



... children, their world, their education

INTERIM REPORTS

Research Survey 1/1

AIMS AS POLICY IN ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

John White
University of London

For other interim reports in this series, and for briefings on each report, go to www.primaryreview.org.uk

This report has been commissioned as evidence to the Primary Review. The analysis and opinions it contains are the authors' own.

Copyright © University of Cambridge 2008



... children, their world, their education

PRIMARY REVIEW INTERIM REPORTS

AIMS AS POLICY IN ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary Review Research Survey 1/1

John White

This is one of a series of 32 interim reports from the Primary Review, an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. The Review was launched in October 2006 and will publish its final report in late 2008.

The Primary Review, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, is based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and directed by Robin Alexander.

A briefing which summarises key issues from this report has also been published. The report and briefing are available electronically at the Primary Review website: www.primaryreview.org.uk. The website also contains Information about other reports in this series and about the Primary Review as a whole. (Note that minor amendments may be made to the electronic version of reports after the hard copies have been printed).

We want this report to contribute to the debate about English primary education, so we would welcome readers' comments on anything it contains. Please write to: evidence@primaryreview.org.uk.

The report forms part of the Review's research survey strand, which consists of thirty specially-commissioned surveys of published research and other evidence relating to the Review's ten themes. The themes and reports are listed in Appendices 1 and 3.

The theme: this survey relates to Primary Review theme 1, Purposes and Values.

The author: John White is Emeritus Professor of the Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Suggested citation: White, J. (2008) *Aims as Policy in English Primary Education* (Primary Review Research Survey 1/1), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Published January 2008 by The Primary Review,
University of Cambridge Faculty of Education,
184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK.

Copyright © 2008 The University of Cambridge.

All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Primary Review, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation or the University of Cambridge.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-906478-12-4

AIMS AS POLICY IN ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

This report is divided into two parts. Section 1 looks at official accounts over the last century of what primary aims should be; while Section 2 surveys accounts by educational theorists across the same time span. In each case, there is more emphasis on recent developments. The two sections are not wholly discrete, since educational theory has influenced policy and vice-versa.

1. CHANGING POLICY ON PRIMARY AIMS

2007, the year in which the Primary Review reached its mid-point, may prove a milestone in the history of primary school aims in England. It saw the publication of the first ever set of detailed statutory aims for the school curriculum. As yet, in January 2008, these have only been applied to Key Stages 3 and 4, but there is every likelihood that they will soon be made mandatory for Key Stages 1 and 2 as well. This statement may not seem remarkable in itself. After all, we have had substantial national aims for eight years now – over two pages of them at the front of the *National Curriculum Handbook* (DfEE/QCA 1999 - see Appendix 1 below). As we shall see below, the 1999 aims have been largely ignored. What distinguishes the 2007 aims from their 1999 predecessors is that they now have the force of law behind them and have been designed so that curriculum subjects have to bring their own aims and programmes into line with them.

We will be coming back to these recent developments later. In order to properly understand them, we need to see them in their historical context.

Historical background up to 1988

Maintained primary education is a product of the inter-war period, when a division began to be made at eleven between primary and secondary schooling. Before then, all but the tiny minority of children who studied at selective secondary or central schools went to elementary schools catering for pupils of all ages.

Morant's introduction to the Code 1904

The public elementary school goes back to 1870. It was set up to provide basic education in the 3 Rs for working class children. In 1904 Robert Morant, Permanent Secretary at the Board of Education, wrote an inspirational, six-paragraph statement of its purposes as an introduction to the elementary school Code. This was regularly reprinted in different editions of the *Handbook of Suggestions* for elementary school teachers until 1944. For several decades it was intended to give teachers of primary age pupils a sense of their mission. Since it is the most comprehensive, and indeed almost the only, statement of national aims for this age group before the 1999 ones, it is worth outlining in some detail.

In general terms, the aim of the elementary school was 'to form and strengthen the character and to develop the intelligence' of children, to assist 'both girls and boys, according to their different needs, to fit themselves, practically and intellectually, for the work of life.'

The intellectual side of this involved training in 'habits of observation and clear reasoning' so as to gain an acquaintance with 'some of the facts and laws of nature'; developing pupils' interest in the 'ideals and achievements of mankind' and giving them 'some familiarity with

the literature and history of their own country'; improving their command over language and nurturing a lasting taste 'for good reading and thoughtful study'. The practical side covered practical/manual instruction, PE and games, and basic health education. In addition, 'an important though subsidiary object of the School' was to discover children of exceptional capacity and develop their special gifts so that they could transfer to secondary schools at the appropriate age.

The fifth of the six paragraphs was about character development. This picked out 'habits of industry, self-control, and courageous perseverance in the face of difficulties', learning to 'reverence what is noble, be ready for self-sacrifice', striving after purity and truth, 'a strong sense of duty', 'respect for others', 'unselfishness', an 'instinct for fair play and for loyalty to each other'.

The final paragraph was about a 'united effort' between school and home in enabling children 'not merely to reach their full development as individuals, but also to become upright and useful members of the community' and 'worthy sons and daughters' of their country.

There are many echoes of Morant's aims throughout the history of primary education in the twentieth century and into our own. We will come back to these.

Until 1926, the elementary curriculum was state-controlled, and the aims have to be interpreted in that light. A keynote of Morant's policy was to draw a sharp line between elementary education and secondary, this line having been blurred since the 1890s. While the new, post-1904 maintained secondary schools, patronised largely by the middle classes, taught an academic curriculum, the accent of the elementaries was to be on the 3 Rs, rudimentary factual knowledge in various fields, and practical pursuits. This reinforced the nineteenth century conception of elementary education as suitable for the working classes. Helping pupils 'to fit themselves, practically and intellectually, for the work of life' is, after all, only a finger's breadth away from 'habituating them to a life of work'.

The paragraph on character-development has to be read against this background. Its first-mentioned virtue is 'habits of industry'. Its others are equally stoic qualities needed to sustain one through a hard life. There is nothing here about personal fulfilment as distinct from self-abnegation. For the poor in a still deeply Christian age, the former could exist, if at all, only beyond the rigours of this mortal life.

Although Morant deepened the gulf between an elementary and a secondary education, he also fashioned a ladder between the two, as the 'important though subsidiary' aim mentioned above indicates. This involved 'discover(ing) children of exceptional capacity and develop(ing) their special gifts so that they could transfer to secondary schools'. This is the origin of the *selective* aim of elementary/primary schools that has persisted into our own century. While it no longer appears – and in such an unambiguous form – in any national statement of aims, it exists *de facto* in a system like our own which embraces selective secondary schools of different types and also requires each school to identify its 5-10 per cent of gifted and talented pupils.

Morant's 'subsidiary' aim also continued to influence the system after the ending of state curriculum control in 1926. From the 1920s it began to receive a theoretical rationale in the shape of the eugenicist notion of intelligence testing associated particularly with Cyril Burt. The abilities embraced by Burt's notion of intelligence were abstract, logical and linguistic competences especially suited to the academic curriculum of the secondary school. Since he also believed that intelligence is innate and that there are individually differing ceilings of intelligence, adopting his perspective made it seem reasonable that most elementary pupils, being of indifferent and virtually unalterable intelligence, should receive a basic schooling of

a non-academic sort, while those more gifted should be prepared for a more demanding régime. Burt himself suggested what he called ‘a “treble-track” system – a series of backward classes for slow children, a series of advanced classes for quick children, both parallel to the ordinary series of standards for children of ordinary average ability’ (Board of Education 1929: 422). This led to the widespread practice of streaming within the elementary school by the 1930s (Simon 1974: 244).

The Hadow Report 1931

The inter-war period witnessed the emergence of the primary school from its elementary school chrysalis. The 1931 Hadow Report on *The Primary School* underlined the transition that had already occurred from a school ‘for the children of the labouring poor’ to a school which provided ‘a basis for all types of higher teaching and training’ (p91). In its section on ‘The general aim and scope of the primary school’, it stated that this should not ‘be regarded merely as a preparatory department for the subsequent stage’ but should be planned around ‘the needs of the child at that particular phase in his physical and mental development’ (pp70-1). ‘It should arouse in the pupil a keen interest in the things of the mind and in general culture, fix certain habits, and develop a reasonable degree of self-confidence, together with a social or team-spirit’ (p71). It is interesting how much shorter and more general this aims statement is than Morant’s, and how much of it, even so, is about administrative arrangements to do with the emergence of the primary school rather than educational purposes.

Consonant with its emphasis on the needs of the child, Hadow questioned the centrality of the traditional aim of imparting knowledge, claiming, famously, that ‘the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored’ (p93).

While Hadow and other inter-war developments can be seen, positively, as a breach with the elementary tradition as updated by Morant, they can also be interpreted as a subtle continuance of it. The middle classes expanded considerably during the twentieth century. As more and more of their children went to their local elementary/primary school, in the expectation that they would leave it for a secondary school at eleven, they must have found its working-class ethos, as defined by Morant, difficult to accept. The Hadow combination of a pre-age-eleven grounding for differentiated secondary schooling and of a more intrinsically enjoyable regime, freed from many of the mechanical exercises of the old one, must have suited them better.

Hadow described its ‘main care’ as the facilitation of children’s growth – physical, intellectual and moral (p92). The terminology reflects the beginnings of a change in educational thinking, which reached its fullest expression in the Plowden Report of 1967. The conception of education as the inculcation of knowledge, habits and skills, exemplified in Morant’s aims statement, was being replaced by the notion of it as a quasi-biological process of development. T.P. Nunn’s book *Education: its data and first principles* (1920, frequently reprinted until 1963) was an influential text, advocating as it did ‘securing for everyone the conditions under which individuality is most completely developed’ (p13).

The radical change of perspective left its mark on thinking about the aims of education. In broad terms, they became less salient. Whereas Morant’s aims were clearly intended to be an articulated guide to more specific planning, the general statement of aims in Hadow was, as we have seen, perfunctory. In Nunn, aims were played down even more. On the very first page of his book, he reviews different accounts of the universal aim of education – the formation of character, preparation for complete living, and so on – and dismisses them all as interpretable in so many, and often contradictory, ways as to be useless (p9). His own

view is 'that there can be no universal aim of education if that aim is to include the assertion of any particular ideal of life; for there are as many ideals as there are persons' (p13). In place of universal aims imposed from without, he gives us his own picture of education as a process of biological growth leading to the most complete development of individuality. It is only nature that can set the goals, not politicians or educationalists.

Despite the sea-change in beliefs, Nunn's developmentalism fitted in well with the notion, already present in Morant's scheme, and developed under Burt, that one purpose of the primary school was to classify children according to their abilities and educate them according to their likely future destinations, academically and occupationally. Like Burt's notion of intelligence, the idea of education as a process of biological development carried with it the implication that there are individually varying ceilings of ability. Nunn, like his colleague Burt, believed that innate differences in capacity 'limit the possibilities of individuals with adamant rigour' (p117). The emergence of the primary school from its elementary school chrysalis, accompanied by increasing middle-class pressure on it to prepare their children for transfer to secondary schools, had found its ideological rationale.

In all this we should keep in mind that from 1926 until 1988 state control of the primary curriculum had been relinquished. During this period it was schools and teachers who were responsible for what was taught and why. Like the *Handbook of Suggestions*, Hadow could only offer guidance, not prescribe. This may be a reason, apart from the ideological one just mentioned, why, over this period, an interest in formulating nation-wide aims, as revealed in official pronouncements, was on the wane. This is very clear in the next milestone publication in the history of primary schools, the Plowden Report of 1967.

The Plowden Report 1967

Plowden has a short, four-page, chapter on 'the aims of primary education'. It is hard to give a coherent account of it, given the way it swings this way and that.

It states at first that 'one obvious purpose is to fit children for the society into which they will grow up' (p.185). This will be marked by rapid economic and social change, so children will need to be adaptable, responsive to others, able to withstand mass pressures, well-balanced, willing to learn new skills, and aware of their obligations to the community.

Having said this, it then seems to endorse 'the view that general statements of aims were of limited value, and that a pragmatic approach to the purposes of education was more likely to be fruitful' (p185). By this it means encouraging schools and teachers to draw up their own aims so as to guide their activities, and to reflect on what aims might be implicit in their pedagogical practices.

It then veers back to general aims in its suggestion that the aims thus uncovered would tend to 'correspond to a recognisable philosophy of education, and to a view of society', which, among other things, underlines that schools must transmit values and attitudes, that children should learn to live with others in their school community, 'develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them', have opportunities for individual discovery and for creative work, and become balanced and mature adults, able 'to live in, contribute to, and to look critically at' their society (pp187-8). Traditional virtues like 'neatness, accuracy, care and perseverance, and the sheer knowledge which is an essential of being educated' are also important (p188).

Plowden's chopping and changing is instructive. On the one hand, it reflects the fact that aims no longer emanated from the political community but were the province of professionals in the schools. On the other, it reveals how difficult it is in a national system to avoid national aims altogether. The result is its curious notion that national aims can be

abstracted from what schools say they aim at, and its half-hearted attempt at spelling out such national aims, lazily dependent on an amalgam of traditional virtues and progressive nostrums rather than on a more considered and thorough investigation.

This discussion of aims in Plowden has concentrated on its brief chapter devoted explicitly to the topic. But as Dearden (1968: 50-4) pointed out, implicit references to aims lie scattered through the text, as in its familiar child-centred claim that no advances in educational policy can be effective 'unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him' (Ch.2, para 9).

From Plowden to the National Curriculum 1967-1988

The two decades between 1967 and 1988 are divisible, for our purposes, into two overlapping segments. The earlier years underlined the Plowden message that primary schools should review their own aims and their realisation in curriculum activities. This was understandable in an age when state control had not yet returned to the agenda (except for RE, which became statutory in 1944).

A study by Ashton *et al.* surveyed the most popular aims in primary schools. The first six were, in order:

- Children should be happy, cheerful and well-balanced.
- They should enjoy school work and find satisfaction in their achievements.
- Individuals should be encouraged to develop in their own ways.
- Moral values should be taught as a basis of behaviour.
- Children should be taught to respect property.
- They should be taught courtesy and good manners.

(Ashton *et al* 1975)

It is interesting that all six aims are about personal qualities, none about the acquisition of knowledge. It is also striking that the first three have to do with the pupils' own well-being, and the last three with their moral obligations. While these latter would not have been out of place in Morant's paragraph on character development, the first three reflect the more pupil-centred approaches favoured in the inter-war years.

In 1983 the Schools Council's working paper *Primary Practice* (Schools Council 1983) encouraged teachers, very much along Plowden lines, both to work out their aims and put them into practice, and also begin from their current practice and try to see what aims are implied in it. As in the Ashton study, personal qualities figured prominently in the discussion.

But by 1983 the post-1926 principle that schools, not the state, should determine aims was increasingly under challenge. In 1975-6 the excessively free régime at William Tyndale primary school in Islington caused a public furore. This was followed by Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1976, in which government first floated the idea of a national 'core curriculum'.

In 1981 the Conservative government's *The School Curriculum* proposed a set of aims in which 'the school curriculum needs to be rooted'. These were the first national aims in English history to be proposed for all maintained schools, primary as well as secondary. They were:

- to help pupils to develop lively, enquiring minds, the ability to question and argue rationally and apply themselves to tasks, and physical skills;

- to help pupils to acquire knowledge and skills relevant to adult life and employment in a fast-changing world;
- to help pupils to use language and number effectively;
- to instil respect for religious and moral values, and tolerance of other races, religions, and ways of life;
- to help pupils to understand the world in which they live, and the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations;
- to help pupils appreciate human achievements and aspirations.

(DES 1981)

What is striking about this list is the weight it gives to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding and related intellectual qualities. It does this with next-to-no indication of why this is important. Is knowledge a good thing for individual fulfilment, for democratic citizenship, for economic growth, or for some combination of all these? More fundamental questions about aims are ignored.

In putting knowledge first, and in paying so little attention to personal qualities more generally, the 1981 list is a departure from the tradition of thinking about aims for primary age children that goes back through the Ashton *et al.* data to Plowden, Hadow and even Morant. This is partly explicable, if not justifiable, in the light of media-fuelled anxiety about low educational standards, not least in primary schools, which were seen as in thrall to 'progressive' methods.

The National Curriculum and beyond

The National Curriculum 1988

When the National Curriculum appeared in 1988, it was built around ten foundation subjects, including the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. But the only aims powering its complex system of programmes of study, attainment targets and level statements were that the curriculum

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society
- prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life

Apart from being minimal in the extreme, the aims were carelessly drafted, vapid and unclear. Taken literally, one job of the school was said to be the nonsensical one of promoting the physical development of society. Teachers did not have to be told that, among other things, they should be preparing pupils for adult life: they needed to know more about the *kind* of preparation, about the sorts of abilities and qualities young people should be acquiring. As for lack of clarity, the multiple ambiguities of 'spiritual' may have generated acres of published print over the last two decades, but have not been much help to schools, except the more religious of them, in knowing what they should be doing.

The aims give every impression of having been added as an afterthought. What the curriculum should consist of seems to have been the starting point, to judge from the battles, leading up to 1988, between Mrs Thatcher, who favoured a statutory core of English, mathematics and science, and the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, who stood out for the wider curriculum which prevailed.

If so, this was an extraordinarily illogical way to proceed. A school curriculum, whether in the narrower sense of timetabled activities or in one that goes wider, is, after all, not an end in itself. It is a vehicle for achieving certain purposes. These have to be determined first; the vehicles best suited to realise them, second.

This glaring defect in the 1988 scheme is worth commenting on for another reason. 1988 was a historic year. It marked the shift back from professional to political control of the content of school education. There was, and is, a powerful argument for political control of its broad framework, as distinct from its more detailed filling-in. The broad outlines of the curriculum and the aims on which they should rest should be inextricable from the kind of society which is thought desirable and which school education can help to bring about. What kind of society this should be is a political matter, something to be determined by all of us through the ballot box as democratic citizens and not by any sectional group. This is why teachers should not have a special voice. True, they have an expertise about how to implement a broad curriculum framework within the special circumstances of their school, its area, and its pupils. And this puts them in a better position than government when it comes to details. But they have no more authoritative a voice than postmen or doctors in deciding the larger directions.

In 1988 the government got its responsibilities relative to those of the professionals woefully back to front. Its first duty was to chart the direction of travel in the shape of substantive general aims; its second to work out in very broad terms what curricular vehicles were best suited to attain them. Neither of these things did it do. What it *did* do was what it had no moral authority to do. It imposed a curriculum framework which was literally almost aimless; and included in this innumerable detailed prescriptions which fell not within its own province but in that of the professionals.

After 1988 all schools suffered, and still do suffer, from this constricting and arbitrary innovation. Primary schools were especially hard hit. A curriculum built around traditional subjects was the rule in most secondary schools. Indeed, as my colleague Richard Aldrich has shown, the subjects laid down in 1988 are almost identical with those made compulsory in the first maintained secondary schools when they came on stream in 1904. Over the course of the twentieth century they had become largely taken for granted in secondary circles. But primary schools had to make readjustments from their less subject-structured arrangements. Not that this was all bad. Any decent set of national aims would require pupils to have a good understanding of the scientific and technological basis of their own society and of others'. This is an area in which many primary schools were weak before 1988. The National Curriculum helped them to become stronger.

The 1999 aims

During the 1990s more and more teachers began to ask what the National Curriculum was *for*. Responding to their pressure, in the later part of the decade the government set about delineating the values, aims and purposes on which the school curriculum should rest. These drew on the statement of common values drawn up after widespread consultation by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community in 1997. The aims and values were published, as was said at the beginning of this report, at the beginning of the *National Curriculum Handbook* (DfEE/QCA 1999). They covered more than two pages and are reproduced in Appendix 1. Although they are presented under two headings, the second of which reiterates the minimalist aims of 1988, it is hard to discern much of a logical structure among them. They appear to be the product of a familiar pattern whereby a drafting committee gets hung up on minutiae but loses sight of the bigger structure. This said, there is much to be said for the *spirit* of these recommendations. They make a belief in the well-being of the individual the foremost of their values. Taken together, they are fitting aims for a

tolerant, liberal democratic society concerned with its economic well-being and aware of its global responsibilities.

There is a marked difference of emphasis from the earlier national list of aims of 1981. (I am ignoring the 1988 non-aims). The 1981 precedence of knowledge over personal qualities is reversed. About 60 per cent of the 1999 items have to do with personal qualities, some 30 per cent with knowledge and understanding, and 10 per cent with skills. This kind of weighting is, after all, only what one might expect when aims begin to be taken seriously. For school education should have its sights on the kinds of persons it wishes its students to become, on the qualities of character, ethical as well as intellectual, with which they should be equipped. In order to be such people, they will need knowledge and understanding of all kinds of things. But acquiring knowledge and understanding is not a self-contained educational aim of its own, something self-evidently desirable without any need to ask for reasons. True, there is a sense in which acquiring knowledge *can* be seen as an end in itself, for example where someone is fascinated by science not for its extrinsic benefits but as something intrinsically interesting. But this is another matter. It is a defensible educational aim that pupils should be introduced to activities (like science) which can hold their attention in this intrinsic way. But there are good reasons behind this, for example, to do with the contribution this can make to personal fulfilment. It is not a self-evident truth that acquiring knowledge is a good thing. One must start further back, with wider concerns about people's well-being and the kinds of persons we would like pupils to become.

For all their raggedness, if the 1999 aims had been followed through and government had produced statutory and non-statutory guidance about what curricular vehicles were most suited to their realisation, the work of primary as well as secondary schools would have been transformed. Teachers' attention would have been constantly directed on to fundamental aims and values. Their imaginative powers would have been released as they were able to shape their activities with these in mind.

But this did not and could not happen, for the curricular vehicles had already been predetermined. Over 90 per cent of the 1999 *National Curriculum Handbook* was devoted to them. They were, with one or two additions, the foundation subjects of 1988.

This need not have been quite so much the impediment it proved to be if the specifications for the subjects had at least been brought into line with the new aims. But no attempt to do this seems to have been made. If you look at the paragraphs explaining the importance of the different subjects, at their programmes of study, and at their attainment targets and level descriptions, for the most part you find a massive mismatch with the overall aims. This is not true of the newly introduced subjects of Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship, which fit the aims very well – even though at primary level, as a combined subject, PSHE+Citizenship was not thought important enough to be of statutory status like the other subjects. It is not true, either, of Design and Technology. But most of the other subjects reveal a mismatch with the aims. Their programmes and purposes tend to follow inward-looking paths which two centuries and more of curricular history have worn smooth. For most, the main preoccupation emerging from their pages in the *Handbook* appears to be to lay the foundations of specialist knowledge in their subject so that learners can go more deeply into the field at a later stage (White 2004: 14-15, 182-3).

Given all this, it would have been surprising if the statement on aims and values had had much influence on the work on the primary school. There is no evidence, as far as I know, that it has had any. Teachers have used the *Handbook*, understandably enough, to see what they should be doing at their key stage in the different subjects. Some of them, judging from my own observations, do not seem to have known that the section on aims and values exists.

Current developments: Northern Ireland

Since 2003 central education authorities in different parts of the UK have devised new aims statements for all maintained schools, intended to mesh more closely with curriculum activities. The first and boldest of these was drawn up in Northern Ireland by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). For the 'Big Picture' of the KS1&2 curriculum and for more specific features, including detailed aims, see (as at January 2008) http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stages_1_and_2/index.asp .

The central aim is 'to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives'. This generates three groups of sub-aims, to do with young people as [1] individuals, [2] contributors to society, and [3] contributors to the economy and environment. These three are further subdivided as follows: [1] personal and mutual understanding, personal health, moral character, spiritual awareness; [2] citizenship, cultural understanding, media awareness, ethical awareness; [3] employability, economic awareness, education for sustainable development. Each of these sub-sections contains a number of more specific items.

What is impressive about this aims statement is its coherence. It is much better arranged, logically speaking, than the 1999 statement of aims and values in the English *Handbook*. It has a clear central aim and one can see without difficulty how the various sub-aims and sub-sub-aims mesh together as specifications of it. Take for instance, under 'media awareness' the item '[to help children to] become aware of the potential impact of media in influencing our personal views, choices and decisions'; or, under 'economic awareness', the item '[to help children to] learn to manage their money and to build up savings'. The bearing of these two items on the central aim of a life based on informed and responsible choices is not hard to discern. And although the language of any aims-statement must be general and may be open to multiple interpretations, the CCEA document is for the most part clearly and unambiguously written, as the examples just given illustrate.

How well has CCEA succeeded in bringing curriculum activities into line with the aims? Here, as in England, it has had to treat as non-negotiable the continued existence of the traditional subjects as curriculum vehicles. This has massively restricted what it has been able to do, since one cannot assume that a subject framework always constitutes the most appropriate way of promoting aims. But it has managed to do something. Subjects are grouped at the primary stage into seven 'learning areas', some of these covering a single subject, like 'mathematics and numeracy', and some embracing two or more subjects, as in 'the arts' (art and design, and music) and 'the world around us' (geography, history, science and technology). The latter learning area is built around several interdisciplinary themes. A whole learning area is devoted to 'personal development'. Links between learning areas are stressed. There is also an emphasis on 'whole curriculum skills and processes' which curriculum activities are meant to foster. These fall under the headings of communication; managing information; thinking, problem solving and decision making; being creative; working with others; self management; and ICT skills. The various interconnected elements of the curriculum and its aims are presented graphically in the 'Big Picture' of the KS1&2 curriculum, already mentioned.

Given the constrictions within which CCEA has had to work, the match between curriculum and aims is reasonably good. In practice, much will depend on what weighting schools give to the areas of personal development and the world around us, as these reflect the general aims particularly well. The match is not as close as in the CCEA's 'Pathways' proposals for Key Stage 3, where the specific aims of the learning areas are each closely tied into one of the general aims.

I have dwelt on Northern Ireland developments as these have been especially imaginative and challenging to the status quo. They have also been influential in English curriculum reform, for instance in their use of 'Big Pictures' to present whole schemes.

Current developments: Scotland

English developments, to which I turn soon, have also learnt from recent reforms in Scotland. Like the ones in Northern Ireland, these, as expressed in *A Curriculum for Excellence* (2004), have aimed at providing a less fragmented, more holistically designed curriculum for children of school age, due to come on stream in 2007. The purposes of the curriculum from 3-18 are included in the account of *A Curriculum for Excellence* at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/11/20178/45862. In Scotland, guidelines on the curriculum are not statutory and schools need not follow them.

The Scottish aims are presented on a single page and neatly arranged under four headings: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. The first three of these are identical to the ones in the new draft aims-statement for England and have plainly influenced the latter. I will describe the English version of the three below. According to *A Curriculum for Excellence*,

The learning will take place through a wide range of planned experiences. These will include environmental, scientific, technological, historical, social, economic, political, mathematical and linguistic contexts, the arts, culture and sports. Sometimes the experiences may be linked to particular vocational or other specialised contexts. To achieve this breadth will require both subject-based studies and activities which span several disciplines. Children will also learn through the day-to-day experiences of the life of the school community, with its values and social contact, and from out-of-school activities, events and celebrations.

Current developments: England

Since 2005 QCA has developed a new set of aims for all English maintained schools, intended, like the other schemes, to be easily mapped into curriculum content. Programmes of study in the different subjects are to be slimmed down, leaving schools greater freedom to work out their own curricular arrangements. The three overall aims for all schools are found in the 'Big Picture' of the school curriculum at http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5855.aspx.

They are very similar to the Scottish ones. They are that the school curriculum should enable all young people to become:

- successful learners, who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- confident individuals, who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- responsible citizens, who make a positive contribution to society.

Each of the three aims comprises a set of sub-aims. The three aims and their sub-aims are now being made statutory for Key Stages 3 and 4. It is expected that Key Stages 1 and 2 will soon follow suit.

The QCA description of the new aims, at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/aims/index.aspx>, says that the curriculum should enable all young people to become

Successful learners who...

- have the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology
- are creative, resourceful and able to identify and solve problems

- have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate
- communicate well in a range of ways
- understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes
- are able to learn independently and with others
- know about big ideas and events that shape our world
- enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve the best they can, now and
- in the future

Confident individuals who...

- have a sense of self-worth and personal identity
- relate well to others and form good relationships
- are self-aware and deal well with their emotions
- have secure values and beliefs and have principles to distinguish right from wrong
- become increasingly independent, are able to take the initiative and organise themselves
- make healthy lifestyle choices
- are physically competent and confident
- take managed risks and stay safe
- recognise their talents and have ambitions
- are willing to try new things and make the most of opportunities
- are able to take the initiative and organise themselves
- are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world and human achievements.

Responsible citizens who...

- are well prepared for life and work
- are enterprising
- are able to work cooperatively with others
- respect others and act with integrity
- understand their own and others' cultures and traditions, within the context of British heritage, and have a strong sense of their own place in the world
- appreciate the benefits of diversity
- challenge injustice, are committed to human rights and strive to live peaceably with others
- sustain and improve the environment, locally and globally
- take account of the needs of present and future generations in the choices they make
- can change things for the better.

Unlike the aims in the 1999 *Handbook*, these 2007 ones are more logically arranged, that is, under three headings picking out qualities of the successfully educated person. They are also meant to be more closely geared into the curriculum itself. In the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum they stand at the head of programmes of study in the different subjects and bear both on the subjects' self-descriptions under the rubric of 'The importance of...(history, science, and so on)', and on the now slimmed-down content of the programmes. (See again <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/aims/index.aspx>).

How far is this new policy on aims an advance on what went before? Time will give a fuller answer, but already some things are clear.

- The most radical difference from the 1999 aims is that the 2007 ones are to be made statutory. This is the first time that English schools have had a detailed set of statutory aims to help them shape their curricula. The impact of this change on how twenty-first schools, not least primary schools, will operate is potentially profound. It should mean that a school's success is to be judged not primarily in terms of test and exam results but by how far it meets the person-centred requirements embodied in the aims. There are big implications here about how a school's work can best be evaluated and inspected. In addition, obliging schools to construct their curriculum planning around aims with the force of law behind them should encourage them to be more imaginative in breaking away from conventional curriculum patterns. How far these desirable outcomes will in fact be realised is as yet unknown.
- It has been taken as read that the current school subjects – the National Curriculum subjects plus RE – are here to stay, at least for the immediate future. This puts a massive constraint on the system and raises doubts about how far a good match between aims and curriculum can be achieved. For the sensible way to plan these things would be to work out the aims first and then, without preconceptions, decide what kinds of curricular vehicles are best suited to promote them. This cannot now be done. The obstacle is the same one that has plagued developments since 1988 – that the subjects are the fixed point and everything else must fit round them. It is true that this still leaves room for interdisciplinary collaboration and QCA is actively promoting this, along with more devolution of detailed programming to the schools. This may be more easily realised in the primary than in the secondary sector, since there is more scope here for planning around projects and themes. We will have to see whether this strengthening of interdisciplinary activity in the QCA's new scheme avoids the fate of the cross-cultural themes introduced as part of the original National Curriculum in 1988. All sorts of hopes were pinned on these, but owing to pressures to confine thinking within subject boxes, they vanished without trace within a few years.
- While the 1999 aims were, as explained above, patently out of synch with most of the subjects, a problem with the 2007 ones is that, in one respect, there is now *too good a fit* with them.

I have especially in mind the first of the three headline aims – that all young people should be helped to become successful learners. None of the traditional subjects need baulk at the prospect of aiming at successful learning. They all want that.

The former mismatch between overall aims and curricular specifics is thereby reversed, at least for *Successful learners*. Traditional subjects can urge that they fit snugly and logically into the big picture of the curriculum.

- There are more charitable things to say about the other two headline aims – *Confident individuals* and *Responsible citizens* – and their specific items. Few of these can be hijacked by those wishing to keep subjects within traditional blinkers. True, the expression

'*Confident individuals*' may be grist to their mill. *Any* teacher, including the least outward-looking, will prefer their pupils to be confident rather than diffident in their curriculum area – whether at solving geometrical problems, doing the high jump, or writing a letter to their MP.

This qualification apart, most of the aims in these two categories are about desiderata in the world beyond traditional school subjects. They are about some of the qualities people need in order to lead a personally flourishing and morally decent life, and to become good workers and informed citizens. They are indeed genuine aims, not pseudo ones.

- Not that they are above criticism. A big drawback of the whole aims statement, the last two categories included, is that it is nothing but an ordered list. There is, so far, no indication of why the list has been constructed as it has, no stated rationale for it. (In this, the QCA can, once again, look to Northern Ireland's CCEA as a model. This takes very seriously the need to provide fuller reasons for its aims statement, as is evident in its current (2007) Key Stage 3 reforms).

Why is a rationale important? We need it in order to see how the items cohere together within a larger framework. Such a framework has been hinted at in many of the items, but not made explicit. For instance, something like the good of the pupil is a value embedded, but not presented as such, in the three-fold list. There is a proto-picture at work in this of what a flourishing human life is ideally like. For many it will be an attractive picture. It emphasises self-confidence and self-awareness, taking the initiative, looking after oneself physically and emotionally, being independent, ambitious and making the most of opportunities. In terms of global perspectives on personal well-being, it is closer to what might be called a modern American ideal than to a traditional Indian or African one.

In other words, the picture is controversial. This is not to say it is indefensible. For twenty-first century England – as compared with, say, eleventh-century England – it may make a lot of sense. The problem for the QCA aims statement is that it is taken for granted, not argued-for. Not only this. Half-hidden behind the text, the picture is incomplete. Only a few features of the flourishing life have been sketched in. We need something more rounded, more satisfying to the understanding.

If we had this fuller account and rationale, we would, I suspect, be able to see gaps in the list not so evident before. The picture suggests, as I have said, that pupils should learn to look after themselves physically and emotionally. This is a defensible prerequisite of leading a fulfilling life. As such, it belongs to a wider framework than the one presented. This has to do with the satisfaction of basic needs as a condition of human flourishing. Physical and emotional needs are certainly part of the story, but not the whole of it. Take money. Just as one needs to manage one's health – through exercise, diet and so on, so one needs to manage one's money – through income generation, control of expenditure, budgeting, and so on. There is nothing in the list of aims to do with money management, yet it is of basic importance in one's welfare. So is something else. Especially in a society like our own, with pressures from the media and advertisers to buy junk food, drink more than is good for one, gamble, worship celebrity, and spend too much time on television and computer games, young people need for their own good to be equipped with an understanding of such blandishments and the power to resist them. Again, there is nothing on this in the list of aims.

I have suggested that a fuller picture of personal well-being will enable us to identify gaps in the aims proposed. So far I have concentrated only on the necessary conditions of well-being, on basic needs. What well-being is goes wider than that. We can see this if we imagine someone whose basic needs are broadly met – she has food, shelter, clean air, a decent

income, good health, and so on. How, given this, is she to lead her life so that it is a thriving one rather than a non-thriving one? Are some kinds of activities more conducive to this than others? How do relationships come into the frame? How far are good and bad luck significant? How far are success or failure in what one undertakes?

These are big questions – too big to explore in this survey. I just want to drive home how very sketchy is the portrayal of personal flourishing implicit in the new QCA document. A more rounded, fuller account would enable us to identify gaps – not only in the area of our basic needs, but also in the area of activities, relationships and experiences once these needs are met.

This lack of a fuller account affects not only aims which have to do with the well-being of the pupil, but also those concerned with the good of others in the community and in the wider world. For this notion, too, comes back to the same underlying question ‘What is it for people to lead a flourishing life?’

Finally, I hope I have done enough to show why an aims statement like that from the QCA needs a rationale. But there are two further reasons for this, too – not entirely separate ones, but considerations closely connected with those already given.

The first is that, as we have seen with the *Successful learners* aims, an item may be interpreted variously. National aims have to be understood more or less in the same way by all parties, schools and teachers not least. The latter have to operationalise the aims, to embody them in programmes and whole school processes. They need more determinate guidance.

The second is this. A national aims statement needs a national gloss – a reasoned explanation of what is meant by the items it includes and of why they have been prioritised. This is for democratic reasons. Citizens in general, as well as those in the education system who apply the aims, have the moral right to know what vision of education government has in mind and how the details fit into this. If all they get is the details, however neatly organised under headings, all they can do is take them on authority, as pronouncements from on high.

I have produced a fuller critique of QCA thinking about aims in *What schools are for and why* (White 2007a). This gives something of the historical background which has made subject-centredness so prominent a part of the English tradition. It also complements its critique of the lack of rationale in current arrangements by an alternative set of desirable aims and a discussion of the rationale for these. This focuses for reasons of shortage of space only on one central topic: the underlying notion of personal well-being, about which something has already been said above.

This is an appropriate point in this survey of the aims of primary education in England to leave the history of official aims over the last century and look at what educational theorists, especially philosophers, have said over the same period about what primary aims should be. Once again, the survey is weighted towards more recent developments.

But before we turn to aims-theory in Section 2, it will be useful to summarise the main events in the story of aims policy.

Summary so far

It is now just over a hundred years since Morant drew up his aims for the precursor of today’s primary school, the elementary school. He framed them in such a way as to sharpen the differences between the elementary and secondary systems, while at the same time making it a subsidiary purpose of the former to be a ladder of opportunity into the latter. The century between him and us has witnessed both continuities and discontinuities.

A major change occurred in 1926, when the elementary school curriculum passed from political to professional control. This remained the case for sixty-two years until the coming of the National Curriculum in 1988. It was early in this period that the primary school emerged from its elementary school chrysalis. By then the divide between secondary education aims and elementary aims was deeply entrenched; and the gulf persisted into the age of the primary school. With the demise of the tradition that non-secondary schools provided an education fitted to the destiny of the urban poor, in the age of Hadow and Plowden between the 1930s and the 1960s the new primary schools became powered by benigner, more child-friendly, aims, more acceptable to an increasingly middle-class clientele. Yet the wide gap between what secondary and non-secondary schools were taken to be about remained, if now in a different form. Throughout this whole period, from 1904 until the 1980s, it was taken as read that an education based on the study of a wide range of discrete academic disciplines belonged to the secondary school sector, and was not appropriate for elementary/primary schools.

Since the 1980s there have been radical changes in primary aims. The first national aims statement of 1981, the meagre aims of 1988, the fuller version of 1999, and the more streamlined aims set out by QCA in 2007 do not differentiate primary from secondary aims. For the first time in English history, there has been a single set of aims for the whole maintained system. Parallel to this development, the curriculum of the primary school has been brought into line with the traditional subject-based curriculum of the secondaries.

We are now within sight of a statutory aims-based curriculum for all schools that does not start from academic subjects but from more deeply embedded educational goods. If successful, this could well reverse the post-1988 assimilation of primary to secondary education and help to make both sectors more open to the more person-centred approaches found in the better primary schools before 1988.

Meanwhile, the 'important though subsidiary object of the School' which Morant proposed for his elementary system in 1904 is still with us in the primary sector. Now, as it was then, this object is

To discover individual children who show promise of exceptional capacity, and to develop their special gifts (so far as this can be done without sacrificing the interests of the majority of the children), so that they may be qualified to pass at the proper age into Secondary Schools [we would say 'good' Secondary Schools], and be able to derive the maximum of benefit from the education there offered them.

(Board of Education 1929: 9)

This aim is no longer in a national aims-statement, but is implicit in the government's current Gifted and Talented Strategy as well as in that part of primary practice responsive to parents' pressure to get their children into 'good' schools. How justifiable this aim is is a further question.

Another interesting historical legacy is the re-emergence of the developmental approach introduced during the Hadow-Plowden period in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 0-5, which overlaps the primary phase. 'Early Learning Goals' are specified for each of the six EYFS 'Areas of Learning and Development.' See Section 2 for Dearden's critique of developmentalist ideas.

2. WHAT SHOULD PRIMARY AIMS BE? THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Views of educational theorists on what the aims of primary education should be are best understood against the background of policy changes discussed in Section 1. The 1960s are a major turning point. Before that time, in both policy and in theory, primary aims were in many ways conceived very differently from secondary ones. Since the late 1960s, it has become increasingly difficult to separate the two. The change began in the sphere of theory, as we shall see below. By the early 1980s, as we saw above, it had worked its way through into policy recommendations.

The primary school emerged, as we have seen, from the elementary school. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was, largely thanks to Morant, a clear-cut division in function between the elementary and the secondary systems. Crudely speaking, elementary schools fitted working class children for blue collar jobs, while secondaries prepared middle class pupils and working class children on scholarships for white collar ones.

In 1911, drawing on his experience as Chief Inspector of elementary schools, Edmond Holmes published his influential cri-de-coeur *What is and what might be*. This rejected 'the path of mechanical obedience' which these schools still obliged their pupils to follow, advocating in its stead 'the path of self-realisation'. 'The function of education,' he proclaimed in his very first sentence, 'is to foster growth'. In his view, we are all born with a number of instincts – communicative, dramatic, sympathetic, aesthetic, inquisitive and constructive. 'A good education will allow all [...] these to develop naturally into fully-fledged dispositions and thus enable each of us to achieve self-fulfilment'.

The metamorphosis of the elementary school into the primary school was propitious for growth theory, as we noted in Section 1. Nunn's *Education: its data and first principles* (1920) scarcely mentioned Holmes's text, but it reaffirmed its central idea, that education is a matter of biological development, while grounding it more firmly than Holmes did in the psychological sciences. Richard Selleck (1972) gives a readable account of the 'progressive' movement in English primary education from 1914 until 1939, in which the idea of education as growth, espoused also by Homer Lane and Maria Montessori, was pivotal.

By the 1960s, policy statements (Hadow and Plowden) had combined with the literature of educational theory to create a distinctive perspective on the aims of primary education. Hadow's (1931) formulation had encapsulated this well. The work of the primary school should be planned around 'the needs of the child at that particular phase in his physical and mental development' (pp70-1).

The last years of the 1960s saw the apogee of this view of primary aims in the Plowden Report of 1967. They also witnessed its wholesale undermining in Robert Dearden's *The Philosophy of Primary Education* of 1968, as well as in his and Richard Peters's essays in the latter's edited collection *Perspectives on Plowden* (1969). The luxuriant claims of 'child-centred' thinking were ripe for philosophical scrutiny and as a philosopher with extensive experience in primary classrooms Dearden in his 1968 book shows them no quarter. He makes it clear that primary aims cannot unproblematically be based on children's needs, what they are interested in, or their alleged mental growth. Human learning, as a socially-originating phenomenon, cannot be modelled on the biological unfolding of organisms from seed to mature specimen.

When Dearden turns from critique to his positive account of aims, concepts specific to the primary scene fall away. Primary education, like any stage of education, is largely about equipping learners to become autonomous persons, making independent, rational choices about how they are to live. Autonomy is a central value in much of the child-centred

tradition, but it needs disentangling, in Dearden's view, from the growth ideology with which it has become enmeshed. Autonomy cannot be the only aim, however. We all also have moral obligations towards other people, and our education must prepare us to fulfil these too.

Dearden's positive account of aims is as applicable to secondary as to primary schools. After his book appeared, it became all but impossible to discuss what primary aims should be in a hived-off way. The focus for philosophers, and from the early 1980s for politicians, too (as we saw in Section 1), became the aims of school education in general. Primary schools were assumed to need the same aims as secondary. As Dearden says of his later book *Problems in Primary Education* (1976): although he included the word 'primary' in the title, 'really much of the discussion would be equally relevant to secondary interests' (p.x). Part One of this book is about aims and principles.

Another philosophical book from the late 1960s also marked a watershed. This is Richard Peters's *Ethics and Education* (1966). In Chapter 5 Peters claims that the aims of education proper, and not some ersatz version of it, have to be intrinsic. Intellectual and aesthetic activities have to be studied for their intrinsic value and not, as in Dearden, as prerequisites of autonomous living. Although Peters' theory does not distinguish between different types of institution, it belongs to the tradition of thinking about secondary and university education based on the acquisition of academic knowledge for its own sake. For reasons which should now be clear, this aim had never been salient in the elementary/primary world.

The contrast between the 'growth' approach to education and the 'learning for its own sake' approach was never clearer than in the late 1960s, clarified as both positions were by contemporary philosophical treatments of them. To a large extent this contrast matched the fracture line in the English system between primary and post-primary institutions. Its echoes have persisted in defences of each of the two positions in later decades. In philosophy of education, David Cooper's *Illusions of Equality* (1980) argues for the ideal of educational excellence as manifested in an elite of scholars pursuing understanding and critical appreciation for their own sake. Colin Wrings's *Understanding Educational Aims* (1988), having reviewed aims focussed on the individual and others to do with society, comes down, Peters fashion, in favour of the pursuit of understanding for its own sake. On the other side, John Darling's *Child-Centred Education and its Critics* (1994) is, as its title suggests, a defence of the once-dominant perspective on primary aims against objections to it, not least from the Peters camp. In a more political context, conservative thinkers like Cyril Burt and other Black Paper authors of the 1970s, as well as their successors down to today, have repeatedly presented English schools as the site of a struggle between beleaguered champions of subject learning for its own sake and besieging devotees of child-centred ideology.

A critic of 'child-centred' thinking not in thrall to this latter polarisation has been Robin Alexander. His *Primary Teaching* (1984: chs 1, 2) includes a discussion of central concepts, dichotomies and assumptions in this area reminiscent of Dearden's approach but on a broader canvas than philosophy alone. But Alexander does not oppose the child-centred tradition to that of learning for its own sake. He is not centrally concerned in this book to spell out an alternative position on primary aims, but his generally approving remarks on making primary schools more responsive to a wider social and political world as well as to the child's well-being (pp 32-5) clearly distance him from the advocates of knowledge for its own sake.

In this, Alexander belongs to a new mainstream. Beginning with Dearden, philosophical writings since the late 1960s on what school aims should be have tended to start from deeper

bases than the polarised traditions just discussed. In doing so, they have become increasingly detached from an age-specific framework. Dearden (1968), as already stated, builds his account of primary aims around personal autonomy within a framework of morally appropriate behaviour. The non age-related framework in White 1973 is close to Dearden in this, but sees personal autonomy as an aspect of the more fundamental concept of a person's well-being. In White 1982, the canvas is wider. Four kinds of aim are discussed and relationships among them examined. The four have to do with: knowledge for its own sake, personal well-being/personal autonomy, morality, and economic demands. Preparation for work and its relationships with other aims is taken up in more detail in White 1997. It also figures in Wringer 1988, ch 6.

White 1990 takes up personal well-being and moral aims again and provides a new account of them. The treatment of morality reflects a shift in philosophical ethics in the 1980s, influenced especially by Alasdair MacIntyre's Aristotelian text *After Virtue* (1981), from seeing the basis of the moral life in following rules and principles to locating it in desirable personal dispositions, or virtues, like courage and generosity. This shift also casts doubt on the hard and fast line which many have drawn between one's own well-being, or self-interest, and morality. White's book explores the apparent inseparability of these two areas. At the same time, it argues now for the *separability* of the notions of personal autonomy and personal well-being, seeing the former as a value which has come to be embedded in the latter only with the rise of a modern, liberal kind of society. It is not prized, for instance, in societies based on a conception of personal well-being in which obedience to custom or to God is central.

The fact that personal autonomy has come to be seen, here as elsewhere, as a specifically liberal value rather than one more deeply associated with human nature as a whole is linked to the belief that defensible aims of education must be located within a specific kind of polity – that is, a liberal-democratic one. Educating for autonomy is inextricable from educating learners as citizens of such a society. This thought is not unconnected with the idea mentioned in the last paragraph, that an individual's well-being is inextricable from his or her moral relationships with others.

I am aware that the abstract argument of the last few paragraphs has made various connexions and distinctions that need fuller explication to be more intelligible. But I hope it gives some indication of the direction in which thought about aims has been moving in recent decades. The trend from the 1980s onwards has been away from more piecemeal discussions of desirable aims towards intellectually satisfying accounts of how a whole array of aims hang together in a unified belief system. In this the notion of personal well-being, including the autonomous form this takes in modern societies, has become a central concept. Philosophical explorations of the concept are now becoming increasingly relevant to policy-making, given that well-being underpins the 2004 Children's Act, the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, and the 2007 Children's Plan.

In the later 1960s Paul Hirst had produced a massively influential argument claiming that a liberal education should be built around seven or eight logically distinct forms of knowledge or understanding, all of which should be studied for their own sake (Hirst 1965). In the 1980s, influenced by MacIntyre, Hirst shifted his thinking away from this tradition. He now argued that education should be conceived as preparation for a good life via a critically reflective induction into a range of important social practices and the virtues which these bring with them, beginning with but not confined to those to do with the satisfaction of our basic needs.

A statement of Hirst's new theory is found in Roger Marples's 1999 collection *The Aims of Education*. This also includes several essays by leading philosophers of education about

liberalism as a social framework from which aims are to be derived. Some of these pick up on John Rawls's account of liberalism in his *Political Liberalism* (1993) which marked a significant shift from his celebrated 1972 work *A Theory of Justice*. The relevance of this change to educational aims is that, while his earlier work suggested that personal autonomy should be a central value for any member of a liberal society, the 1993 book promoted a version of liberalism in which a view of the good life centred around autonomy is only one of many possible such views and should not be privileged over others. Discussions of which of Rawls's theories is to be preferred are still continuing. They are especially important in countries like Britain with their many cultural groups, for not all of which autonomy is a positive value: some religious groups, for instance. All this raises the question of whether a liberal-democratic state should impose autonomy as an educational aim on all learners, including those from communities which do not prize it.

Issues to do with autonomy and liberalism have also exercised Eamonn Callan, a particularly rigorous philosophical investigator of educational aims. His *Autonomy and Schooling* (1988) argues for a version of child-centred education built around the notion of autonomy and that is sensitive to learners' interests, while his *Creating Citizens* (1997) discusses problems from an egalitarian perspective with Rawls's 1993 account of liberalism, including the possibility of the liberal state's becoming complicit in oppressive cultural practices like the subordination of women to men. Callan also argues in favour of a non-chauvinist form of patriotism as a civic virtue, seeing it as a vital educational aim of the liberal state and one which helps to do justice to communitarian concerns about liberal values.

What civic aims should be in a liberal democracy and who should have the power to determine them have also been explored in Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education* (1987). In the line of thought sparked off by MacIntyre 1981, Patricia White's *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling* (1996) is another manifestation of the shift over the last decades towards thinking of aims, first and foremost, in terms of the pupil's personal qualities, or dispositions, rather than in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, however necessary this is as a sub-aim required by more fundamental values. In her book she explores the role of virtues like courage, self-respect, decency, trust, hope and confidence in the education of the democratic citizen. Enslin and White's chapter 6 in Blake *et al* (2003) gives a fuller conspectus of work on education for citizenship, including discussions of whether this should be within a national or a global framework.

Patriotism as an aim is also discussed, more dismissively than in Callan's book above, in Harry Brighouse's *On Education* (2005), again within the context of citizenship education in general. Chapters are also devoted to autonomy, human flourishing and economic participation. As with other writers on aims in recent years, Brighouse is especially interested in how such aims relate together and provides his own perspective on this. For instance, the importance he attaches to autonomous flourishing makes him wary of work-orientated aims premised on continuing economic growth. A central theme in Brighouse's earlier book *School Choice and Social Justice* (2000), as in several works mentioned earlier, is education for autonomy as a liberal requirement.

It is distressingly obvious to us in 2008 that there is no point in discussing the ethical foundations of aims in liberal-democratic societies unless such societies are ecologically viable. The promotion of dispositions and understanding in the area of sustainable development has now become a salient feature of contemporary discussions of aims. We saw this above in the latest aims-statement from the QCA. Educational theorists are also increasingly engaged with this area. The topic is intimately connected with issues to do with education for global citizenship and education for economic participation, both mentioned several times above, and with notions of personal well-being giving less priority to

conventional notions of 'success' as measured in financial and status terms. See Michael Bonnett's *Retrieving Nature* (2004) ch 9. Robin Alexander's *Education as Dialogue* (2006) is also partly about education for sustainable development. (On another topic, for those wishing to compare recent official aims of education in England with those of France, Russia, USA and India, Alexander's *Culture and Pedagogy* (2001) is a valuable source.)

* * *

This section has looked at a range of theorists' views over the last century on what the aims of primary education should be. Since the late 1960s it has been increasingly difficult to treat this as a topic distinguishable from the aims of school education in general. In the last few decades writers on the topic, largely philosophers, have tended to move from a discussion of specific aims towards more comprehensive accounts. These have stressed interconnexions among different types of aim and explored the liberal-democratic background implicitly assumed by so much writing in this area.

Theorists' writings on aims have influenced policy makers from the beginning of our period and continue to do so today. Official aims-statements have tended in the past to be built around lists of items for which a rationale has rarely been provided. In forthcoming years we may hope that the increasingly holistic accounts of aims outlined in this section will encourage policy-makers to spell out more fully the reasons behind the aims they choose and the interrelationships between them.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, R.J. (1984) *Primary Teaching*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Alexander, R.J. (2001) *Culture and Pedagogy: international comparisons in primary education*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Alexander, R.J. (2006) *Education as Dialogue*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.
- Ashton, P., Kneen, P., Davies, F. and Holley, B.J. (1975) *The Aims of Primary Education: A Study of Teachers's Opinions*. London: Macmillan.
- Blake, N., Smeyers, P., Smith, R. and Standish, P. (eds) (2003) *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Board of Education (1929) *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others concerned in the work of public elementary schools* (6th impression). London: HMSO.
- Bonnett, M. (2004) *Retrieving Nature: Education for a Post-Humanist Age*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Brighouse, H. (2000) *School Choice and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brighouse, H. (2005) *On Education*. London: Routledge.
- Callan, E. (1988) *Autonomy and Schooling*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Callan, E. (1997) *Creating Citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, D.E. (1980) *Illusions of Equality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- DES (1981) *The School Curriculum*. London: HMSO.
- DfEE/QCA (1999) *National Curriculum Handbook for Teachers in England*. London: HMSO.

- Darling, J. (1994) *Child-Centred Education and its Critics*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Dearden, R.F. (1968) *The Philosophy of Primary Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Dearden, R.F. (1976) *Problems in Primary Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gutmann, A. (1987) *Democratic Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hadow Report (1931) *The Primary School*, Consultative Committee of the Board of Education. London: HMSO.
- Hirst, P.H. (1965) 'Liberal education and the nature of knowledge', in Archambault, R.D. (ed) *Philosophical Analysis and Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Holmes, E. (1911) *What Is and What Might Be*. London: Constable.
- MacIntyre, A (1981) *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- Marples, R. (ed) (1999) *The Aims of Education*. London: Routledge.
- Nunn, T.P. (1920) *Education: its data and first principles*. London: Arnold.
- Peters, R.S. (1966) *Ethics and Education*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Peters, R.S. (ed) (1969) *Perspectives on Plowden*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Plowden Report (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools*, Central Advisory Committee for Education (England). London: HMSO.
- Rawls, J. (1972) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1993) *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Raz, J. (2003) *The Practice of Value*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schools Council (1983) *Primary Practice*, Working Paper No 75. London: Methuen.
- Selleck, R. (1972) *English Primary Education and the Progressives, 1914-1939*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Simon, B. (1974) *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- White, J. (1973) *Towards a Compulsory Curriculum*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- White, J. (1982) *The Aims of Education Restated*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- White, J. (1990) *Education and the Good Life*. London: Kogan Page.
- White, J. (2004) (ed.) *Rethinking the School Curriculum: values, aims and purposes*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- White, J. (2007) *What schools are for and why*, IMPACT Paper No 14. Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.
- White, P. (1996) *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: educating citizens for a democratic society*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wringe, C. (1988) *Understanding Educational Aims*. London: Unwin Hyman.

APPENDIX 1

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM: VALUES, AIMS AND PURPOSES (DfEE/QCA 1999)

Values and purposes underpinning the school curriculum

Education influences and reflects the values of society, and the kind of society we want to be. It is important, therefore, to recognise a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools.

Foremost is a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual. Education is also a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends. These include valuing ourselves, our families and other relationships, the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and the environment in which we live. Education should also reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty.

At the same time, education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work. In particular, we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, parents, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change, including the continued globalisation of the economy and society, with new work and leisure patterns and with the rapid expansion of communication technologies.

Aims for the school curriculum

If schools are to respond effectively to these values and purposes, they need to work in collaboration with families and the local community, including church and voluntary groups, local agencies and business, in seeking to achieve two broad aims through the curriculum. These aims provide an essential context within which schools develop their own curriculum.

Aim 1: The school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve.

The school curriculum should develop enjoyment of, and commitment to, learning as a means of encouraging and stimulating the best possible progress and the highest attainment for all pupils. It should build on pupils' strengths, interests and experiences and develop their confidence in their capacity to learn and work independently and collaboratively. It should equip them with the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology, and promote an enquiring mind and capacity to think rationally.

The school curriculum should contribute to the development of pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural heritages of Britain's diverse society and of the local, national, European, Commonwealth and global dimensions of their lives. It should encourage pupils to appreciate human aspirations and achievements in aesthetic, scientific, technological and social fields, and prompt a personal response to a range of experiences and ideas.

By providing rich and varied contexts for pupils to acquire, develop and apply a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills, the curriculum should enable pupils to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better. It should give them the opportunity to become creative, innovative, enterprising and capable of leadership to equip them for their future lives as workers and citizens. It should also develop their physical skills and encourage them to recognise the importance of pursuing a healthy lifestyle and keeping themselves and others safe.

Aim 2: The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.

The school curriculum should promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, in particular, develop principles for distinguishing between right and wrong. It should develop their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of their own and different beliefs and cultures, and how these influence individuals and societies. The school curriculum should pass on enduring values, develop pupils' integrity and autonomy and help them to be responsible and caring citizens capable of contributing to the development of a just society. It should promote equal opportunities and enable pupils to challenge discrimination and stereotyping. It should develop their awareness and understanding of, and respect for, the environments in which they live, and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level. It should also equip pupils

as consumers to make informed judgements and independent decisions and to understand their responsibilities and rights.

The school curriculum should promote pupils' self-esteem and emotional well-being and help them to form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships, based on respect for themselves and for others, at home, school, work and in the community. It should develop their ability to relate to others and work for the common good. It should enable pupils to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and to cope with change and adversity. It should prepare pupils for the next steps in their education, training and employment and equip them to make informed choices at school and throughout their lives, enabling them to appreciate the relevance of their achievements to life and society outside school, including leisure, community engagement and employment.

The interdependence of the two aims

These two aims reinforce each other. The personal development of pupils, spiritually, morally, socially and culturally, plays a significant part in their ability to learn and to achieve. Development in both areas is essential to raising standards of attainment for all pupils.

(DfEE/QCA 1999: 10-12)

APPENDIX 2

THE PRIMARY REVIEW PERSPECTIVES, THEMES AND SUB THEMES

The Primary Review's enquiries are framed by three broad perspectives, the third of which, primary education, breaks down into ten themes and 23 sub-themes. Each of the latter then generates a number of questions. The full framework of review perspectives, themes and questions is at www.primaryreview.org.uk

The Review Perspectives

- P1 Children and childhood
- P2 Culture, society and the global context
- P3 Primary education

The Review Themes and Sub-themes

- T1 Purposes and values**
 - T1a Values, beliefs and principles
 - T1b Aims
- T2 Learning and teaching**
 - T2a Children's development and learning
 - T2b Teaching
- T3 Curriculum and assessment**
 - T3a Curriculum
 - T3b Assessment
- T4 Quality and standards**
 - T4a Standards
 - T4b Quality assurance and inspection
- T5 Diversity and inclusion**
 - T5a Culture, gender, race, faith
 - T5b Special educational needs
- T6 Settings and professionals**
 - T6a Buildings and resources
 - T6b Teacher supply, training, deployment & development
 - T6c Other professionals
 - T6d School organisation, management & leadership
 - T6e School culture and ethos
- T7 Parenting, caring and educating**
 - T7a Parents and carers
 - T7b Home and school
- T8 Beyond the school**
 - T8a Children's lives beyond the school
 - T8b Schools and other agencies
- T9 Structures and phases**
 - T9a Within-school structures, stages, classes & groups
 - T9b System-level structures, phases & transitions
- T10 Funding and governance**
 - T10a Funding
 - T10b Governance

APPENDIX 3

THE EVIDENTIAL BASIS OF THE PRIMARY REVIEW

The Review has four evidential strands. These seek to balance opinion seeking with empirical data; non-interactive expressions of opinion with face-to-face discussion; official data with independent research; and material from England with that from other parts of the UK and from international sources. This enquiry, unlike some of its predecessors, looks outwards from primary schools to the wider society, and makes full though judicious use of international data and ideas from other countries.

Submissions

Following the convention in enquiries of this kind, submissions have been invited from all who wish to contribute. By June 2007, nearly 550 submissions had been received and more were arriving daily. The submissions range from brief single-issue expressions of opinion to substantial documents covering several or all of the themes and comprising both detailed evidence and recommendations for the future. A report on the submissions will be published in late 2007.

Soundings

This strand has two parts. The *Community Soundings* are a series of nine regionally based one to two day events, each comprising a sequence of meetings with representatives from schools and the communities they serve. The Community Soundings took place between January and March 2007, and entailed 87 witness sessions with groups of pupils, parents, governors, teachers, teaching assistants and heads, and with educational and community representatives from the areas in which the soundings took place. In all, there were over 700 witnesses. The *National Soundings* are a programme of more formal meetings with national organisations both inside and outside education. National Soundings A are for representatives of non-statutory national organisations, and they focus on educational policy. National Soundings B are for outstanding school practitioners; they focus on school and classroom practice. National Soundings C are variably-structured meetings with statutory and other bodies. National Soundings A and B will take place between January and March 2008. National Soundings C are outlined at 'other meetings' below.

Surveys

30 surveys of published research relating to the Review's ten themes have been commissioned from 70 academic consultants in universities in Britain and other countries. The surveys relate closely to the ten Review themes and the complete list appears in Appendix 3. Taken together, they will provide the most comprehensive review of research relating to primary education yet undertaken. They are being published in thematic groups from October 2007 onwards.

Searches

With the co-operation of DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA and OECD, the Review is re-assessing a range of official data bearing on the primary phase. This will provide the necessary demographic, financial and statistical background to the Review and an important resource for its later consideration of policy options.

Other meetings (now designated National Soundings C)

In addition to the formal evidence-gathering procedures, the Review team meets members of various national bodies for the exchange of information and ideas: government and opposition representatives; officials at DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA, GTC, NCSL and IRU; representatives of the teaching unions; and umbrella groups representing organisations involved in early years, primary education and teacher education. The first of three sessions with the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee took place in March 2007. Following the replacement of DfES by two separate departments, DCSF and DIUS, it is anticipated that there will be further meetings with this committee's successor.

APPENDIX 4

THE PRIMARY REVIEW INTERIM REPORTS

The interim reports, which are being released in stages from October 2007, include the 30 research surveys commissioned from external consultants together with reports on the Review's two main consultation exercises: the community soundings (87 witness sessions with teachers, heads, parents, children and a wide range of community representatives, held in different parts of the country during 2007) and the submissions received from large numbers of organisations and individuals in response to the invitation issued when the Review was launched in October 2006.

The list below starts with the community soundings and submissions reports written by the Review team. Then follow the 30 research surveys commissioned from the Review's consultants. They are arranged by Review theme, not by the order of their publication. Report titles may be subject to minor amendment.

Once published, each interim report, together with a briefing summarising its findings, may be downloaded from the Review website, www.primaryreview.org.uk.

REPORTS ON PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

1. Community soundings: the Primary Review regional witness sessions (*Robin Alexander and Linda Hargreaves*)
2. Submissions received by the Primary Review

PURPOSES AND VALUES

3. *Aims as policy in English primary education*. Research survey 1/1 (John White)
4. *Aims and values in primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 1/2 (Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell)
5. *Aims for primary education: the changing national context*. Research survey 1/3 (Stephen Machin and Sandra McNally)
6. *Aims for primary education: changing global contexts*. Research survey 1/4 (Hugh Lauder, John Lowe and Rita Chawla-Duggan)

LEARNING AND TEACHING

7. *Children's cognitive development and learning*. Research survey 2/1a (Usha Goswami and Peter Bryant)
8. *Children's social development, peer interaction and classroom*. Research survey 2/1b (Christine Howe and Neil Mercer)
9. *Teaching in primary schools*. Research survey 2/2 (Robin Alexander and Maurice Galton)
10. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: the curriculum dimension*. Research survey 2/3 (Bob McCormick and Bob Moon)
11. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: evidence from TLRP*. Research survey 2/4 (Mary James and Andrew Pollard)

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

12. *Curriculum and assessment policy: England and other countries*. Research survey 3/1 (Kathy Hall and Kamil Özerk)
13. *The trajectory and impact of national curriculum and assessment reform*. Research survey 3/2 (Harry Torrance, Dominic Wyse, Elaine McCreery and Russell Jones)
14. *Curriculum alternatives for primary education*. Research survey 3/3 (James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter)
15. *Assessment alternatives for primary education*. Research survey 3/4 (Wynne Harlen)

QUALITY AND STANDARDS

16. *Standards and quality in English primary schools over time: the national evidence*. Research survey 4/1 (Peter Tymms and Christine Merrell)
17. *Standards in English primary education: the international evidence*. Research survey 4/2 (Chris Whetton, Graham Ruddock and Liz Twist)
18. *Quality assurance in English primary education*. Research survey 4/1 (Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

19. *Children in primary education: demography, culture, diversity and inclusion*. Research survey 5/1 (Mel Ainscow, Jean Conteh, Alan Dyson and Frances Gallanaugh)
20. *Learning needs and difficulties among children of primary school age: definition, identification, provision and issues*. Research survey 5/2 (Harry Daniels and Jill Porter)
21. *Children and their primary schools: pupils' voices*. Research survey 5/3 (Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding)

SETTINGS AND PROFESSIONALS

22. *Primary education: the physical environment*. Research survey 6/1 (Karl Wall, Julie Dockrell and Nick Peacey)
23. *Primary education: the professional environment*. Research survey 6/2 (Ian Stronach, Andy Pickard and Elizabeth Jones)
24. *Teachers and other professionals: training, induction and development*. Research survey 6/3 (Olwen McNamara, Rosemary Webb and Mark Brundrett)
25. *Teachers and other professionals: workforce management and reform*. Research survey 6/4 (Hilary Burgess)

PARENTING, CARING AND EDUCATING

26. *Parenting, caring and educating*. Research survey 7/1 (Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin)

BEYOND THE SCHOOL

27. *Children's lives outside school and their educational impact*. Research survey 8/1 (Berry Mayall)
28. *Primary schools and other agencies*. Research survey 8/2 (Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole)

STRUCTURES AND PHASES

29. *The structure and phasing of primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 9/1 (Anna Eames and Caroline Sharp)
30. *Organising learning and teaching in primary schools: structure, grouping and transition*. Research survey 9/2 (Peter Blatchford, Judith Ireson, Susan Hallam, Peter Kutnick and Andrea Creech)

FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

31. *The financing of primary education*. Research survey 10/1 (Philip Noden and Anne West)
32. *The governance, administration and control of primary education*. Research survey 10/2 (Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder).



... children, their world, their education

The Primary Review is a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It is supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, based at the University of Cambridge and directed by Robin Alexander. The Review was launched in October 2006 and aims to publish its final report in autumn 2008.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.primaryreview.org.uk

General enquiries: enquiries@primaryreview.org.uk

Media enquiries: richard@margrave.co.uk

Published by the Primary Review,
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK

ISBN 978-1-906478-12-4

Copyright © University of Cambridge 2008