

ISSUES PAPER 6

Aims and Values

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Introduction

Following its Annual Reports in 2004, 2005, and 2006, the Nuffield Review¹ is now producing Issues Papers which focus on specific areas of concern with a view to widening the debate and seeking further evidence. The question, which the Review has posed from the beginning, is

What are the qualities, attitudes, understandings and capacities which, in different degrees, an educated 19 year old should have in this day and age?

¹ The Nuffield Review is an independent review of all aspects of 14-19 education and training: aims; quality of learning; curriculum; assessment; qualifications; progression to employment, training and higher education; providers; governance; policy. It has been funded for six years by the Nuffield Foundation, beginning in October 2003. It is led by a Directorate of Richard Pring and Geoff Hayward from the University of Oxford Department of Education, Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours from the Institute of Education, University of London, Jill Johnson from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Ewart Keep from SKOPE, based at Cardiff University and Gareth Rees from Cardiff University. Its reports and papers are available on the website www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk or from info@nuffield14-19review.org.uk.

This Paper explores this question further and examines the aims and values which shape the system of education and training.

Emphasis on the 'skills agenda'

The Government has invested much thought and money in the last ten years in the reform of education and training. Many of the interventions and changes are justified by the Government in terms of the perceived economic need for a better skilled and knowledgeable workforce. As the then Secretary of State for Education said in the wake of the Leitch Report, 'The question of how we improve the nation's skills is one of the defining political, economic and social issues of our age'². Such an aim is seen to bring with it wider benefits such as those of greater social inclusion, a more just society and personal fulfillment. As the then Prime Minister said, skills are also the key to

² Alan Johnson speaking at the Skills for Business Network's Skills Convention, London, 5th March, 2007, following the publication of the Leitch Report, 2006

ensuring social inclusion, fighting poverty and ensuring social mobility³.

All too often, though, the emphasis on economic competitiveness and a skilled workforce overshadows those broader educational aims and the complex ethical issues that come with them.

This judgment may, on the surface, seem unfair. After all, the Government White Paper which set out the agenda for 14-19 reforms clearly envisaged a broad educational approach, when it said,

‘Every young person has potential; the job of our education system is to develop and extend that potential’⁴.

This sets out the important principle of equity, namely, that all young people matter irrespective of social and economic background, ethnicity, ability and religion. And that is not an empty declaration. Too often in the past, sections of the community, on the basis of ability, ethnicity, social class or gender, have been ignored or undervalued or indeed regarded as ineducable.

However, such a statement skates over difficult ethical issues which have to be faced. A glance at the daily papers reveals that people have as much potential for evil as for good. The task of education is to help young people realise some potentials and not others; it is to do so by drawing upon the cultural resources which we have inherited and through which those potential strengths and interests are directed. But the selection of this and not that potential (e.g. the potential for cooperation rather than conflict) and the choice of the cultural resources through

which to develop ‘selected potentials’ (e.g. through the introduction to a particular literature) depends upon the values which are embodied in the underlying and often unexamined aims of education.

It’s always necessary, then, when the time comes to make changes to our education system, to pay attention to its broader aims. If we don’t do that, if we work on too narrow a front, then we risk damaging the values that ultimately define an educated and humane society. The pursuit of economic prosperity, for example, could be at the expense of social values, such as greater community cohesion, or of personal values such as those of personal fulfilment and growth. There is a need, where so much is invested in education and training, to stand back every so often and to ask ‘What is it all for?’ – or to be more precise –

‘What values are embodied in the curriculum and its assessment?’

‘What kind of society is being nurtured by this investment?’

‘Whose interests are being served?’

The moral dimension and the problems it raises

These are not easy questions to answer for several reasons. First, policy and practice, the curriculum and the institutional provision of education and training are not morally neutral. They are concerned with introducing young people to a way of life, to a set of values which, whether acknowledged or not, affect profoundly their view of the world. One can expect different answers from different people and groups of people. The aims of education for a religious person will be different in important respects from those of members of the National Secular Society (hence, the argument from religious bodies for the preservation of voluntary aided schools so that differences of aim might be respected within the school system).

³ Tony Blair, 2007, ‘Our nation’s future – the role of work’, quoted in Keep, E., 2007, ‘Skills and the labour market’s role in delivering economic performance and social justice; competing visions for 2020’

⁴ DfES, 2005, 14-19: Education and Skills, London: The Stationery Office, Cm.6272, section 3.1

Or, again, people of different political persuasions may have different ideas of the kind of society to be nurtured through the education system; ‘enterprise’, for example, is a recent addition to the curriculum and would not have featured in the curriculum, or amongst the list of educational virtues, a generation ago.

Second, given this diversity within society, there is no one with the ‘moral authority’ to say what, for everybody, the aims of education should be. Indeed, it was because of the fear of Government assuming this role that the Permanent Secretary, Redcliffe Maud, told Dr Margaret Reeves, when she was appointed to the Central Advisory Committee for Education (England) in 1947, that ‘the main duty of members of the Council was to die at the first ditch as soon as politicians get their hands on education.’⁵ This problem, at the very heart of curriculum development, was recognised in the setting up of the Schools Council in 1964. Derek Morrell (the civil servant who in effect was the architect of the Schools Council⁶) argued in 1966 that, since there was lack of consensus over the aims of education at a time of rapid social change, we must find ways of living with diversity:

‘Jointly, we need to recognise that freedom and order can no longer be reconciled through implicit acceptance of a broadly ranging and essentially static consensus on educational aims and methods.’⁷

⁵ Conversation with Dr. Reeves in 1999.

⁶ The Schools Council was established in 1964 and disbanded in 1982. It brought together teacher representatives, local education authorities, employers, parents and government in order to provide research based curriculum development, guidance and advice.

⁷ Morrell, D., 1966, Education and Change, Lecture I, The Annual Joseph Payne Memorial Lectures, London: College of Preceptors

The Schools Council, he said, was an attempt:

‘to democratise the processes of problem-solving as we try, as best we can, to develop an educational approach appropriate to a permanent condition of change’.

And, we could add, appropriate also in a context where there is lack of consensus over the values which should shape our lives. But the Schools Council, with what it stood for, was abolished in 1982.

Dealing with diversity

The problem we’ve outlined – of addressing aims and maintaining values against a background of diversity -- leads to the more practical question,

‘How can one now reconcile diversity of values and aims with curriculum development in a national system of education and training?’

The significance of this question lies in the many ways in which values enter into curriculum and into the institutional provision of education and training. Yet rarely is that diversity recognised and thus reflected in the public deliberations which Morrell advocated and which the Schools Council placed at the centre of curriculum development. The following are but a few examples, picked out by the Review, of where there seems to have been a lack of deliberation about values embodied in the changes which are taking place:

- the declining role of the humanities and the arts in the general education of all young people, no longer a statutory requirement after 14⁸;

⁸ The impact of 14-19 changes on the humanities and arts will be the subject of subsequent Issues Papers.

- the division of learning programmes into ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’, with greater status attributed to the academic;
- the focus upon particular kinds of learning at the expense of other kinds (such as experiential and practical) and of personal qualities⁹;
- the absence of the learners’ experience and voice (what is significant for them) in the development of the curriculum;
- the assessment and grading of citizenship on the basis of written examinations;
- the definition of educational standards in terms of examinations passed at specific grades;
- the continued selection, and thereby separation, of learners at the age of 11 and at 16;
- the emphasis upon parental choice of schools rather than upon the creation of integrated and comprehensive community schools.

One reason for the neglect of public deliberation in what are morally controversial issues is the changed language of education – one which recently has come to be dominated by the language of management.

The language of education

The language we use embodies particular values and shapes our thinking. The language of education has changed into one which suggests the management of a business rather than the very different task of promoting the welfare of young people.

⁹ The importance of practical and experiential learning is behind a range of initiatives funded by the RSA, Edge, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn, Nuffield Foundation, Young Foundation, and Gulbenkian Foundation, which will be expanded upon in a future Issues Paper.

And it is not unconnected with that shift in language that businesses are increasingly invited to sponsor, if not to manage, schools and the new academies.

But, if one speaks the language of management, one is in danger of treating young people and their teachers as objects to be managed. Cuban, in *The Blackboard and the Bottom Line: Why Schools can't be Businesses*, refers to a successful businessman who, dedicated to improving public schools, told an audience of teachers, ‘If I ran a business the way you people operate your schools, I wouldn't be in business very long’. Cross-examined by a teacher, he declared that he collected his blueberries, sending back those that did not meet the high quality he insisted on. To this the teacher replied,

‘We can never send back our blueberries. We take them rich, poor, gifted, exceptional, abused, frightened, confident, homeless, rude, and brilliant. We take them with attention deficit disorder, junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them all. Every one. And that ... is why it is not a business. It's a school’¹⁰.

The boundaries between running a school and running a business can easily become confused. On the face of it, were we looking for examples of such confusion, we might take the announcement that staff working for Flybe or McDonald's will be able to get qualifications – from courses run and examined by Flybe and McDonald's -- that are recognised by the QCA as ‘equivalent to an A Level’ or a university degree. Really, though, developments like this raise questions more about what such equivalence could possibly *mean* than about the values permeating the educational system¹¹.

¹⁰ Cuban, L., 2004, Harvard University Press.

¹¹ www.qca.org.uk/qca_15669.aspx.

Therefore, language matters, and so do the metaphors we employ. The words we use embody the way in which we conceive the world, other people, the relationships between them and the way they should be treated. When education is conceived in terms of *inputs* leading to *measurable outputs*, or in terms of *targets* which constitute the *performance indicators* against which learning can be *audited*, or when teachers are seen as *curriculum deliverers*, or when cuts in resources are referred to as *efficiency gains*, then education is being conceived very differently from how it was seen only a few decades ago. It is no longer seen as, and thus evaluated in terms of, an *engagement* between teacher and learner¹², or an initiation into the *conversation between the generations of mankind*¹³, or an introduction to *the best that has been thought and said*¹⁴, or an emancipation from the constraints of authority and custom¹⁵, or *the source of common enlightenment and common enjoyment*.¹⁶ Change the metaphor, and you change the understanding of the aims of education and the values which such aims embody. That is reflected in the different traditions which enter into educational thinking and practice.

¹² Oakeshott, M., 1972, 'Education: the engagement and its frustration', in Dearden, R, et al, *Education and the Development of Reason*, London: RKP

¹³ Oakeshott, M., 1962, 'The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind', *Rationalism in Politics*, London: Methuen.

¹⁴ Arnold, M., 1869, *Culture and Anarchy*, new edition, 1963, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ Freire, P., 1982, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, N.Y.: Continuum.

¹⁶ Tawney, R.H., 1931, *Equality*, London: Geo. Allen and Unwin, p.15.

In working papers of the Review, there have been more detailed examples of this¹⁷. Here, two will suffice.

First, many of the reforms are an attempt 'to raise standards'. But the concept of 'standards' is rarely examined. 'Standards' are the benchmarks logically related to the aims of a particular activity – the one would not make sense without the other. If you change the purpose of the activity (e.g. introducing into Geography an emphasis on relevance to environmental sustainability) then you change the standards. Educational standards must be related to the overall aim or purposes of educating young people; they cannot be disconnected from such deliberations¹⁸. That makes it difficult to understand what can be meant by equivalence of standards between those learning activities geared to more efficient working on the budget airline Flybe¹⁹ and those geared to grasping the complex concepts of nuclear physics or appreciating the poetry of Hopkins.

Second, the distinction is frequently made between academic and vocational courses. But the distinction is not easy to clarify. Is the study of English with a view to a career in journalism academic or vocational? The difficulties in making sense of such a distinction has led to the substitution of 'applied' for 'vocational'. But in what way does that help? The good 'academic' scientist is applying his or her knowledge all the time. There is no clear distinction between thinking scientifically and acting

¹⁷ see Working paper No, 2, 2004, Aims and purposes: philosophical issues, www.nuffieldreview14-19.org

¹⁸ see Pring, R., 1992, 'Standards and quality in education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 40(1)

¹⁹ see note 11 above.

scientifically. The dualism between academic and vocational (or 'applied') is questionable, but it continues 'to bewitch the intelligence'.

Different traditions

Intrinsic, therefore, to the controversies around the content, provision and methods of educating and training are very different traditions of whom and what education is for. In general, of course, both education and training are about the promotion of learning. That clearly is what the system is set up to bring about. But not all learning counts as education. The central meaning of education is evaluative – it picks out certain kinds of learning as worth while. In that sense, an educational activity is to be contrasted with mere training or with indoctrination or with activities which deaden the mind and the capacity to think.

But there is the rub. There is disagreement, not only over the kind of learning which is to be judged most worthwhile, but also how the question might be resolved. There are some clear and distinct strands here -

Learning for intellectual excellence.

There is a common association between 'education' and the initiation into the different forms of knowledge which constitute what it means to think intelligently – the acquisition and appropriate application of the concepts, principles and modes of enquiry to be found in the physical and social sciences, in the study of literature and history, in mathematics, in language and in the arts²⁰.

²⁰ see, for example, Phenix, P., 1964, *Realms of Meaning*, New York: McGraw Hill; Hirst, P.H., and Peters, R.S., 1970, *The Logic of Education*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

It is concerned with the development of the intellect. For Newman, 'liberal education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more than intellectual excellence'²¹. Those within such a tradition emphasise 'the importance of traditional learning' for 'the proper and effective exercise of reason must take place against the background of inherited forms of thought and experience'²². Within such a tradition of educational thinking, there is often neglect, if not disdain, for the practical, the useful and the vocational – as well as for those learners who do not achieve 'intellectual excellence'.

Learning to do useful things.

By contrast, 'intellectual excellence' gives way to that which is useful – the acquisition of skills which are worthwhile, not so much in themselves, but in the goods which they produce. Education, in this sense, has a utilitarian purpose; it is a 'means to an end' – to what is profitable economically or to what will lead to qualifications for progressing to higher education or to employment. The emphasis is upon skills. 'The Skills Revolution'²³ has been promoted through various Government papers, but without much attention to what is meant by a *skilled* person or how skill relates to other mental attainments such as knowledge, understanding, attitude or sensibility. 'Education' therefore becomes identified with 'training' in behaviours which will

²¹ Newman, J.H., 1852, *The Idea of a University*, p. 121 – although it should be noted that Newman was speaking of a university education

²² O'Hear, A., 1987, 'The importance of traditional learning', in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, p.102.

²³ The title of the White Paper, 2003, *The Skills Revolution: Realising our Potential*, London: HMSO

lead to pre-specified outcomes. It is 'for something else'. Undermined are those activities, with no obviously utilitarian purpose, through which we address, explore, reflect upon, or engage critically with matters of deep human concern.

Learning to be a member of a democratic community.

There is recognition of the essentially social nature of human beings and of the centrality of 'community' in personal growth. The social philosopher, R.H. Tawney, argued that:

'men possess in their common humanity a quality which is worth cultivating a community is most likely to make the most of that quality if it takes it into account in planning its economic organisation and social institutions ... and establishes on firm foundations institutions which meet common needs and are a source of common enlightenment and common enjoyment'²⁴

The community shapes the lives of each of us, but is itself shaped by the thinking and activities of its members. Hence, the central importance of education for democracy, and the embodiment of democratic principles, not so much in the text books on citizenship as in the very life of the school. A crucial part of that learning would be the acquisition of the knowledge and skills – and also the opportunity - whereby each was able to contribute fruitfully to the community, to earn a living, and to do so in a personally fulfilling way. 'Vocation' would be understood in this wider ethical and cultural context.

Learning to be a complete person.

However, there is a suspicion of education and training which emphasises simply intellectual excellence or utility or a sense of community and democracy. These, though obviously most valuable, do not capture the range of learning which leads to the development of the whole person. They are part, but not the whole. Hence, we need to consider more broadly the range of understandings, skills, qualities, practical capacities, virtues and attitudes which make up the whole person, but which take into account the social and economic context in which young people are to achieve that wholeness.

Education for the 21st century

Therefore in posing the question with which this Paper begins, the Review is asking what kinds of knowledge and understanding, what qualities and virtues, what ideals and aspirations should we be nurturing in all young people - whatever their social, economic or ethnic background. And in referring to 'this day and age', the Review is assuming that the answer will depend partly upon economic, technological, cultural and social contexts within which young people are living.

Following wide consultation after the publication of its paper *Curriculum for the 21st century*, the Review believes that education for all young people should be centrally concerned with:

²⁴ Tawney, R.H., 1931, op. cit.

- *capacity to think intelligently and critically about the physical, social economic and moral worlds they inhabit.* That requires an initiation into the forms of knowledge as they are reflected in the physical and social sciences, the humanities and the arts. Such initiation can be achieved at different levels (through different ‘modes of representation’ as Bruner argued²⁵) – no one needs to be excluded.
- *practical capability* – what the *Capability Manifesto* of the Royal Society of the Arts set out in 1980 to give recognition to ‘competence, to coping, to creativity, and to co-operation with others’, thereby countering the ‘imbalance’ towards a purely academic tradition;
- *respect for the experiences, concerns and aspirations* of the learners, reflected not only in the process of learning, but also in the system of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) within the curriculum²⁶;
- *preparation for responsible and capable citizenship* within the community – vocational education in its widest sense;
- *ideals and values* which inspire and prepare young people to face actively the ‘big issues’ which affect them individually, the community to which they belong and the world – such as environmental change, racism and injustices of many kinds.

²⁵ Bruner, J., 1960, *The Process of Education*, Harvard University Press.

²⁶ see *Issues Paper 5* for a development of this.

It is, however, one thing to set out broad aims, and quite another to show what they mean in concrete detail or how they might be implemented. It is intended that future *Issues Papers* will begin that task. Here it is enough to say that there is a need:

- to recognize the importance, at every level of policy making and practice, of constant deliberation over these aims and values and their manifestation in the particular context of school or college;
- to see the central role of teachers in such deliberation – and to provide the opportunities through further professional development for them to do so;
- to provide the forums in which teachers, learners, parents and members of the community might enter into such deliberations.

The Review would welcome responses, not only to the general issues it raises about educational aims, but also to the specific ways in which that broader educational vision is pursued. The Review has, in its search for evidence, witnessed so many inspiring activities which rarely get acknowledged in the formal accountability to which schools and colleges are subjected.

THE NUFFIELD REVIEW OF
14-19
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