the british working class
and neither is independent yet
he meant well and he told everybody
it was a good job nobody heard him
he worked hard (his rhythm was english)
and pushed his dreams into africa's face

the sun said *give him time*
uganda said *this man provokes us*
he put his finger exactly on what was wrong
had in fact before he came and when he looked
for what he thought he'd find – he found it
so he went on digging and manuring the ground
and took out his pre-packed seeds – people stropped by
bewildered and saying *yes* – so he exploited
his success and worked – as he would in england

the sun said *give* and uganda said *this man*
but his blindness had gone to his brain
and he said *this is right and this*
and if only we could all do this
wherever he pressed on the wall it crumbled
and his bright banana ideas walked through
he worked faster (heard that big booming drum)
he was taller than jacaranda with more flowers
he wanted to go up to the sun and shake his hand

and the sun struck and uganda pulled him down
he lay in a hospital bed till his head stopped banging
the sun came and sat on a hill – an african sun
like a lion with the paw that had smacked him
his eyes were uneasy but he knew where he was now
he couldn't see england – as he lifted his head
he could sense a new rhythm – the pulse of a people
is the pulse of its landscape – africa got caught
in his words and he said *hello* to uganda

(B)

(This account was published in TEACHER EDUCATION IN NEW COUNTRIES – Oxford University Press – sometime in 1970. When this journal ceased publication some years later, the final Editorial statement recorded that, in the whole existence of the journal, the article that drew the greatest response – and controversy - from its readers was the one now being reprinted here.)

THE ENGLISH BLOCK , KOLOLO (1966-67)

Senior Secondary School, Kololo, Kampala, is, I believe, the largest school in Uganda, with 1800 students attending the school in two shifts, morning from 7.50 to 1.5 p.m.; the afternoon from 1.20 to 6.30 p.m. During colonial times it was an Asian secondary school; since Independence it has become multi-racial. In May 1965, when I started teaching there, African students were still largely occupying the lower streams, although by April 1967, when I left, attempts at de-streaming had resulted in a more even mixture of the races.

I had arrived from Hampshire, where I'd been in charge of the English Department of a County Secondary School and had developed a non-traditional approach to language teaching. At Kololo I was asked to suggest ways in which my particular ideas could be applied to the situation there. I produced a two-page account which stressed the need for a non-streamed, group approach to English, allowing considerable responsibility to the students and introducing drama and other ways of creatively applying the language. The account was approved and, from then on, in discussions with other interested teachers, the notion of the English Block grew.

In August 1965 I stencilled copies of a document called *The English Block* and distributed them to everyone concerned. This document was both an explanation and an argument, as the headings to each section show:

(a) Why Change?
(b) Positive English.
(c) Drama and Intensive Writing.
(d) The English Block.
(e) The Building and its Working.
(f) Some problems.

Some of its ideas were never reached in the Block's practice. The assumption behind it was that a permanent system was being inaugurated, which could outlast my going, which was already fixed for May 1967. But, in all, the early statement of faith has remained valid; it contains the seeds of the major controversies the Block managed to attract to itself. It was meant to be brash and uncompromising. It began:

The system of teaching English through examinable academic values is based upon false assumptions about the nature of English, about the effect upon the syllabus of examinations and about the importance of grammar and structural analysis in an understanding of the language and the way it is best learned.

It upset people by making assertions like this: *English as it has been taught in East Africa (as it has been taught in England, I know) is a maker of nothing but disinterest.* But it went on, and this is its justification for being quoted here, because it stated the key to all that we tried to do in the Block:

If we teach English we must care for it. If we care for it we cannot happily leave it as this anaemic thing. For some

years now there have been growing in England new ideas in the freeing of teaching and use of English from the aridity of the academic method. These ideas, in my opinion, are doubly applicable to countries like Uganda, where a need for the deep understanding of the language at its fullest by as many Ugandans as can be shown it is desperate. The ideas involved in this English Block are not new, though their total application in this way may be. But they offer a use of English that is positive, practical, purposive and imaginative. They take the language for what it is, not for what the rules say it ought to be. They make English a necessary part of life, not an effete specimen from which all but the official life has dried away. If East Africa needs English, it needs also to free it from the worst of its home-country abuse. Textbook English is a bore. Textbook summaries, comprehensions, essays, grammatical and structural analyses are destroyers not makers. My whole case for an English Block at Kololo comes from the belief it is time we should make *English for a change.*

In the third term 1965, two other expatriate teachers and myself were given an English Room, where we could begin trying out the proposals. Meanwhile meetings were held with teachers of English to explain what it was all about. The intention was that the whole school should go straight into the Block system in the first term of the new year. But already opposition to the scheme, both open and veiled, was growing, and when the Block did start in January 1966, it was confined to the first year classes, with the second years to be brought in sometime during the year. School politics, aroused by the Block, became a bitter, heated and fascinating affair, with Block and anti-Block factions among staff and students. Throughout its existence it was never safe. The Block cannot properly be understood apart from the intense feelings it engendered. They were essential to it, and inevitable, because it set out to challenge concepts of teaching and the teacher that most people within education still accept without question. The issues were very big, since we were attacking the school not only in its educational establishment, but as a social organisation as well. It was never a calm, protected experiment. It was seen as, and meant to be, a swift, concentrated assault on conventional academic values. Although I felt it could easily have outlasted my stay in Uganda, by the end I had to accept that it had no chance of doing so. It wasn't stopped because of its educational failure – there was too much evidence of its achievements – but because it disturbed people to the depths of their sectarian being.

The English Block began in January 1966 with six first year classes being timetabled together for nine periods a week in the three three-period sessions. Six teachers (or tutors) were responsible for its running, with myself as a kind of itinerant overseer. the rest of the first year classes and all the second year classes were started at the same time in semi-Block: that is, they worked to the Block ideas, but within their separate classrooms. All this was part of the Afternoon School. In the morning, teachers of the third

year classes, who wished to, could also operate under semi-Block conditions.

At first no space was permanently allocated for Block use. In one part of the school was a T-shaped building with four rooms upholding two others. The four rooms could be opened out to make a long thin hall. Five of these rooms., plus the use of the School Library, were timetabled for the Block. During the morning sessions, and at non-Block times in the afternoon, the partitions had to be replaced and the furniture put back to ordinary use. This quickly became a bugbear, and by half term arrangements had been made to establish all morning classes working in semi-Block in the Block building; the partitions were permanently withdrawn and all desks replaced by tables. The fifth room was cleared of excess furniture and converted into a Drama and Intensive Writing Room. At this stage the Block became a physical reality. (Later the sixth room was added as a Block Library.) For three and a half terms, the Block functioned without classrooms, housing 200 students at the same time, working in groups (of five or six) around thirty-six tables set out in the long hall. Some attempts were made during the third term 1967 to interest teachers of other subjects in the Block methods, but, apart from this the space was used solely, and more and more fully, for English.

At the beginning of each term (later modified to twice a year) students were sorted into groups of five or six, each group cutting across the streams, sexes, races, tribes and castes. Each tutor was given a Unit to look after – five or six groups. Each Unit and Group were given a number for easy reference, so that throughout the growing Block no Group or Unit would be numbered the same as any other – to avoid confusion from badly addressed letters in the Block Postal Service.

Each student received a Personal File, a Diary and a Worksheet; each group a Group File and a Group Minute Book. The key document was the Worksheet. This divided the activities to be tackled into Individual and Group Activities; within these categories the activities were further divided into time-spans (as already suggested in the quotation given from the August 1965 document). Several versions of the Worksheet were brought out during the operation of the Block, and a study of them in sequence would say much about the development of the Block. The aim all the time was to produce a sheet that forced students away from a grammatical, structural, exercise approach to the language into creative use. It had to be real – in as real a situation as we could foster. There were obvious artificialities; that all this had to go on in a school building divorced from the world outside pushed certain unavoidable limitations on us; and an acute shortage of money cut back many of our first hopes. But the limitations had advantages too, and the best newspapers, for example, quickly realised how much material for comment there was in the Block itself. The Worksheet issued on November 8th 1965, for all years, listed these activities:

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

Daily	Personal Diary
Weekly	Intensive Writing, Story or Dialogue, Library Research, Reading a Book, Book Review (Films, TV etc.)
Termly	Extended Writing (Novel, Play etc.),Talk to Group, Personal Anthology, Literature (special readers or set books), Letters (to pen-friends, newspapers, magazines), Listening to Speech-records, Entering items in Scrapbooks.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Weekly	Group Minute Book (Secretary), Discussion, Reading and |Criticism of each other's work.
Monthly	Magazine, Newspaper, Programme on Tape, Inter-Group Debate.
Termly	Group Anthology, Listening to Talks, Projects.
Yearly	Script for Film, TV or Radio, Exhibition.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Weekly	Drama, Intensive Writing.
As planned	Tutor's programme, Outside Speakers

The final Worksheets, issued at the beginning of 1967, moved away considerably from this first one. Separate worksheets were issued for first and second years, third year, fourth year. Variations in timing, the dropping of some activities and the finding of new ones; most items given some kind of qualifying note, so that the sheet had a more particularised feel: but none of this altered the worksheet's basic purpose. It was there to force the pace, to get the student to handle the language in as wide and exacting a manner as the time given to the subject could be made to hold. We deliberately put pressure on, insisting that there was more work to be done than there was time to do it. Since returning from Uganda, I've wondered about the wisdom of this pressure, and still vacillate between one belief and the other. I don't accept that students should be pressurised to conform, and where the Block pressures did this, then its failures were deserved. But on the whole within our educational system hardly any pressure is put on students to find out about themselves, and this leaves them indifferent to most things. What we sought in the Block was a total involvement in the needs and excitements of language, but only as applied to the needs (and excitements) of the students themselves. We were asking them to come into a new relationship with the language, using it not correctly, but personally and intensely. The undisputed achievement of the Block, I think, was the quantity and quality of its creative, especially

intensive, writing. Much of that was achieved in the Block precisely because of the pressure.

A small portion of the weekly six hours was set aside for administrative and other specified activities. The first quarter-hour of the first session each week was given to a Group Meeting. Here the week's programme was discussed and decided on by the group-students, presided over by the Group Secretary. This role passed in rotation to each of the group-members. No one was allowed to opt out of the responsibility. At the end of the week, for the last quarter-hour, while the others were supposed to be putting the finishing touches to their work, the Group Secretary was given time to complete his/her job, ready for someone else to take over the following week. Drama and Intensive Writing were timetabled because of the need to use the special room without clashing. (The Block Library could be used only at certain times by each group: this involved a less rigid allocation of time.) Finally, sometime during the week a short period would be set aside as Tutor's Time, where problems could be discussed between the whole Unit and the Tutor.

After the Group Meeting the Group Secretary recorded the week's programme on the left hand page of the Group Minute Book, and during the week this person had the responsibility for seeing that the Group carried the programme out. At the week's end, on the right-hand page of the Group Minute Book, the same Group Secretary wrote up what work had actually been done; then, in the Group File, assessed all the work and attitude of every group member, including him/herself. It was the Group Secretary's job to check the required work and see that magazines and newspapers were ready on time; and, in the last term of the Block, the Group Secretary of each week was expected to take home the Group File of one other Group and make relevant comments upon that.

The special treatment of Drama and Intensive Writing stressed the Block's creative roots; in them the students discovered – or were meant to discover – the deep relationships between language and body. We opposed language as a brain-child, wanting students to realise that experiences inflicted upon their bodies and stored inside themselves (uselessly to date) were the proper stuff of language. We ran an initial course in Intensive Writing, showing the students how to release words inside themselves that so far in education had been dismissed as unimportant, even objectionable.

Here are examples of writing that came out of the Intensive Writing sessions in the Block:

No

Father called he say no.
Mother called he did likewise.
Take bath.
No, I won't.
Ask him he answer no.
Bully him he say no.

Danger approaches he says no.
Let's work.
No I shan't.
Come here.
No, I am not.
Where are you going?
No, nowhere.
Have you eaten?
No, not yet.
Will you finish it?
No, I don't know.
What is your work?
No work nothing.
Come with me.
I won't.
What boy are you?
Boy? No I am not.
A fool.
No, not foolish.
A girl, are you?
No! No!
Shut up/
No, I won't

Eston Umwon

The Railway Maker

In the world a bee is not a busy object only.
The railway worker who made the new Uganda
railway, which begins at Soroti to Pakwachi
seemed to be the second bee.
The workers were divided into groups who worked
hard while whistling.
One group which cut the smaller trees and grass was
followed by tractors which went in felling big
trees and digging the ground.
Another one was behind all these putting railway
lines while again testing the lines.
All people were perspiring and what I saw again was
that everything in a village became dusty.
My head and my room were, I think, the worst.

Moses Magino

Block
A pale idea rose beneath claws of wood
From the silver-darkness of the dust
Crawled and crouched among wooden legs
Torn like a wisp of air
Between the grey ceiling and
The table tops
A fat genie grew and burst and
Rolled and clapped and danced across the room
Wide eyes bobbed and gasped among the waves
The sea a murmur in the dust
Till the rock of the waves sighed and fell

Among a whisper a quiet shoot grew
The dead-wood legs around

Saroj Datta

Block Drama, without the room or resources now common place in British schools, was slower to develop – it was with the Actors and Writers Club out of school that the major dramatic work was done. Again though, emphasis in the Block was put on groups working out their own ideas from their own background resources, discovering what happened to language when it came out of the re-creation of an experience linked personally with themselves.

In all, of the six hours given weekly to the Block, the organisation, for creative and administrative reasons, claimed something like a quarter of the time. The rest of the time was used by the group, by its own arrangement, although other subsidiary rules arose (and fell away) as necessary during the Block's growth. We suggested that each activity should last no longer than half an hour at a time. We wanted to break away from the idea of overlong attention being given to one aspect of the language at the expense of the others. We hoped that quick-thinking, flexibility, awareness, and delight in change would thus be encouraged. If these things were in the Block, I don't think that particular rule was responsible for them. Simply by being there it created resentment against it, and by the end was one of the rules much disregarded.

Throughout its short life the Block was frequently changing its rules, searching for a way of being that would translate into practical sense the theories from which it had sprung. Every term a day-long meeting of Block Tutors would be held, to argue out the complaints and the failings. Many ideas were tried, then dropped.

Several strands of thinking in the Block were then pulled together. Nothing should be done simply to be marked; anything done should have a purpose, a place to go. Whatever a student did should be open to criticism, but from fellow group-members, not from a tutor. There were plenty of receptacles for any piece of work. Each group put out newspapers, magazines, projects. Why shouldn't stories, plays, poems, reports of debates, reviews of books, and so on, find their way into these publications, and be read there by the *general public* of the Block? Language was a communication; what was the point of doing anything in language that wasn't for communicating to others? So the Personal File became a mere transition-book for writing-to-be-completed, or awaiting criticism. The Group File, on the other hand, which had seemed to have little real use at the Block's beginning, gradually became the key to the administration of the group. It contained check-lists, secretary-assessments, Unit-assessments, Block notes, records of all spoken activities, as well as holding all the group work awaiting to be moved into its finished form.

Every way of providing an outlet for criticism was tried (but even then proved insufficient). A Suggestions File was kept and students were encouraged to write in making

whatever suggestion or complaint they wanted to. Rather optimistically a reply was guaranteed to every letter. But all year the supply of letters to the File, many very critical, but others packed with suggestions, outstretched our ability to keep up with the replies. We began to realise that in some ways the Suggestions File offered the wrong kind of outlet. It provided the concept of the final authority to whom to appeal when satisfaction couldn't be gained through the normal channels – in other words it sustained the very concept of the teacher-authority we were trying to reduce. Nevertheless many ideas eventually practised in the Block came first to us through the Suggestions File and the range (and occasional virulence) of the grievances kept us alive to our problems. We treated the File very seriously indeed, sometimes writing twenty-page letters in reply, in order to deal with all the matters raised by the correspondent.

Letters were sent to the Suggestions File through the Block Post Office, which at its peak handled well over 100 letters a day. Besides letters to the File, students were expected to write letters to editors of magazines and newspapers, to reply to letters received by themselves in their capacity as editor, and to arrange all meetings with other groups through the use of this postal service. Our aim was to have to teach no one to write a letter but to ensure that everyone had the experience of writing many. Envelopes were provided, and each group had its own distinctive postal address. By the fourth term – and last – of its existence, there were well over 200 groups in the English Block, split into eight Blocks (known as Block One, Block Two, etc.). So a letter might be addressed as follows:

The Editor
The Sphere
Group 123
Unit 20
Block 6
English Block

The box would be cleared daily, the letters franked and dated, then left in the appropriate box for the Block Tutor to collect and deliver.

In the November 1965 Worksheet quoted, both newspapers and magazines were a monthly activity, but we soon saw that newspapers should come out more often, if we were to establish the essential difference between the two forms of publications. The first issues of both were abysmal, full of imitated advertisements, copied recipes, and articles, cut-out pictures and stale national and international news; all of this often defaced, perhaps rightly, with scribbled, offensive comments from uninterested readers. So we campaigned for originality at all costs, banned copied, cut-out material. If illustrations were needed, then someone in the group must draw them. We argued that whatever the students wrote should come from the world that they themselves knew intimately. Newspapers were wasting their time turning out pale copies

of national news. The real news was all around them in the school itself. Anything said was news: their job was to learn how to handle and assess it. Magazines should be full of their own creative work. All publications went out with the group's number clearly displayed. It was up to the group to give them a distinctive, interesting content. If the group felt there was anything wrong with the Block it should mount a campaign through its publications to draw attention to it.

Very soon most of the groups saw what we were getting at, and lively papers and magazines began to appear. By the fourth term over 200 newspapers a fortnight were being turned out, full of local material – so topical that teachers outside the Block would arrange for specific papers to be smuggled out, so that they could read items referring to themselves. The magazines too became fearless in the subjects they were willing to question and attack. Complaints were often made by staff about their content, but, except on one occasion, when I insisted on the removal of an article in a sixth-year paper accusing two younger girls of lesbianism, we refused to consider any form of censorship. It was a rule in the Block that Block Tutors should be open to any comment. Where non-Block teachers were concerned, groups were expected to use their sense and not pillory people who had not had any say in the freedom they themselves were enjoying. But we argued that anyone could take up hostile criticism by writing to the publication concerned. In fact, the students themselves were quick to see when someone had gone too far and offending papers were sometimes deluged with complaining letters.

Visitors to the Block were always welcome. The doors were never shut during a session. Each group had to bring a visitor every term; for a while the fashion was to entertain lavishly, and other students would hover around the table waiting for the left-overs, but in time the situation became ridiculous and there was a quick return to little refreshment or none at all. But visitors from other schools would come to look around. Hardly any notice was taken of them and certainly nothing stopped because they were there. In the third term a full-scale inspection was carried out in the Block. Normally this would have caused a considerable upset among students and staff – but not on this occasion.

None of the tutors in the Block had had much experience, except myself, of the new methods of English teaching. None of us had ever worked before in conditions approximating to those of the Block. During the four terms there were many disagreements amongst us, and by the end some of the Block's staunchest supporters had turned against it. But for most of us, I think, it was an experience that has deeply affected our teaching lives. In the role of tutor, we were in a different kind of teaching world. Indeed the tutor no longer taught. He tried to rid himself of the old conceptions of the teacher, above the student and removed from him- a creature barely human, to be respected but not really to be liked. His job came to be to know how to keep

out of the way, so that the groups could come to terms with their own problems, without having them solved by more experienced minds. But he was an activator, an experimenter, an encourager, aware of the aims of the Block, having his own views of what it should be; and interested in the groups sufficiently to know how to help them over an impasse, by showing them how difficult relationships were not necessarily impossible ones. He was no longer a purveyor of knowledge. The students were often working in fields well away from his specialised knowledge. But he cared about relationships and he spent our time on the job trying to improve them. He had to argue that he was not preparing the students for the world he had grown up in. but for a world of their own, in which the tutor was already out of date. Therefore to tie the students to his standards was inadequate. Students had to learn to communicate to their own public; and that public was made up of their own generation. By insisting therefore that students should be criticised and assessed by their contemporaries, not by him, the tutor had to accept the forfeiture of his own power, not the usual compounding of it. It was over this that we all stumbled.

During a session the Block was a constant but shifting noise. Students moved about as they wished. Groups worked with the noise of thirty-odd other groups around them. Suddenly, without bells, or shouted warning, a whole section would stand and move to the Drama Room, or a group here and there would move to the Library, or outside to rehearse. Tutors were no longer isolated from each other. They were free to confer, to discuss ideas, to carry out their job as they saw fit. The enthusiasms that were sparked into being by this freedom were very noticeable.

When the Block ran a Book-week, to collect books for its own Library to supplement reading material offered by the school, over 3000 books and magazines came in, well over 2000 of them proving serviceable. A donation of wood and bricks from a friend of the school's gave us our shelves and soon the Block Library, made up of the collected books, plus the projects, novels, anthologies produced by the students themselves, was in operation. When at the end of the second term 1966, the Block ran an Exhibition, over two-thirds of the groups arranged stalls of material collected over a wide area. One group of African students persuaded a firm to bring its tractor along and arranged its display around it.

Inevitably the picture seems too rosy. We had a lot of trouble, some of it ingrained in the nature of the challenge we were making, some of it through our own near-fatal mistakes. By trying to change the second year from semi- to full-Block in the third term 1966, when they were being got at by concern for the coming examinations, we roused a great deal of ill-feeling that almost brewed up into a strike. But the situation was not helped by the uncertainty that was allowed to exist in official quarters about the future of the Block. The official inspection in November 1966 confirmed the Block should continue, to be the method by

which English was taught at Kololo. For all that it fell to pieces when I left.

Out of the English Block came a wealth of proof that some such system was needed. In a short time we mined a vast quantity of intensive writing (poems), novels, plays, diaries, anthologies, projects, stories' the newspapers and magazines reached an exciting level of local journalism; the school exploded with argument and discussion, for which the Block was entirely responsible, and Africans and Asians, girls and boys, were mixing with each other often for the first time in their lives, having to sit round a table and listen to each other's attitudes and statements. We made no restriction on the subject matter used in any of the activities; every attempt by the school authorities to have something quashed was resisted by us. Constant complaint of the standards of grammar and spelling was made. Because we disputed the substance of the complaint, and the understanding (or lack of it) implied in it, we resisted doing anything about it, arguing that the real language was at last being used and that to call attention to error in technical fields was both useless and stultifying. Every possible criticism, and excuse for criticism, against the Block was at some time used. We were told we were doing nothing new; that our sternest critic had tried out the whole idea years ago and discovered it did not work; that Dewey and Dalton were two of the people we had pinched the idea from; that there were hundreds of schools in the States doing at least what we were doing; that (at first) Kololo was a Grammar School and didn't want Secondary Modern ideas – then, at last, that it was a system for the able ones only and the worst students were if anything getting worse: finally that it was my system and nobody else could work it.

When I left Uganda, the Block was closed without giving any of the other tutors a chance to prove whether they could run it or not, whereas at least one – Mr. B. Dixit – was as capable as myself of doing so. A controversy started in *The People* of Kampala that went on spasmodically for some months, with students, teachers and outsiders taking part. Academics pronounced on it and a TV programme had a go at it. It is now buried in Kampala; all that remains is the written work and the efforts of some of its students who have begun to explore careers in writing for themselves. In Kakamega, Kenya, a version of it was being run by George Matthews, though, the last I heard from him, he was meeting much the same sort of difficulties as we did at Kololo.

In one of the letters to *The People*, four students, two Asian, one European and one African, wrote:

We who worked in the Block are convinced it did not live in vain. It symbolised a restless spirit wanting to experiment with new ideas and fought the notion that it is dangerous to deviate from the established rules.

It gave the student tremendous responsibility, asked him to be self-reliant, and looked at ideas and things through the eyes of the adult world rather than through a child's paradise.

That is what it was about for me too.

(There are things here that now make me cringe, but without a brashness and arrogance the idea of the Block would have found no practical form. Its intentions and workings still seem to me valid and necessary)

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