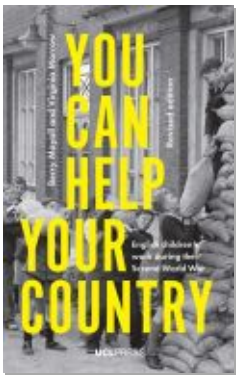
4. Children in wartime



Published by

Mayall, Berry and Virginia Morrow.
You Can Help Your Country: English children's work during the Second World War.
Revised First Edition ed. University College London, 2020.
Project MUSE. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81854.

4
Children in wartime

In this chapter, we continue into the war years with our exploration of tensions between children's work – notably, work for the war effort – and children's schooling. We start with some reminders about the social conditions of childhood when the war began, and continue with a brief account of how the evacuation of children was understood at the time. This is followed by a discussion of children as workers and as learners in debates at the time, and a section on education-policy developments during the war. We then outline the many routes through which children were urged to participate in the war effort. Finally, we discuss some of the principal themes identified in the chapter.

The lead-up to war

From the point of view of English children's lives, we note here some movements (among many) that led up to the Second World War. Perhaps most important were the plans to evacuate vulnerable people – especially children – from danger points. The country was divided into evacuation areas (the industrial cities), reception areas and neutral areas. As part of the scheme, 30 camp boarding schools were established in 1939 within the state system; the plan was that they would serve as schoolchildren's camps in peacetime – to give them a taste of country life – and as reception centres for some children in wartime (see Dent, 1944a: 95–7). Another innovatory set of schools was established in the 1930s in Cambridgeshire under the inspiration of Henry Morris, who wanted to educate boys and girls (11–14) for their lives 'as countrymen

and countrywomen' (Dent, 1943: 11), and to provide a rural education for the whole community (ibid.: 32).

Planning for a possible war took place throughout the 1930s, including plans for dealing with physical injuries, material damage to homes and distress caused by traumatic events. Proposed measures included emergency medical services, rest centres and feeding centres for the homeless, and the deployment of psychiatric services. From 1935 onwards, the government organisation known as the ARP (Air Raid Precautions Department) worked on plans to relieve distress caused on the home front by enemy action – including injury, homelessness and the loss of paid work.[1]

But while planners prepared for war, there was concurrently well-established anti-war feeling among the people[2] – and in that context it is interesting that private schools and some grammar schools continued to train boys for military service, through Officer Training Corps. These built on traditions of service fostered in these schools, but were also a preparation for war (Graves and Hodge, 1985: 212–15). Indeed, the concept of service was widespread among other organisations that many young people joined – such as the Scouts and Guides. As we shall see in Chapter 8, such organisations exhorted their members to participate in the war effort.

As we have already noted, in 1939 the vast majority of children left school at 13 or 14 and went out to paid work. The legal position (under the Children and Young Persons Act, 1933), was that no child under the age of 12 could be employed (i.e. paid for work); children over 12 could not work during school term before 6a.m. or after 8p.m. and not for more than two hours on a schoolday. But local authorities varied in their bye-laws about this – for instance, they might permit under-12s to be employed by their parents in agricultural work. Furthermore, during their school years girls did unknown quantities of domestic work (cleaning, childcare, errands); and both boys and girls worked either for no pay in, for instance, household enterprises or for pay in casual work, as messengers and errand boys and as shop assistants.

Over 90 per cent of children went to publicly funded schools; the rest attended (mostly) fee-paying grammar schools and private schools, including the so-called 'public' schools (Dent, 1942: 18. There were about 5.4 million children aged 5–14 in England and Wales – 1938 figures). In 1938, of 2 million young people aged 14–18 in paid work, only 42,000 were released for any school-based education during working hours (that is, 1 in 50) (Dent, 1944a: 130). According to the 1943 White Paper (Board of Education, 1943b: 6, paras. 17 and 19),

only 9.5 per cent of elementary schoolchildren went on at age 11, via an exam ('the scholarship'), to a grammar school; from age 11 onwards, just under half of elementary schoolchildren were in separate 'senior' classes or in 'senior elementary schools', or in central or senior schools. (The White Paper figures presumably mean that about 40 per cent of children aged 5–14 spent all their schooldays in elementary school, often grouped in only two or three classes. See also Barber, 1994: 1 and 61.)[3] These figures reflect slow progress towards secondary schooling as advocated in the 1918 Education Act and the 1926 Hadow Report. While the 1936 Education Act proposed raising the SLA to 15 on 1 September 1939, this was postponed on the outbreak of war. But the Act's exemptions for 'beneficial employment' on attaining 14 years were no longer acceptable to the majority of commentators during the war years, according to Michael Barber (1994: 9). Frustration among educationalists at the slow rate of change in the 1930s led to massive demands for free full-time education to 15 years for everyone (see the 'Education policy' section, below).

Welfare in wartime

As regards children's experiences during the war, the principal memory in the public mind nowadays is of evacuation. Indeed, to mark the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the war (September 2009), a service was held in St Paul's Cathedral for evacuees, now in their 70s and 80s, and a BBC programme on evacuation was broadcast (BBC4, 2 September 2009). Evacuation, commonly regarded as children's central and traumatic experience during the war, has been the focus of many studies – including some at the time (Padley and Cole, 1940; Isaacs, 1941; Barnett House Study Group, 1947) and others, drawing on people's memories, in the succeeding years (Johnson, 1968; Wicks, 1988; Holman, 1995; Parsons and Starns, 1999). Studies describe the difficulties of putting numbers on the scale of evacuation (Padley, 1940: 41–4; Titmuss, 1976: 102–3). But out of a UK population of about 45 million, about 2 million people evacuated themselves in 1939 (to stay with relatives and friends living in safer areas). The government scheme evacuated about 1.5 million people: expectant mothers, mothers of under-5s, school-age children and teachers. The scheme was voluntary and, overall, 47 per cent of those eligible took part, with variation across areas (Titmuss, 1976: 102–3). Margaret Cole (1940: 11), in one of the first accounts, says that the scheme could have been proposed only by minds that were

'military, male and middle-class'. John Bowlby (1940) offered psychological justification and sympathy for mothers' unwillingness to let their children go. These movements at the start of the war were followed by returns home; for instance, by January 1940, 79,000 of 241,000 evacuated London children had returned. Later major evacuations took place during periods of intensive enemy action (autumn 1940, summer 1944).

In addition, some parents who could afford it sent their children overseas, to English-speaking countries that offered help; estimating numbers involved is difficult, but perhaps 13,000 children left (Titmuss, 1976: 247–8). For a short time in 1940, the government also ran a scheme, the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB); under this scheme 2,664 children went abroad, most of them for the duration. It was hastily stopped when a boat was torpedoed and 73 children drowned.[4] Some private schools, sited in dangerous areas (cities, coastal areas and southern counties), sent large groups abroad, Sherborne and Roedean girls' schools among them (Mann, 2005: 51); however, more common was the movement of whole schools out of danger areas, to share premises with schools in 'reception areas'.

The evacuation and planned evacuation of children from cities elicited interesting responses at the time. Policymakers presumably thought that parents and children would do as they were encouraged to do and leave the cities, for they closed not only the city schools but also the school medical services (Hendrick, 2003: 125). Titmuss deals with revelations of class divisions in society: the shock to public opinion in the reception areas, when people met poorly clothed children who were lice-infected and enuretic. He argues that indications of differing living standards and customs between city and country dwellers, and government recognition that improved social services were necessary during the war, provided an important impetus for the construction of the welfare state after the war (Titmuss,1976: chs VIII and XXV; also Titmuss, 1966). Evacuation, in his view, put the children centre-stage as appropriate recipients of social services; it was only through national planning in the interests of social justice that the situation could be remedied.[5] A London organiser of evacuation services endorsed this view in 1940: the evacuation experience might be

> [o]ne of the things that will force us to accept a levelling up of the income of the insecure section of the community, even though we shall inevitably experience a levelling down of our comparative middle class ease. (Williams et al., 2001: 92)

As to children who left Britain, some commentators saw them as rats deserting the ship. For instance, Prime Minister Winston Churchill said in July 1940, 'I entirely deprecate any stampede from the island at the present time.' *The Lady* magazine promoted a patriotic view: children should be thought of not as 'charming pets to be kept away from real life . . . They too are the British people and they may be better British people because of their patriotism being tested in their early years'. And the Headmaster of Winchester College put this point in overtly social-class terms:

> It cannot be right to encourage these [privately schooled] boys and girls to think first of their own safety and security. It may be possible for them to help here in many ways. How can we with any consistency continue to speak of training in citizenship and in leadership while at the same time we arrange for them against their will to leave the post of danger? I believe it is our duty to encourage those for whom we are responsible to stand fast and carry on.[6]

What did become clear during the war was that children in England, whether evacuated or not, of whatever class, participated in the war effort in a wide range of ways – which we detail in later chapters. In these ways, they promoted their own welfare as well as that of the communities in which they lived. It is also clear that from the first days of the war, children became a prime focus for state intervention to ensure their health and welfare. As R.A. Butler, President of the Board of Education, put it in 1943, 'In the youth of the nation we have our greatest national asset' (Board of Education, 1943b, para 1). Previous stringent means testing gave way somewhat to the provision of school meals, milk at school and extra coupons for clothes and shoes. Though progress on these fronts was piecemeal and varied across local authorities, by 1945 more than a third of schoolchildren were having school meals and 70 per cent drank school milk (meals and milk were either means-tested or free). The official view was that nutritional standards for elementary schoolchildren had 'almost certainly been improved during the war'.[7] The Board of Education's stated view in 1943 was that a national health service after the war would provide universalist medical treatment, and so the school medical service would become merely an inspection and referral service (Board of Education, 1943b, para 94). Titmuss (1976: 510) saw these welfare initiatives as becoming established social services 'fused into school life'.

Work during the war – adults and children

Mobilisation of adults

Voluntary enlistment of adults early in the war gave way to conscription, and by 1943 Britain had over 4.5 million men in the armed forces. Of all women aged 18–40 (single, married, widowed), 55 per cent were in the armed services or employed in industry or as land girls in agriculture (Gardiner, 2005: ch. 18). Other women worked part-time or full-time in nurseries, canteens, hospitals, hostels, clubs and rest centres (Titmuss, 1976: 412); many others worked voluntarily in organisations such as the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), the Red Cross and the Women's Institutes. For instance, the WVS, started in 1938, recruited women who had not been mobilised – those with young children or other dependants, or who were too old for registration for war service. Women worked as unpaid volunteers in cooperation with local authorities all over Britain. By 1941, over one million of them had joined – and not just well-to-do women, but those from all classes (Williams et al., 2001: 97; Williams, 2000: 158–79). Their main activities were: (1) billeting, and arranging for feeding evacuees; (2) the Housewives Service – running canteens; (3) collecting salvage; (4) collecting for National Savings; (5) running rest centres; (6) keeping records of residents; and (7) training women in cookery.

Children and young people as workers

Implications for children of the mobilisation of men and women aroused great interest at the time. Whether children should work was a debating point throughout the war. Some thought that if parents gave their children less attention this was bad for morale – neglected children ran wild (Titmuss, 1976: ch. XX). Others – such as teachers of evacuated children – thought that children who had previously been 'pampered and nervous kiddies' gained in self-reliance, learned to think and act for themselves and developed their own individuality (The Cambridge Evacuation Survey, 1941, Chapter X; see Appendix). Some evacuated children themselves – like their teachers and those who researched them – welcomed and enjoyed the changed character of school life, whereby community spirit was fostered and activities had widened to include the study of local life (natural and human). Children's views on their daily lives as evacuees in Oxford were collected by the Barnett House

Study Group (1947: 56–61) – and clearly their experiences varied (as did adults'), but both the Cambridge and Oxford studies saw benefits to children. Other children endured hardships; one of our interviewees recalled that her childhood ended with evacuation, in the sense that she had to take responsibility, aged 5, for both herself and her younger sister.

Children who remained in the cities were less fully and extensively studied than evacuees, but two examples give contrasting accounts of life in London. An 11-year-old attended one of the emergency secondary schools set up in 1940 when evacuated children drifted back to the capital. One day, they were told that one of their classmates and her family had all been killed the night before:

> We did not cry, we seemed to freeze, but we did not talk about it. However, from then on, when one of us was away, we were anxious until we knew that all was well . . . The school grounds were dug up and we had little plots of land, 'digging for victory'. We knitted scarves for airmen, adopted a British prisoner of war in Germany and sent him Red Cross parcels and wrote to him. We collected waste paper and scrap metal. No one was fat, we were a lean lot. Every day we had gym or games . . . We were very well taught and cared for (Williams et al., 2001: 92).

Bombing, war-work and caring teachers contributed to her complex and memorable daily life. Another kind of experience of life in London is given by jazz musician Benny Green. He recounts the bombing raids; the chaotic farce of 'education' offered by an assortment of teachers: dregs of the profession, dotards and young ladies 'with no suspicion of what they were letting themselves in for'; teenage years playing cricket and football, and exploring sexuality and music – importantly, at the youth club, where he developed his saxophone skills. Casually, he refers to war-work:

> One morning in Goodge Street I spent an hour or two helping demolition men clear away the rubble and broken glass which were the legacy earlier that morning of the descent of a doodlebug. There was a girl living in the street whom I was anxious to impress. (Green, 1994: 12–13)

Notably, however, many children had to do the jobs that their parents and other adults had done – especially at home. For instance, Tony Rees (aged 7 in 1939) took on domestic work when his mother went out to

work. His contributions included raising soft-fruit bushes from cuttings, bottling fruit and preserving eggs in water-glass solution. He quickly became

> a skilled food shopper, particularly for things that were unrationed, such as vegetables, or subject to the 'points' system which allowed a wide choice of tinned foods within a restricted allocation of points. The skill with points came in choosing things that were tasty or sustaining without costing too many points – spam cost a lot of points, for example, whereas the equally delicious army surplus tinned stew cost very few. South African jam, though disgusting, cost almost none. The skill with vegetables came in being there when the more desirable ones made their all too brief appearances.

And Joan Barraclough (aged 6 in 1939) recalled gardening work, feeding the pigs and dealing with slaughtered animals:

> I found the insides of animals very interesting and could clean and truss a chicken and skin a rabbit once they had been despatched. We were very disappointed when the war ended and my mother cancelled the cow she had on order.

Children, both evacuees and those who stayed at home, had new opportunities to exercise their agency. And adults who observed them had new opportunities to recognise children as agents, who dealt with the exigencies of wartime as best they could. For instance, apart from domestic and household work, 30 per cent of the children evacuated to Oxford and 8 per cent of a comparison group living in London earned money (see Appendix). But in addition, as we shall detail in later chapters, schoolchildren contributed directly to the war effort in a number of ways – in agriculture and also in savings schemes, and in food production at school as part of the curriculum and outside school hours.

However, commentators were concerned with the possible health effects of hard physical labour. The Spens Report (1938), on secondary education in the state sector, echoed current sensibilities about children's developing bodies but was, of course, too early to be aware of the exigencies of war:

> no adolescent . . . should be allowed to do heavy continuous muscular work either in or out of school, particularly if it involves postural fatigue . . . Great care should be taken to ensure that

> children do not overtax their strength in the garden, in digging and wheeling barrows, and at the bench in planing and sawing. (Board of Education, 1938: 110)

And early on in the war, the *TES* argued:

> School children are losing health and strength for want of satisfying and wholesome meals; their hardworked parents, toiling all day, and it may be all night, are not at home to prepare them, and as yet the schools do not provide them. (*TES*, 27 July 1940)

The General Council of the TUC was critical of government measures encouraging the employment of schoolchildren in the Second World War, but appeared to accept that in the emergency such employment was necessary and recognised that 'the exceptional economic circumstances of recent years have provided some justification for the employment of school children in agriculture' (TUC, 1949: 155). As we noted earlier (in Chapter 3), underlying the overt concern for children's childhoods was concern for union members' work and pay.

What young people thought about possible contributions to the war effort emerges through a government scheme established to deal with a perceived social problem – what working-class young people got up to in their leisure hours (Macalister Brew, 1943: ch. 2). In November 1939, the Board of Education issued Circular 1486, 'The Service of Youth', with the aim of preventing physical, mental and moral deterioration among school-leavers. Local education authorities (LEAs) were required to establish Youth Committees, which would work with voluntary organisations to provide young people (aged 14–20) with facilities to develop mind, body and spirit – notably, in youth clubs and youth organisations. In June 1940, a further circular – 1516: 'The Challenge of Youth' – was issued, offering guidance on 'this new national movement'. However, as this movement developed, it became clear that many young people did not prioritise being entertained; they wanted, not to be served, but to serve. Thus, when in January 1941, new pre-service training for young people was established for the air force, navy and army, the rush by boys to join these new organisations (the Air Training Corps, the Sea Cadet Corps and the Army Cadet Force) far exceeded officials' expectations. For instance, 200,000 boys enrolled in the Air Training Corps in the first six months, double what had been expected by officials (Dent, 1944a: 111; see Chapter 8 for a discussion of pre-service training). Similar organisations were started for girls – and from February 1942, these various

ventures were grouped under the National Association of Girls' Training Corps.

The next stage in harnessing young people into the war effort was compulsory registration of all those aged 16–18 (boys from January 1942; girls from March 1942); they would be invited to an interview to encourage them to carry out useful activities. The Prime Minister stressed that these interviews would help young people learn their responsibilities as future citizens: some might join pre-service training groups or work with the Home Guard – from age 16 (Dent, 1944a: 121). This measure had the unexpected effect of bringing to public and governmental notice just how hard and long many young people worked. Interviewers up and down the country sent in their reports; in many cases, they recorded young people working 50, 60 or even 70 hours a week. Given this, they felt unable to recommend that the young people should be asked to do extra voluntary work or training. The *TES* (27 June 1942) said, 'Apart from any other consideration, we cannot from the point of view of national safety afford to run any longer the risk of devitalising a whole generation.' The government reviewed these reports and came to the same conclusion: on average, 25–30 per cent of young people interviewed could not reasonably be asked to do more:

> It was evident that some girls were tired out and unfit to undertake further activities, especially when they had to help at home after a day's work; a heavy burden rested on girls in large families. (*TES*, 8 August 1942)

One father, thinking that registration implied compulsory war-work, wrote to his LEA, asking for exemption:

> Dear Sir, I wish to apply for exemption of my daughter as she is the one we depend on for our food here. There are five of us – all on war work, including my wife. We all work from 8 a.m. to 7.45 p.m. each day. We have no-one but my daughter to cook us a meal and to keep the house clean for when we come home; also she has to run the messages and is on war work herself from 8 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

One important effect of this registration of young people was that the government, having read the reports from across the country, issued a White Paper, 'Youth Registration in 1942' (Cmd 6446), which proposed better regulation of hours of work for young people aged 14 and up (Dent, 1944a: 120–9).

During the war, when many schoolchildren were employed on the land (see Chapter 6), the Home Office, under the Labour leadership of Herbert Morrison, was reported to be reviewing the law relating to the employment of schoolchildren, and the Education Committee of London County Council made a number of recommendations. These were, firstly, that:

> there should be a general national standard laid down by statute for the hours of employment, both on school days and during school holidays, but that the LEA should retain the power of enforcements; secondly, that the employment of children on school days before the close of school hours should be prohibited by statute; and thirdly, that local authorities should keep children under close medical supervision by means of medical examinations before, and periodically during, employment. The licensing of children to perform in public houses shall be prohibited by statute. (see *TES*, 11 November 1944)

In presenting the report, the Vice-chairman commented that the committee 'would look forward to the time when the nation would prohibit all employment of children' (*TES*, 11 November 1944). But it seems that during the war there was conflict, or at any rate poor communication, between the Home Office and the Board of Education and Ministry of Agriculture – and this disparity reflects the fact that there was still no coherent government policy concerning the employment of schoolchildren.

Education-policy developments during the Second World War

The main policy development in this arena during the war was the passing of the 1944 Education Act. Heralding free education for all 5–15-year-olds, it is generally seen as shifting the emphasis decisively towards children as scholars rather than as workers. There are any number of strands that one could trace to explain why this measure, the principal domestic legislation passed during the war, is thus regarded. In brief, listed below are some of them – drawing on five main sources.[8]

Since the passing of the 1918 Education Act, the aim of providing secondary education for all had been supported by the Labour Party and by the 1926 Hadow Report. But government conservatism, class bias and poor economic performance held up reform. As we have noted,

up to 1939, gradual, piecemeal reorganisation took place and some 'secondary' education was provided in separate classes and schools (Board of Education, 1943b; and see discussion in Barber 1994: ch. 4).

These organisational changes, coupled with the diffusion of educationalists' ideas on appropriate provision for young and older children (as described in the three Hadow reports of 1926, 1931 and 1933), began to seep into people's understandings and, furthermore, into practice (Richmond, 1945: ch. VI). Changes towards more 'progressive' methods may have been helped by the example of the privately run, progressive day and boarding schools (by 1934 there were at least 17 'progressive' schools, such as Beacon Hill, Dartington Hall and Summerhill [Blewitt, 1934]). During the war, there was continued pressure from a range of educational and workers' organisations to implement radical reforms;[9] this was strengthened by the formation of a Campaign for Educational Advance (1942), bringing together the NUT, TUC, WEA (the Workers' Educational Association) and the Co-operative Union under the chairmanship of R.H. Tawney (Barber, 1994: 8). Groups of influential men – linked by their membership of 'public' schools, 'Oxbridge' and London clubs – met to consider possibilities for change,[10] and the National Government may have decided on modest reforms to placate the Labour vote, in order to defuse increased support for the party.

In the lead-up to the 1944 Act, the Norwood Committee (1943) argued that there were three types of child: the academic, the technical- or arts-oriented, and the rest – practical people. Children could be sorted for secondary schooling into these three types.[11] This provoked an acerbic critique from Cyril Burt (1943: 131), who neatly encapsulated the report's outdated and false assumptions, quoting 'a well-known political leader' whose view was that

> [t]he child of the working man differs from the child of the professional classes, not by a lower intelligence, but a different intelligence, that is an intelligence directed towards technical skill or practical common sense rather than towards abstract work of a literary or scientific nature.

Such a notion, Burt adds, was not accepted by present-day psychologists. The crucial question was about the child's general intelligence, regardless of what it was applied to:

> In the interest of the nation as well as the child, the paramount need is to discover which are the ablest pupils, no matter to what school

> or social class they may belong, and generally to grade each child according to the relative degree of his ability, and give him the best education which his ability permits . . . The proposed allocation of all children to different types of school at the early age of eleven cannot provide a sound psychological solution. (Burt, 1943: 140)

A further theme was what the war conditions revealed – the nation's stark socio-economic inequalities. As a result, greater equality of opportunity was increasingly seen as just.[12] Measures introduced by government to ensure the welfare of children – school meals, milk, camp schools – suggested long-term implications for state intervention to improve the 'quality' of the population. War was also revealing the gross inadequacies of the education system, in the light of wartime requirements. In 1939, 25 per cent of 16-year-old and 17-year-old recruits to the armed services were illiterate (Barber, 1994: 4) and there were not enough people skilled in making munitions (see Chapter 7).

The reforms

The 1944 Education Act was an important step in consolidating the status of childhood as apprenticeship through schooling. Childhood as scholastic activity was to be lengthened, and sited under the control of a central government 'Ministry of Education' rather than under the varying policies of LEAs.

The President of the Board of Education – R.A. Butler from July 1941[13]– went through a long, detailed consultation process in order to ensure that a deal was done and that the Act went through. A 'Green Book' (a consultation paper) was issued to appropriate organisations in 1941, and over 100 of them wrote in with their comments and suggestions. While there was basic disagreement between conservative and left-wing commentators,[14] there was almost universal agreement on some points. There should be a primary-school stage, followed by a secondary-stage for all. All forms of full-time secondary education should be equal in status. There should be a Code of Regulations applying to all types of secondary school. There should be a variety of courses in secondary schools to meet students' varied interests. The 'special place' exam ('the scholarship') should be abolished and children allocated to the type of secondary school 'judged most fitted for them'. The SLA should be raised to 15 at the end of the war, and to 16 as soon as practicable. There should be compulsory part-time education for all from the age they left full-time education to age 18. The service of youth should be closely linked up with the education system and coordinated with arrangements for placing

and training young people up to age 20 in industry and commerce (Dent, 1949a: 87).

The 1943 White Paper 'Educational Reconstruction' (written by Butler) conceded most of these demands. The Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in December 1943, and passed in the summer of 1944. It laid down the principle of nursery, primary, secondary and further education, free to all. Children (assessed by teachers, supplemented perhaps by an IQ [Intelligence Quotient] test) would go to the type of secondary school best suited to their talents and future lives: grammar, modern or technical. However, implementing these points would take time and would depend on finding the necessary resources (money, buildings, staff), and success would depend on the efforts of those implementing it and on assessing the value of what was put in place. In practice, conservative forces slowed reform. A single examination ('the 11+') determined children's fates. The SLA was not raised to 16 until 1972. Compulsory part-time education to age 18 for school leavers was not implemented. Nursery education continued to be a low priority. In essence, the main achievement was free secondary education for all to age 15. The 'public' schools were not affected by these reforms.[15]

Encouraging children to participate in the war effort

Here, we consider some of the main routes whereby children were encouraged to think that they had a part to play in the war effort, and encouraged to do what they could. These include: (1) government action and BBC radio work with and for children; (2) messages beamed out at cinemas; (3) images of sturdy, active, competent children portrayed in children's storybooks and anti-enemy propaganda and heroic war exploits in comic magazines.

Government action and the BBC

Churchill had told Butler in 1941 that he did not want an Education Act (which would stir up domestic political battles, and might divert attention from the war effort) but that schools might be encouraged to be patriotic (Barber, 1994: 35). Indeed, the government made great efforts to encourage children to contribute to the war effort, particularly via their schools.

Thus, the Board of Education issued a series of memoranda entitled 'The Schools in Wartime' – for instance, on 'Schools and food production' (September 1939) and on 'Needle subjects' (November 1939). 'Making

do' and mending clothes was a necessary task for adults and children. Practical information about food production was issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, which also issued 'Dig for Victory' leaflets (see Figure 4.1). The Ministry of Information supplemented this information with films on, for instance, making a compost heap, fruit-tree pruning, sowing and planting. Some schools acquired the necessary equipment to show films.

Figure 4.1: Ministry of Information poster: 'Dig for Victory'. Source: Imperial War Museum, London. © IWM (PST 0696)

These government departments worked closely with the BBC, whose school broadcasts would be a key means of contacting children. Thus, through the war years the Board of Education worked with the Central Council for School Broadcasting (CCSB), and early on, in December 1939, the Board's Memorandum No. 6: 'The use of school broadcasting' was sent to schools with a stamped addressed postcard asking them whether they listened to broadcasts, in which case they would be sent the programme for the Spring Term 1940. Memorandum No. 8 was 'Winter in the garden' (December 1939), containing practical tips for gardening; it suggests in the last paragraph that '[w]here a wireless set is available, the pupils should listen to the very enlightening Science and Gardening

broadcasts by Dr B.A. Keen and Mr C.F. Lawrence every Monday at 2 p.m.' A Board of Education memorandum (28 November 1939) notes that about two-thirds of schools said that they were keen to listen in, but some (6 per cent) had difficulties (bad reception, school closures, timetabling) (BBC Written Archives Centre [WAC], folder R16/12/4/2b).

However, radio broadcasts quickly became popular with schools – partly to compensate for staffing difficulties; partly as a means of providing children with continuity; and partly because children, especially those in country schools, could be encouraged to grow food and keep livestock. The number of schools listening in doubled by late 1941 to about 12,000 (out of perhaps 20,000 schools) (Gosden, 1976: 79). From 1940 and throughout the war, the BBC carried programmes titled *The Practice and Science of Gardening*, giving detailed advice on food production (see Figure 4.2) and (in the Spring Term 1942) on rearing livestock.[16]

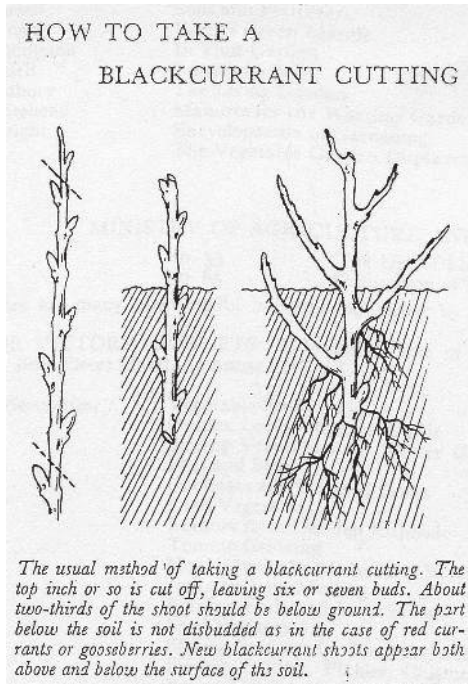


Figure 4.2: How to take a blackcurrant cutting. From the notes (25 September 1944) accompanying the BBC's *The Practice and Science of Gardening* weekly programmes for schools. Source: BBC copyright content, reproduced courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation. All rights reserved

Particularly revealing is a booklet issued by the Board of Education in 1941.[17] This consists of edited and numbered reports of the accounts sent in by teachers of their use of school broadcasts with children. For instance:

> 17. From a village school in the West Midlands. Seniors 11–15 listen to the News Commentary and then use atlases to find points of interest. They also collect newspaper cuttings, which include maps. Each child makes a book of these cuttings with added notes. For instance a talk on 'The Raid on the Lofoten Islands' was a jumping-off ground for the geography of Norway. We revise the past history of the German occupation.
>
> 20. From a modern school in the North West (13+). A talk which referred to Disraeli led to a lively discussion of the part played in history by the Jew. A little pedagogic manoeuvring and the presence of Lisel, our German Jewish refugee, transformed a faint incipient hostility with appreciation of the benefit to mankind wrought by the Jews.
>
> 28. [on *The Practice and Science of Gardening* talks:] We are always on the alert to compare our practice with that suggested. Often the two coincide, e.g. our cropping plan closely follows that described by Mr Lawrence, except that we extend our rotation over four years, where he advocates a three-year course. On 17th Feb we got a good laugh when the sowing of onions was advocated while the ground outside was frost-bound and covered with snow and we had been unable even to start digging. The boys were delighted when in the intensive cultivation talk of 3rd March, the advantages of a hot bed were explained, as they had just made one.

The BBC's broadcasts for schools included, from September 1941, a daily five-minute *News Commentary* – and this was continued during the holidays, and throughout the war. A series of programmes considered the histories, cultures and people of the allied countries – France, the USA and the USSR. Also developed were current-affairs talks for sixth forms and, later, for fifth forms. Topics covered included consideration of values – 'the totalitarian answer' and 'the democratic way' – and introductions to sociology and research methods. Throughout the war, the BBC encouraged schools to send in their views on the broadcasts; they

also held meetings with groups of teachers, older schoolchildren, local education staff and regional education officers engaged in school work.[18]

As Jean Seaton notes (2006: 141), these BBC initiatives indicate that BBC staff were positive in their views of children as people who could be asked to take part and as active, sensible, thoughtful people who could be engaged with directly, on equal terms. She quotes from a broadcast on *Children's Hour* (15 November 1940) by Stephen King-Hall, in which, discussing democracy and its implications for children, he addressed children, saying that they must acquire the skills to engage with democracy by sensible activity. As a sensible child, you would 'take the trouble to find out the facts about problems yourself . . . train yourself to use your brains[,] . . . not believing everything you are told, or read or hear. Question everything but be sensible judges.' More generally, Seaton argues that, whereas in those years programmes for children included children and adults seriously talking with each other, nowadays no one makes programmes in which adults engage with children; programme makers have thus separated the worlds of children from those of adults (Seaton, 2006: 143). The view of children as sensible people who could do their bit comes through in a 1945 retrospective description of *Children's Hour* during the war by Derek McCulloch ('Uncle Mac'). He says that it aimed

> to give children stability and continuity in a world of chaos and change; to give children the best music, story, drama; to encourage their war effort in savings schemes, salvage, handicraft, harvesting and safety first; to avoid too much emphasis on direct war topics or hate of enemies but focusing on the part played by men and women in the Services; to avoid creating fear, to give direct and regular religious instruction. (BBC, 1945)

Films

'Going to the pictures' provided children with more messages encouraging them to participate in the war effort. Cinema-going was a well-established custom between the wars and even more so in wartime (see Graves and Hodge, 1985 on the interwar years; Gardiner, 2005: 146–9 on the war years). For instance, the Bolton Odeon, opened in 1937, could seat 2,354 people and had continuous programmes on weekdays and three on Saturdays (Gardiner, 2005: 148). In the 1930s, between 18 and 19 million tickets were sold weekly (the population was about 45 million according to the 1931 census).

A survey of children's leisure activities by A.J. Jenkinson, first published in 1940, showed that between 40 and 50 per cent of grammar-school boys and girls went to the pictures once a week or more, and about 60 per cent of senior-school boys and girls did so (see Jenkinson, 1946; and Appendix). The Oxford study also showed that going to the pictures was part of many children's week (see Appendix). A study in 1943 found that 32 per cent of adults went at least once a week, and that the proportion was higher among young adults and children than among older people.[19] Most cinemas also had Saturday-morning shows for children, and the history of Weston-super-Mare Grammar School (see Chapter 5) records the jingle associated with these shows:

> Every Saturday morning, where do we go? Getting into mischief, oh dear no!
> To the Mickey Mouse club, with our badges on,
> Every Saturday morning at the O-de-on!

As well as American escapist films, popular offerings included British feature films about war – for instance, *Convoy*, the most successful British film of 1940, and *Henry V* (1944): pictures that combined entertainment with propaganda (Chapman, 1999: 42). In those days, a cinema programme included a 'newsreel', perhaps a Ministry of Information documentary, a 'B' feature film and the main feature. Documentaries were 5-minute (and later 15-minute) propaganda films, typically featuring each of the armed services or topical exhortations following crises – for instance, in the aftermath of Dunkirk and the 1940–41 Blitz (for fuller accounts, see Swan, 1989: 158–9; Chapman, 2007). These films also praised the work of people on the home front, and the resilience of schoolchildren.[20] There were also 'story-documentaries' – fictionalised propaganda to promote the war effort.[21] This, then, was a setting in which children, like adults, enjoyed time out from day-to-day experience and hardships and (though they may have been sceptical faced with propaganda) might be cheered to see films about their own lives; children could also learn about how the war was progressing, and could link that knowledge with news bulletins and discussions at school. Documentary films were also shown in other settings, such as schools and village halls and via mobile vans touring villages (Swan, 1989: 155, 160, 169, 170).[22]

One of our interviewees, Teresa Letts, living in a small village in Kent, went by bus to the cinema once a week, and thus saw a wide variety

of films – but always had to leave before the end of the main feature to catch the last bus back:

> Interviewer: Do you remember what you saw, what you liked?
> TL: Yes, I do actually. I wasn't allowed to see *The Wicked Lady* – so it was that era. I hated Will Hay, loved American features, Betty Grable and Carol Lombard.

Another (Susan Sawtell) noted that at school, she learned about the progress of the war from her 'politically aware housemistress': 'She put up maps and told us what was happening. And in the next-door house lived a refugee Jewish girl, who was, of course, deeply anxious about what was happening to her family. So that was a huge issue for me.' Susan's mother thought it important for her to know what was happening, so in 1945 'she insisted on taking me to a film about the relief of Dachau, because she said you need to know about it'.

Children's fiction

Children's literature was another arena in which children learned the value of their active engagement with the war effort. Children were explicitly exhorted – often entertainingly and amusingly – to undertake all kinds of patriotic duties to support the war effort. Publishing for children was regarded as important at the time (while educational publishing collapsed) (Dudley Edwards, 2007: 650). If we take one classic series, Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories are full of examples of William and his friends trying to offer their services. The wartime stories are pervaded by explicit stories of daily life during the war, and exhortations to help – and William tries hard to do so, often with very funny results. For instance:

> William was finding the war a little dull. Such possibilities as the black-out and other war conditions afforded had been explored to the full and were beginning to pall. He had dug for victory with such mistaken zeal – pulling up as weeds whole rows of young lettuces and cabbages – that he had been forbidden to touch spade, fork or hoe again. He had offered himself at a recruitment office in Hadley, and, though the recruiting sergeant had been jovial and friendly and had even given him a genuine regimental button, he had refused to enroll him as a member of His Majesty's Forces. (Crompton, 1941: 9)

Another series is by Virginia Pye, about the Price family and their friend Johanna. The stories show how children took on jobs in well-to-do homes as servants were called up; Owen Dudley Edwards (2007: 639) notes that war led to people of every kind and age and upbringing being expected to do things they had never dreamed of. Thus, in the 1943 story *Half-term Holiday*, Pye writes about Priscilla, who was working on a farm:

> She was glad too that because of her work on the farm, which she loved better than anything else, she could feel she had a job and that she was a necessary and useful cog in the war machine. She was no longer playing at farming, she was right deep in it. (Pye, 1943: 20)

Children's comics, such as those published by D.C. Thomson, also played their part in enlisting children to participate in the war effort. *The Beano*, for example, was very explicit, containing blatant anti-German and anti-Italian propaganda, laden with images of war and fighting, that seems extraordinary with hindsight. According to Morris Heggie and Christopher Riches (2008: 79), '*The Beano* mobilised a battalion of heroes to inspire British children in their wartime endeavours'. The mantra was that every character should 'do their bit':

> Whether by collecting old comics to recycle, supporting the Home Guard, bearing privation, or simply maintaining prudent war etiquette, everyone had to play their part. Primarily, The Beano concentrated on encouraging children. Every aspect of a war child's life, and indeed their potential contribution to the war effort, was covered. (Heggie and Riches, 2008: 92)

Discussion: Concepts of childhood during the war years

As in any period, ideas about childhood and about children's relations to society and, at local levels, to parents and teachers, were mixed, inconsistent and shifting during the war years. But some ideas current at the time stand out.

Children as workers

There seems to have been no theoretical barrier during the war years to harnessing children's work towards the war effort. It was obvious

that everyone should help by doing what they could. The fact that most children did work anyway in their households, and by 12 many were in paid work, meant that it was no great step to enlist them as war workers. In practice, schools were good arenas in which to promote children's war-work – since children were 'captive' and teachers could encourage and collaborate with them. It was constantly emphasised in government pronouncements, however, that Britain – unlike Germany – was not going down the route of forcing young people to join organisations; since the country was fighting for democracy, democratic principles should be upheld.[23] However, these ideas were compatible with encouragement for children and young people to join groups, such as the Scouts, and pre-military training groups, which also carried out war-work. We note too that one incentive for getting children involved may well have been to boost morale, on the grounds that people were happier if they felt they were contributing.

There is clear evidence, in the massive attempt to save them through evacuation, that in wartime children were recognised as people valuable to the nation's survival. But protecting children and providing for them through welfare measures was complemented by a focus on children's participation in the war effort (see Figure 4.3 on the next page, a propaganda poster demonstrating an ambivalent view of children: A boy scout clearing up after an air raid is told that he should be evacuated). However, it was felt that the future leaders of the country were entitled to more education than the 90 per cent, and the intelligence of the 90 per cent was hotly debated – as was their present and future status in life.

Children as learners

It can be argued that during the war changes were in progress, building on earlier movements, towards conceptualising children as learners. There was increased emphasis on the idea that children were agents in their own education, as had been promoted in the 1930s by Susan Isaacs and other 'progressive' thinkers. Mary Somerville, head of BBC schools broadcasting during the war, surveyed the education field retrospectively and noted changes in educational theory and gradual changes in practice, from what children should learn to what engaged children – with more emphasis on the arts, crafts, music and drama (Somerville, 1945: 64–6). She noted that the BBC had responded to the changes with programmes on these topics; and certainly, the schools programmes emphasised children as social actors in learning and doing. From his travels up and down the country (as editor of the *TES*), Harold Dent[24]

endorsed the view that children were increasingly engaged as participants in education (Dent, 1944a: 155–62; Richmond, 1945: 134). And evidence from the Oxford study (see Appendix) provides convincing instances of changes to education practice during the war. Teachers had to use what was available – and rural studies, botany and local history could be experiential as much as book-bound. Apart from the effects of war, there may also have been a 'Hadow effect' – as curricula had to be developed for the 11–14s in the new secondary elementary schools and classes, so teachers and the Board of Education (1937) devised a widened curriculum with more emphasis on children's activity in practical subjects. Thus, it seems that the earlier model of teaching children a highly limited set of facts was giving way to a view of children as active agents in learning – and, by extension, to a view of schooling as a wider, deeper and more valuable enterprise for all children.

Figure 4.3: Ministry of Health Evacuation Scheme poster. Source: Imperial War Museum, London. © IWM (PST 13854)

We note here too that, as the war progressed and victory looked more certain, educationalists turned their attention to a more basic consideration of the sociopolitical status of children across Europe and the perceived need for political and psychological re-education of children, in the context of international cooperation. A 1937 English documentary film, *Children at School*, had drawn attention not only to what schools could offer but also to the 'multitude of old, decrepit, dark, under-funded and over-crowded English schools' attended by many; the film made the point that 'European fascists were getting ahead in their approach to education' (Hoare, 2007). So it is interesting that the New Education Fellowship, at its 1942 international conference, chaired by Butler, and attended by representatives of the allied nations, drafted a 'Children's Charter', which stressed children's rights to education. This, like Jebb's in 1929 (see Chapter 2), was a statement of 'the basic and minimum rights of children to be secured and guarded, above and beyond all considerations of sex, race, nationality, creed or social position' (Boyd and Rawson, 1965: 122). The conference aimed to promote international cooperation in order to rebuild education services and to encourage teachers, children and young people in working together for better education across countries.[25]

Child–adult relations: Taking responsibility versus knowing their place

Some children found it necessary to take responsibility, whether willingly or not, for their own lives. And whether or not separated from parents, many had to participate in caring for others, such as younger siblings, and in the daily work of maintaining the household. Children had to be adaptable to the changing events of the war. Our interviews for this study indicate strongly that adults assumed that children would contribute; as we shall indicate in later chapters, this applied to all, not just working-class children.

However, it is also clear that children's agency was limited by adult understandings of childhood. Many children were 'kept in their place', both at school and at home. Working-class children, and many girls in all social classes, were allowed only low aspirations. Several interviewees told how they were diverted from university or college towards 'women's work', towards a future as wives and mothers, and towards contributing to family income. Children were taught the hierarchy of the education

system – with private schools and direct-grant grammar schools not for the likes of them (Hattersley, 1983: chs 12 and 13).

Central to understanding childhoods at the time are relations across the generations: between children and parents, and between children and teachers. Encouragement to participate in the war effort was framed by a set of social expectations that children should do what they were told, and that adults – government spokesmen, BBC programmers, teachers and parents – had the right to tell them what to do. The social status of children was as subordinates to adults, and the exhortations that we refer to here were part of a structure of adult control over children's lives. The apparent willingness of children to 'do their bit' may in part have stemmed from their social positioning. Thus, for instance, our interviewees, commenting on child–adult relations in the past and in the present,[26] make it clear that parent–child relations were much more authoritarian then. They quote parents' standard commands: 'Do as I say. Don't argue. Don't interrupt us when we are talking. Get home on time or else!' Children returning as teenagers from abroad after the war found repressive parent–child relations as compared with, for instance, the USA, where they had experienced more respect and more freedom (Mann, 2005: ch. 28). Many interviewees noted that English children had little psychological freedom – that is, they were prevented from knowing, especially about sex and family problems; on the other hand, children had more physical freedom during the war than now, as many people remember, looking back.

In spite of psychological distance between children and their parents, then, as now, family was important to children. This is made abundantly clear in the evacuation studies, in which children were found to miss parents and home more than any other aspect of their former lives (Isaacs, 1941: 67; Barnett House Study Group, 1947: 30).[27] Close child–adult bonds are indicated in mothers' unwillingness to let their children be evacuated. However, while there was a psychological view that child–mother relations mattered, social policies were content to separate children from parents – during evacuation, in hospitals, and in institutions for children whose parents could not afford to care for them.

There is some evidence that children and their teachers came closer together during the war years. Though some of our interviewees remembered school as authoritarian, some recalled teachers' kindness and care. Teachers had to take on many welfare roles, as we have noted, including comforting children and seeing to practical needs (Cunningham and Gardner, 1999); the Oxford study makes this clear (see Appendix). One teacher recorded in her diary her resentment

about the extra tasks imposed on her – administering savings schemes, supervising dinners, sorting salvage (Lawn, 1987). As teachers' roles changed, so did those of children in relation to them: working alongside teachers in school gardens and allotments, working up money-raising shows and fire watching. Children reported a welcome change during the war years. One memory – from Barr's Hill House school – speaks for many:

> Danger, privation and adversity had made a bond between my generation and the Staff which many of us believe never existed in quite the same way before or since. We felt a special generation and we had been together in a special place. (p. 49)

Notes

1 Chapters 2–5 of Titmuss' 1950 book, *Problems of Social Policy*, written as part of the official history of the war, give a detailed account of the planning for the eventuality of conflict. The 1976 edition (which has some amendments to the original) is used here.
2 For instance, see Simon, 1989, for a discussion of pacifism.
3 We note that the percentages quoted vary somewhat according to source and to date.
4 For a full account of the evacuation of children from Britain, see Fethney, 1990 – who was himself a CORB evacuee; and Mann, 2005.
5 See also Cunningham, 1991, 2006 and Hendrick, 2003 for later endorsement of this view. In a lecture given in the 1950s, 'War and social policy', Titmuss, 1966 refers to a leader in *The Times* (1 July 1940) calling for social justice, for the abolition of privilege, for a more equitable distribution of income and wealth, and for drastic changes in the economic and social life of the country.
6 See Mann, 2005: ch. 5 for many examples of antipathy to children leaving the country, including the three quoted here, and patriotic statements by several young people.
7 For good summaries of these welfare initiatives, see Titmuss, 1976: 509–14 and Hendrick, 2003: ch. 3.
8 Among the many histories of the passing of the 1944 Education Act, especially useful are Richmond, 1945: ch. 8; Barnard, 1968: ch. 32; Gosden, 1976: Part III; and Barber, 1994. A useful commentary about relations between Butler and the *TES* editor, H.C. Dent, is given by Joan Simon (1989), who worked with Dent from 1940.
9 Gosden, 1976: 448–50 lists 53 publications (mostly books) urging reform, published in the war years up to the passing of the 1944 Education Act. See also for descriptions of many of these, Dent, 1944a: ch. IV.
10 Joan Simon (1989) gives details of these groups, which included, in a committee organised by R.A. Butler, T.S. Eliot, Karl Mannheim and Fred Clarke.
11 For good description and discussion, including reference to critics of Norwood, see Barnard, 1968: 263–6.
12 As had been proposed way back in the 1920s, and notably by Tawney (1922) in a paper for the Labour Party.
13 R.A. Butler, a Conservative MP and privately educated man, was moved from the Foreign Office to become President of the Board of Education in July 1941. With colleagues, he steered through the Education Act 1944 (Butler, 1952, 1973).
14 Conservatives wanted the retention of social-class distinctions in the education system; some left-wing spokespeople argued for multilateral schools ('comprehensives'), no fees, no selection by IQ test, and abolition of the public schools.

15 In their study of politician and educationalist Shena Simon (1883–1972), Martin and Goodman, 2004: ch. 6 detail how the 'public' schools were deliberately excluded from the remits of the various committees. Butler himself was pleased about his achievement on this score (Barber, 1994: 53).
16 Pamphlets produced to accompany schools radio broadcasts are held in the library of the IOE. For the war years, they are volumes 37, 38 and 39. The full collection covers radio broadcasts from September 1926 until 1979. Television broadcasts are included from 1958 onwards.
17 *School Broadcasts and How We Use Them: By a number of teachers* (Board of Education, 1941). The schools were not named, but each account sent in was given a number.
18 The McNair Committee Report on Teacher Training 1943 for the first time put emphasis on the need for teachers to be trained in how to use school broadcasts (Cain and Wright, 1994: 31).
19 *Wartime Social Survey, 1943*, quoted in Chapman, 1999: 41. Another source says that annual cinema admissions rose from 1,027 million in 1940 to 1,585 million in 1945 (Swan, 1989: 168).
20 *They Also Serve* (1940) documented women's work at home, supporting the family. *Tomorrow is Theirs* (1940) describes how children were coping (and enjoying new experiences) in the emergency schools set up in cities and in rural schools to which they had been evacuated (British Film Institute, 2007).
21 Some of the most successful story-documentaries were *Target for Tonight* (1942), *Fires were Started* (1943) and *Western Approaches* (1944), and these were also shown in the USA to boost support for US involvement in the war (Swan, 1989: 159, 171).
22 The Ministry of Information organised a fleet of over 100 mobile projector vans, which toured the country and showed films in schools, village halls, factories and churches (Chapman, 2007).
23 For instance, among many anti-fascist statements, Macalister Brew (1943: 25, 263–9) is important in stressing that young people must not be conscripted into youth organisations but must merely be encouraged to help in the war effort. For the compulsory membership of Nazi youth groups, see Stargardt, 2005: ch. 2.
24 Dent had a series of meetings with Butler during the drafting of the 1944 Education Act (Simon, 1989); perhaps he had some influence on Butler's thinking.
25 This initiative was part of moves to establish the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after the war. It is notable that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information, made a documentary about how the 1944 Education Act would change schooling. *The Children's Charter* film was made in 1945 by the Crown Film Unit (see the *Land of Promise* DVD issued by the British Film Institute, 2007).
26 Studies of grandmothers' accounts of their childhood concur on many points: Brannen, 2004; Smart, 2007; Wade, 2008; and Mayall, 2005.
27 In much more detail, Roy Hattersley (1983) gives an affectionate account of close relations in his working-class family.