

The Flawed Values of our Schooling System:

How can England turn its schooling system from one based on 'knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing' into one based on the values of a civilised society?

The implication behind the sub-title is obvious: markets and business values are an inevitable part of our lives but are they enough to use as a compass for the direction of our schools?

Values in education have always baffled me. In the days when ministers thought there was merit in leaving the construction of the curriculum to a body at arms-length from the political process, I was once asked by the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) to write 3000 words on 'shared values' in the schooling system. When I protested that I wasn't really an academic – I had just left being a Professor at Keele to take up my post in Birmingham -, I was at once re-assured 'Oh, it's only for headteachers so it doesn't have to be academic'.

My subsequent effort would, as with all my writing, make me blush with shame now if I could find it, which thankfully I can't. I do remember I played around with the eternal values, drawn from the teachings of the great faiths, as primary values (such as a commitment to fairness, to honesty, to truth and to doing to others as you would wish to see done to oneself) which all civilised societies would wish to see promoted in their schools.

I then turned to a secondary set of values which I argued all schools should attempt to live up to and summarised as follows:

- Believing and acting on that belief that all children can succeed rather than running a system which depended on failure for some.
- Assuming that intelligence is multi-faceted rather than inherited, general and predictable
- Making schools inclusive rather than exclusive.
- Assessing students using ipsative and formative rather than normative and comparative methods.

- Emphasising that education is a lifelong rather than a 'once-and-for-all' activity

As you can see, these are not really VALUES but more a set of principles - or prejudices even - that could be starting points for a school staff set of purposes to guide their everyday actions and behaviour. Before I examine purposes and values further, we need to understand our present context in England so that we can see what is possible. Our actions are always shaped to some extent by the influence of time and place. Time is particularly important; for example British values a hundred years ago were different from now and a hundred years before that they were different again.

First a bit of history therefore.

After the Second World War an educational ambition for Britain was set in motion based on RA Butler's 1944 Education Act which settled the respective roles of central government, local government – through local education authorities -, the churches and schools. It was based on three assumptions.

The first assumption was that central government's role was to set the general policy guidelines only; the detail and most power should be left to local government which was closer to the people and therefore better able to understand their needs. (After all, a war had been fought against Dictators in the Axis countries who had consolidated their power base in their respective countries by getting rid of local government. Moreover there was a long tradition in England that the state should intervene in education only as a provider of last resort.) So the secretary of state had just three powers – approving the removal of air-raid shelters; securing a sufficient supply of suitably qualified teachers; and approving the opening and closure of schools and the rationing of scarce capital resource for new schools. Power over the curriculum, staffing and resources was left mainly to local education authorities, who in their turn handed over curricular power to the schools.

The second assumption was to do with the purpose of education and schooling. In that, Butler was influenced heavily by the writings of a former Archbishop of Canterbury and particularly one passage:

Until Education has done more work than it has had an opportunity of doing, you cannot have a society organised on the basis of justice, for this reason.... that there will always be a strain between what is due to a man in view of his humanity with all his powers and capabilities and what is due to him at the moment of time as a member of society with all his faculties still undeveloped, with many of his tastes warped, with his powers largely crushed.

Are you going to treat a man as what he is or what he might be? Morality, I think, requires that you should treat him as what he might be, as what he might become...and business requires that you should treat him as he is.

You cannot get rid of that strain except by raising what he is to the level of what he might be. That is the whole work of education. Give him the full development of his powers and there will no longer be that conflict between the man as he is and the man as he might become .

And so you can have no justice as the basis of your social life until education has done its full work. And then again, you can have no real freedom, because until a man's whole personality has developed, he cannot be free in his own life.....And you cannot have political freedom any more than you can have moral freedom until people's powers are developed, for the simple reason that over and over again we find men with a cause which is just... are unable to state it in a way which might enable it to prevail....there exists a form of mental slavery which is as real as any economic form....We are pledged to destroy it...it you want human liberty, you must have educated people.

In short political freedom, moral freedom, social justice resonated with politicians from all parties. Education was a 'good thing' and we needed more of it.

The third assumption was that it was not for governments to interfere in matters best left to professionals. In education 'matters best left tom the

professionals' meant ***what should be taught and how it should be taught.*** Some politicians remembered from their youth, the end – forty years earlier - of the disastrous period of central national prescription, known as 'payment by results' (I suppose today we would call it Performance Related Pay through Performance Management)

The years since 1944 have witnessed what might be called by historians distinct 'Ages' with different characteristics. First an age of 'Optimism and Trust' lasting till 1968. I have just described its origins. This age was characterised by a general agreement that education was a good thing of which you couldn't have too much. Schools were built; Colleges of Further Education, Teacher Training Colleges, Colleges of Advanced Technology – later turned into Polytechnics (and ultimately Universities) - were created and run by LEAs. Local Authorities also created a Youth Service, Adult Education Centres, Teachers Centres and Outdoor Pursuit Centres for residential trips as they also founded a network of public libraries and youth employment services (later called the Careers Service). Towards the end of the period children who up to then (the early 1970s) were regarded as 'ineducable' were brought within the remit of LEAs, as special schools were established and the world of Special Educational Needs expanded.

Teachers experimented with the curriculum and tried to make sure it met children's needs.

The government encouraged the teachers to trust their professional judgement, as the ministerial foreword to 'Story of a School' – the only professional advice issued to primary schools for 20 years after 1945 – makes clear.

I suppose in a way the very word 'trust' implies a certainty about agreement in relation to values. Gradually that trust and agreement evaporated. Ultimately values became so contested that they are now unspoken and in national debate about education ignored.

The second age was one of 'Doubt and Disillusion'. Starting in 1968, the year of campus student unrest at all the universities, it encompasses the publication (1969) of the so called 'Black Papers' polemical leaflets written by gloomy reactionaries who claimed pupils weren't being taught properly or the right

things, the collapse of a Primary School William Tyndale, pursuing so-called play methods, and the death of a comprehensive school, Risinghill, not so far from here: both were school failures occasioning great and disapproving publicity. The disillusion culminated in Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin speech of 1976 which epitomised the 'education isn't working' theme of the age of 'Doubt and Disillusion'. Central Government – at least in England if not in the other parts of the UK - was determined to act.

Mrs Thatcher ushered in the third age of 'Markets and Managerialism' the tail-end of which we are living through even now. It started in 1980. It has been punctuated by White Papers – followed by Acts of Parliament- with mantra words such as 'choice'(for parents) 'diversity'(of provision and types of school) 'autonomy' (for schools)and 'accountability'(for a relatively narrow, albeit important range of pupil outcomes although not their display of certain values). It stemmed from a belief in market forces and competition as a means of finding a solution to most problems. But the same white papers sometimes contained the words 'Equity' and 'Equality' and these two demanded regulation by the state since market forces, though it was never publicly acknowledged as a problem, couldn't be relied upon to deliver those ideals. On the contrary, markets and competition tend to produce winners and losers – sometimes more of the latter than the former, as workers in Port Talbot and British Home Stores have discovered recently.

So we have managerialism by the state in order to eliminate, or at least limit, that 'failure'. Over 40 Acts of Parliament have followed. The Secretary of State who in 1944 had the three powers very reasonably reserved to her, has acquired over 2000 powers and is not very clearly accountable to Parliament in the exercise of such a breath-taking ability to make what some have recently called central diktats on all manner of matters best left to schools. No wonder Alan Bennett has called it a 'totalitarian tendency'. It extends to the Secretary of State defining in detail what shall be taught, how it should be taught and when it should be taught – something never attempted to the same extent even by Napoleon, Hitler and other continental dictators, and interestingly by no other western developed country.

As the recent White Paper makes clear, the Secretary of State has not yet finished: she proposes 37 more centrally directed changes. Nobody has

thought it necessary to comment that none of these measures addresses the two urgent problems of our English system – an acute shortage of teachers and an urgent need for new schools, both of which duties you may recall were among the three originally held centrally but which Michael Gove gave up, preferring presumably to leave them to be resolved by ‘market forces’.

Interestingly this approach to running the schooling system has not been replicated in Wales Scotland or Northern Ireland.

And that brings me to the fourth age – the Age of Confusion in which we now live.

I started by saying what the 1944 Act intended for Britain as a whole. But Acts of Parliament now are for the 47 million who live in England. Devolution to the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and Stormont mean that children and teachers in Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish schools march to a different tune. Not for them the detailed limited diet rigidly prescribed by Westminster. They do not know the Prevent programme nor are they familiar with Channel protocols. They do not teach ‘British values’.

They do not have an inspectorate which in reporting on schools so narrowly focuses on literacy, numeracy, attendance and progress at the primary level and the Ebac, progress and attendance between 11 and 16 at secondary. No, for the Scots there is a focus on many of those of course but within a more balanced and expansive curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence they call it (now sensibly, being heavily copied by the Welsh).

In three of the four countries of the United Kingdom there is not the same slavish adherence to ‘markets and managerialism’ as an effective way of running an education system. So teachers and schools there don’t suffer to the same extent under fierce and high stakes accountability, through Ofsted and published league tables, which inevitably uses yardsticks which are narrowly drawn and more easily measurable.

In turning to what should be done I first looked to the private independent charitable schools. I know this to be slightly contentious in a Quaker context because I have been made aware of your different views about the appropriateness of Quaker independent fee-paying schools – indeed for some

Qualers of being involved in schooling at all. Nevertheless I thought there is no gainsaying the influence of the great 'public' schools on our society. So I turned first to the famous ones in the hope of some guidance. Would there for example be same pointers in their mottos?

Eton for example, *Floreat Etona* is pretty clear if implicit about a hierarchy of values. When it later became *Esto perpetua*, it reinforced that view even though, in its choice of verbal tense, it betrayed a hint of self-doubt which those outside that privileged world wouldn't share. Nor would many doubt the purposes implied by the self-evident values underpinning Harrow's *Stet Fortuna Domus*.

I could go on but the mottos, values, purposes and actions of private independent schools are perhaps no guide for those of us who have striven to make our society a fairer, more just and more equal place. Indeed some of the actions of a few of them are breathtakingly amoral. They are cloning themselves in the middle and far- east.

Step forward Harrow, Dulwich, Haileybury, North London Collegiate, Marlborough, Shrewsbury, Brighton College, Sherborne, Repton and Wellington – all with overseas branches, some with more than one, variously in Qatar, China, Kazakhstan, Dubai, Bangkok, and South Korea. There may be more.

Now it's not exactly arms dealing, but it is a latter-day form of imperialism which can scarcely be a contribution to greater equity in those countries. Neither shall I raise a hue and cry about where the profits from these enterprises go – for the fees are mouth-wateringly high; nor do I ask whether the ventures are in line with the schools' charitable purposes, since they may have set up arms –length limited companies to avoid that issue.

There are of course exceptions. Among the best of these would be some of the Quaker schools. The statement "Education is about growing the goodness and value in your child, allowing expression and living with peace" which I heard a teacher from Sidcot say is very appealing. So too is the claim that young people in Quaker schools are encouraged to be outward-looking and adventurous, to participate fully in the life of the school and to be of service to the community. Emphasis is placed on the way students lead their lives and how they treat

others. Mutual respect and concern for the natural world and the environment are integral to Quaker beliefs.

With the belief that there is 'that of God' in every person, the Quaker philosophy to education aims to ensure that:

- Every child is approached with optimism
- Individuals are encouraged to believe in their own 'immense potential'
- Learning happens most creatively when relationships are based on mutual respect
- Methods of discipline are based on trust, mutual support and a desire to promote the positive
- Responsibility is encouraged, as is questioning, exploration, honesty and openness

Of course fine words are not always borne out by actions but I have visited Sibford on a couple of occasions and found their sense of peaceful energy and purpose both impressive and contagious. Moreover since its purpose included a focused determination to overcome specific barriers to children's learning, I could see that the school's purposes and values could not be compared with the exclusive privileged missions of those private independent schools I have mentioned earlier.

I asked a friend who had been a successful head of both a Quaker school and a state comprehensive school whether he shared the view of many heads of Catholic schools that it was easier to establish shared values in a faith as opposed to a state secular school. After much thought he agreed it probably was. "That doesn't mean to say that shared values are out of reach in non-faith schools, merely that one has to be clear what they are and to work much harder and more frequently to reassert what they are". One state school locally to where I live has the statement "Think for yourself and act for others" as its strap line displayed all over the school. Shouldn't it be held accountable for how its practices and outcomes demonstrate its success in the simply stated grand purpose?

Of course that's how HMI would have approached its inspection of all schools before markets and managerialism changed its practice.

If your meeting today, as I hope, is to start a debate about a UK wide agreement about what are the purposes of our schooling systems, I am sure your experiences and practices in Quaker schools will be a good starting point for such a debate. But it needs to be a UK-wide debate and it should be non-party political as the Butler Act's gestation was.

My sketchy initial thoughts start with the reflection that a school in contributing to the bringing up of children will be aware that it is wise to underline values which support certain sorts of behaviours and then make sure there are sufficient activities and experiences which are conducive to those behaviours. The guiding purpose being that the school intends to develop the potential of each pupil – and member of staff – both to the benefit of the individual pupil and of others. So the motto I commended of 'think for yourself and act for others' is a start. It implies that pupils, in addition to what we focus on now through Ofsted and league tables, should develop:

- Sensitivity to a plurality of beliefs and a respect and tolerance for others' points of view - of course within the context of the prevailing behaviours of the time (e.g nowadays a rejection of racism, and a respect for choice to lead diverse sexual lifestyles).
- Through the curriculum, thinking skills and demonstrable capacity to work in teams
- A capacity to contribute to the solving of interdisciplinary problems
- A set of experiences which might find what Thoreau described as the 'song' in each of the pupils at the school.
- A confidence to be 'citizens of the world'.
- Healthy minds in healthy bodies – 'mens sana in corpore sano', as Juvenal would have put it.
- Service to others

If all this and more are regarded as parts of the purposes of schools, there are implications about how schools are organised and how they are held accountable for such purposes by the state.

We might for example decide that it would be desirable to have an accountability system where achievement as well as attainment is assessed, where there is an overt attempt to assess the progress of children in terms of

their health and well-being, how they are able to be team players especially in solving inter-disciplinary problems which are the hallmark of the modern world, and how they are intelligent rather than how intelligent they are. In such a system, assessment and accountability would need to change and access to schools would need to be fair rather than the competitive scramble it is now. It will also encompass how schools are to be democratically accountable locally as well as nationally.

A wider discussion on all of this will presumably be one of the outcomes of today. As I have implied, it will be an important wider debate if it starts from certain assumptions:

- It should encompass Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, if we want to preserve a United Kingdom.
- It should lead to a different accountability system regarding accountability frameworks from above both as holistic rather than narrow and complementary to professional and community accountability.

A start has been made on reframing the purposes of education by the House of Commons select Committee which has taken evidence and is due to report shortly on the Purposes of the Schooling System. Within the next 9 months the Paul Hamlyn Foundation will have supported a workshop of teachers drawn from the four countries with the intention to their outlining what are the best and the worst features of the practices in each country. Inevitably of course that gathering will have a professional focus. It will need to be followed by political discussion among the four countries to see if a UK wide set of values and purposes can be agreed. We would be very much the stronger if such could be one of the outcomes.

It might be the beginning of a new age succeeding the age of 'confusion' which has submerged the age of 'markets and managerialism'.

Perhaps this conference could stimulate a debate on how we would like future historians to describe the age whose values you will discuss today. My contribution would be that it be called an age of 'generous ambition and partnership'.

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