The Primary Review

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INTERIM
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PRIMARY CURRICULUM FUTURES

James Conroy, Moira Hulme
and Ian Menter
University of Glasgow

Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Education

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Primary Review Research Survey 3/3

James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter

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.

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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 3, Curriculum and Assessment.

The authors: James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter are at the University of Glasgow. James Conroy is Professor of Religious and Philosophical Education and Dean of the Faculty of Education. Moira Hulme is Research Fellow in the Department of Curriculum Studies. Ian Menter is Professor of Teacher Education and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Education.

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PRIMARY CURRICULUM FUTURES

INTRODUCTION

In this review we seek to address what the current trends in primary curriculum seem to indicate about the future, as well as exploring some of the possible curriculum developments that may be needed to enable primary schools to make an appropriate response to the shape of the future world.

There is little argument that developments since the time of the Plowden Report have been influenced as much by ideology and politics as by research evidence or a considered response to social and technological change. While there has never been a time when literacy and numeracy were not seen as key elements in the primary school curriculum, nevertheless the wider setting in which these were located has varied markedly. In the post-Plowden era there was a strong commitment amongst educationalists at least, to a child-centred curriculum, one that was based on children's interests, and this played down the significance of subjects (especially when contrasted to the secondary school curriculum). The major 'turn' came as part of the 1988 Education Reform Act, when 'English' and 'mathematics' became the home of literacy and numeracy respectively and these two subjects were joined by science to become the core subjects within the school curriculum from 5-16 and were to have priority treatment alongside the range of 'foundation subjects'. Since that time literacy and numeracy have re-emerged as skill oriented curriculum components, with their prescribed pedagogies in the primary school, through the development of the literacy and numeracy strategies, that emerged during the period of transition from Conservative to New Labour government in 1997.

However, the purpose of this review is not to engage with that interesting history but rather to assess current developments and what they may tell us about what is likely to emerge in the future. In so doing we will also comment on the wider policy context from which it is unwise to separate the primary school curriculum. We will also indicate some aspects of future scenarios that are worthy of attention. In setting about these tasks we offer a review of some of the recent alternatives that have been offered in part as a critique of dominant curricular approaches. These include schools that have established alternative curricula, new approaches that are being promoted within maintained (and other) schools, as well as reviewing recent developments in home schooling.

There are two trajectories evident within recent curriculum reform: (1) a stronger focus on individual 'capacities' and the development of core transferable skills, (rather than subject content); and (2) a discernible 'affective turn' evidenced in renewed interest in the management of emotions. These developments do not take place in a vacuum but are shaped by broader political, cultural and economic influences and by the shifting relative influence of social and 'psy' disciplines in education. The changes described above intersect with two broader influences on teachers' work: the re-configuration or 're-professionalising' of teachers' work in the last two decades and the challenges presented by the perceived needs of an emergent 'knowledge society'. The potential for reform of the primary curriculum cannot be dislocated from these complex contextual factors.

In the following section, we consider the implications of the 'learning society' for the formal school curriculum and suggest that the erosion of the transmission model has opened spaces for deliberation over the curriculum. We chart renewed interest in alternative approaches through a variety of forms – commissioned research reviews and targeted funding of a

variety of local and national initiatives. We consider how alternative ('progressive') approaches with a long lineage are 'mediated' or 'refracted' in the contemporary policy field. In particular we identify elements of 'travelling' curriculum policy and suggest ways in which some of the enduring themes of primary education are blended with new approaches to serve the specific needs of the contemporary context. We conclude by suggesting that the curriculum of the future is likely to be constrained by a concern with responding to the political imperatives of the present, not least an enduring emphasis on performance. Whilst we note that the resurgence of interest in aspects of alternative approaches is in part a growing acknowledgement of the limitations of curricular prescription - for either the professional development of teachers or the advancement of children's learning – we suggest that transferring ideas from one context of practice to another is not straightforward. In the process of policy diffusion a re-ordering takes place in which the demonstration of individual competence is valued more highly than the processes of dialogue and collaboration involved in the social construction of understanding - core concerns of alternative approaches.

From the late 1990s teaching has been subject to successive waves of reform, with an explicit focus on classroom practice. The re-positioning of the teacher as 'pedagogical technician' has resulted in an emphasis on the acquisition of technical competence measured by compliance with performance criteria in professional standards. This reduction of the teacher's role and erosion of the professional knowledge base of teaching leaves the profession vulnerable to external intervention. In the drive to raise standards through the identification of 'what works', central government has strengthened its influence and drawn on the 'expert' knowledge of a ready pool of 'policy entrepreneurs' (Ball 1994). The 'what works' agenda, has increased teachers' and Local Authorities' attraction to the problem solving skills traded by educational consultants and trainers. One consequence of this commodification of professional knowledge is the conflation of the affective and the performative; a process that has been referred to elsewhere as the 'instrumentalisation of the expressive' (Hartley 2003; Zembylas 2006). A loose coupling between emotion management and performance improvement has emerged from the intersection of child-centered education in the primary sector and outcomes driven assessment in the post-primary phase. We argue here that the contemporary 'affective turn' creates a backwards glance to child-centered pedagogies and alternative education, but it does so in a field where the management of the expressive is harnessed to equip individuals with the emotional resilience to cope in a system driven by the imperative of the 'examination'. From this perspective the primary curriculum of the future remains inextricably influenced by the performative culture prevalent in secondary schooling.

A curriculum for the 'knowledge economy'

The modernisation of the curriculum has been a focus of education reform internationally in recent years. The traditional 'grammars of schooling' (Tyack and Tobin 1994) – linear progression by age and stage, fixed conceptions of knowledge, primary emphasis on outcomes measurement – are challenged by the emergence of the new discourses of the 'learning society'. The self-programmable 'knowledge worker' (Castells 2000) of the new work order is ill-served by a prescriptive curriculum driven by credentialism. The shift from 'mode one' to 'mode two' knowledge production (Gibbons, Limoges and Nowotny 1994) requires a reconfiguration of the curriculum: a move away from residual notions of the curriculum as a body of static 'knowledge-content' transmitted by teachers to an emphasis on creative 'application-in-use' (Kress 2000). Transmission models of learning, built on assumptions of learner compliance and passivity, are unlikely to realise either sustained economic success, or the social and civic outcomes pursued through the social justice and

inclusion agenda. The curriculum of the future will need to focus on the evolving 'capabilities' needed by learners if they are to develop employability skills, live enriched lives and participate actively in democratic life. A future-oriented curriculum would focus on 'learning for understanding' and require a move away from 'assessment careers' towards 'learning careers' (Ecclestone and Pryor 2003). This implies a difficult shift from 'strongly classified' and 'strongly framed' traditional school subjects (Bernstein 1971) towards greater content integration. In this model the identification of explicit core and cross-curricular themes becomes an important strategy in reducing fragmentation and promoting higher levels of integration. Operationalising curriculum reform in this direction would clearly require expanded opportunities for teacher co-operation and collaboration and an extended view of teacher professionalism.

There is some evidence of an incremental move towards re-engaging with the profession in meeting these challenges. In a review of forces for change in England, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2005) has argued that changes in society and the nature of work, combined with advances in technology and new understandings about learning, require a more responsive pedagogy with greater opportunities for the personalisation of learning. The QCA and the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) have subsequently embarked on a programme of research to explore the future of the curriculum in collaboration with sixty schools within the NCSL's Leadership Network.

In Scotland, the 'Schools of Ambition' programme is leading practitioner engagement with a Curriculum for Excellence. The programme provides feedback to the policy community via school-based enquiry groups working within a school-university research partnership. While at present this scheme is limited mainly to secondary schools there are some indications of similar approaches being opened up in relation to primary schools.

Such a willingness to engage in professional dialogue with stakeholders may represent a wider move across the UK towards a partnership model of curriculum development in contrast to the centre-periphery dissemination model of the recent past. Participation is also encouraged through professional consultation exercises which have drawn on the expertise of practitioners, school leaders, local government officers, members of the inspectorate and curriculum and qualifications bodies through a variety of mechanisms including key informant interviews, focus groups, online surveys, conferences and workshops. Examples include the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) e-consultation (May-July 2006) on the proposed changes to the Key Stage One programme of study for reading following the Rose Report (2006) in England; and the consultation on the new Framework for Achievement (FfA) in Northern Ireland (Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment 2005) and the Curriculum Review in Scotland (Scottish Executive Education Department 2004).

In summary, even a cursory review of curriculum reform cross-nationally reveals a stronger emphasis on goal-orientation, content integration and the development of transferable skills within curriculum documents and some evidence of a greater willingness to engage with stakeholders in shaping the direction of curriculum reform. Reid (2005: 66), writing from an Australian perspective, describes a movement from "'teaching for subjects' to teaching *through* subjects *for* capabilities". The Scottish response to this challenge is found in the articulation of the 'four capacities' in A Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE): successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals. Beyond the UK, educational goals are increasingly framed in terms of 'essential learnings' or 'new basics'. This terminology is woven through policy documents relating to curriculum reform in Australia, Canada, Finland and New Zealand (Halinen 2005; Hipkins *et al*. 2005). Significantly essential learnings in this context extend beyond a 'restorationist' focus on basic

skills to embrace new approaches to teaching and learning, particularly the significance of the learning community.

Travelling policy: influences from non–official alternative approaches

In the following section we consider the possible contribution of non-official alternative approaches to the modernisation of the curriculum in light of the challenges suggested above. Alternative approaches share many of the characteristics of the model of a 'future-oriented' curriculum and pose significant challenges to current practice in UK schools. While clearly drawing on diverse philosophical, theoretical and political traditions, alternative approaches share a resistance to the outcomes-based regimes of assessment that are found in mainstream compulsory education, focusing instead on the *processes* rather than the product of learning. Many alternative approaches cohere around a rejection of teacher-controlled whole-class teaching and a concern with the promotion of learner autonomy. A commitment to developing young children's capacity to think and reason is a core concern threaded through a range of approaches that emphasise critical and creative thinking and the development of personal autonomy. Equally many non-official approaches pose a challenge to narrow constructions of learning as primarily a cognitive act. For example, Krechevsky and Stork (2000: 61) have argued that, 'schools of the future … need to honor affective, aesthetic and moral forms of knowing as valid modes of inquiry that are on a par with, and closely tied to, scientific analysis'. Alternative approaches, such as those adopted in Steiner Waldorf and Montesorri schools, address 'physical, behavioural, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual maturation' (Rawson and Richter 2000, cited by Wood and Woods 2006: 317).

In the following section three challenges to mainstream schooling presented by alternative approaches are identified and some of the implications of pursuing these developments are discussed:

- The move away from teaching for subjects

- The role of the teacher as lead learner

- The 'affective turn'.

The move away from teaching for subjects

Building on the work of Piaget, Reuven Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (IE) programme is a 'cognitive active-modification approach' that aims to equip learners with the cognitive skills needed to adapt to their environment (Feuerstein *et al*. 1980). As the emphasis is on cognitive development IE is deliberately free of subject specific content, offering a radical alternative to the content-based curriculum. It differs from other thinking skills approaches in the centrality afforded to the role of a mediator within a programme of active intervention. IE programmes are based on the notion of 'structural cognitive modifiability', the idea that intelligence is not fixed. Through the provision of Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE) an adult mediator regulates the stimuli that are available to a child in order to support the development of transferable problem solving skills (Head and O'Neill 1999). Through a series of structured interventions the child develops the skills of reflective thinking that enable them to assess and deal appropriately with day-to-day problems and challenges. The Feuersteinian approach to mediated learning emphasises the involvement of the teacher as active agent in the design of appropriate learning materials and the provision of developmental learning opportunities.

The role of the teacher is also central to alternative approaches that advocate 'dialogic teaching' with the goal of creating authentic communities of enquiry (Alexander 2006). Philosophy for Children ('P4C') is a systematic thinking skills programme used with children over an extended period, between the ages of six and sixteen. The program,

originally developed by Matthew Lipman (2003), consists of seven 'novels' with accompanying support materials and manuals for teachers. Core themes within the texts are re-visited throughout the program to develop deeper understanding. The problem-solving stories enacted by the central characters within each text are used to scaffold class discussion. The teacher acts as facilitator, promoting thinking through the use of open-ended questions. Stimulus material is used to generate questions that are then shared with the whole class operating as a supportive community of enquiry (Trickey and Topping 2004). Discussions are recorded using graphic mapping to aid reflection and development. The role of the teacher is considered to be vital in creating and sustaining the conditions within which productive and creative discussion can take place. P4C highlights the role of dialogue in the development of reasoning.

Philosophy with Children (PwC) is a similar approach promoted in the UK for primary age children by Joanna Haynes and Karin Murris (Haynes 2001; Murris 2000). *Storywise: Thinking Through Stories* uses picture books and video animations as stimulus material or 'triggers' to promote thinking in a developed version of 'circle time'. The role of a trained facilitator is very important in supporting the development of reasoned discussion rather than just the sharing of ideas. In this strategy a facilitator helps the children to focus on a particular issue and build on each others' contributions. Questions generated by the children during 'thinking time' are recorded on a flip chart and revisited during the discussion. In addition to verbal responses, children are encouraged to offer a visual response by drawing a picture of their thoughts. PwC is grounded on the belief that thinking skills cannot be developed through the 'delivery' of de-contextualised knowledge.

There are clear links between these approaches and the recent attention to thinking skills promoted in the maintained sector by generic initiatives such as Assessment for Learning, Learning How to Learn (James *et al*. 2006), Activating Children's Thinking Skills (McGuiness 2000) and subject-based initiatives such as Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE), Cognitive Acceleration through Mathematics Education (CAME) and Cognitive Acceleration through Technology Education (CATE) (Adey, Shayer and Yates 1995) or Thinking Through Geography (Leat and Chandler 2001). Thinking skills are given explicit attention in the English National Curriculum and assessment for learning is firmly embedded within official discourse such as *Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES 2003) and the Scottish Assessment is for Learning (AifL) initiative. Additional stand-alone thinking skills courses are widely available to schools through organisations such as the Cognitive Research Trust which draws on the work of Edward de Bono (1991) and include the Somerset Thinking Skills Course (Blagg *et al*. 1993) and strategies such as Top Ten Thinking Tactics (Lake and Needham 1993). A meta-analysis of twenty-nine studies that investigated the impact of thinking skills on pupils found a moderate positive impact and some subject variation. Greater gains were found among programmes supporting mathematics and science than in reading (Higgins *et al*. 2005).

A commitment to dialogic teaching and the encouragement of 'learning talk' in the classroom represents a significant challenge to the legacy of 'direct instruction' in UK schools. The principles of 'collectivity', 'reciprocity' and 'support' proposed by Alexander (2006 p34) require a commitment from teachers to a more risky social pedagogy and the confidence and skills to support collaborative problem solving among pupil groups. A DfES review of effective grouping indicates that successful collaboration requires dedicated training for teachers and pupils in interpersonal interaction (Kutnick *et al*. 2005). In the absence of training in group work skills, pupils may be organised in groups but fail to learn through collaboration. Effective grouping requires careful attention to group size, composition, challenge of task and pupil characteristics. A significant barrier to expanding

opportunities for active engagement through collaborative learning is the persistence of whole class, teacher-centered teaching. There are clear professional development implications in carrying forward the espoused commitment to collaborative, co-operative and problem-based learning contained in the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) 2004) and the reduction in individual working proposed in the English National Curriculum.

The role of the teacher as lead learner

Classroom relations within mainstream schools would need to be reconfigured to draw lessons from alternative approaches to schooling. Most alternative approaches present a significant challenge to the conventional role of the teacher in relation to children's learning, positioning the teacher clearly as facilitator/mediator and lead learner in a shared enquiry rather than information giver (Feuerstein *et al*. 1980). The orientation is primarily towards shared learning, rather than the testing of individuals. Steiner schools, the Reggio approach and the democratic schools movement, whilst very different, share a common concern with avoiding some of the negative consequences associated with hierarchical relations within mainstream compulsory schooling.

Amongst these other significant alternatives are Steiner-Waldorf schools which, while private in Britain, are state-funded in the Netherlands and receive an ad-mixture elsewhere. While still small in number[1] their curricular and pedagogical philosophy has been influential in both alternative schools and at the margins of mainstream schooling. While the curriculum may differ quite significantly in Steiner schools located in different countries, the underpinning principles of using play, colour and music as the context and the readiness of children for particular topics has some resonances with La Fayette[2] (see below). Such subjects as philosophy, geology, astronomy and history of architecture sit alongside the more standard fare of literacy and numeracy.

There are currently twenty-three independent Steiner-Waldorf schools in the UK. There are a number of contrasts between Steiner schools and the maintained sector. Although pupils do not take national tests at Key Stages, Steiner-Waldorf schools do cover National Curriculum subjects and prepare learners effectively for external examinations. Classes are not however structured on the basis of subjects but are broadly based using project work to develop a range of skills and competences. Steiner schools have an explicit commitment to helping students become independent thinkers and are attentive to emotional influences on readiness to learn ('willing'). Congruence is sought between pace of learning and natural rhythms rather than age and stage edicts. Woods *et al*. (2005: 6) identify 'rhythm, rituals, symbols and ceremony' as defining features of Steiner education. Significantly, administration is organised through a collegiate system rather than a management hierarchy, which is designed to encourage greater levels of collegiality (between staff and between staff and pupils). The Steiner teacher occupies the role of 'pedagogical co-leader' (Woods and Woods 2006). Whilst some aspects of Steiner philosophy present very significant challenges to official education policy, the attention to the professional learning community has become embedded within the literature on leadership. The first state sector Steiner school, the Hereford Waldorf School, will achieve academy status in 2007. By contrast in Scotland, in a somewhat peculiar appendix to a 2002 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Executive update, the petition to *The Public Petitions Committee* from the Edinburgh Steiner school to become state funded is rejected on the grounds that such schools don't offer a curriculum that cannot be offered in mainstream funded schools but admits to having

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[1]   Currently around 894 worldwide.
[2]   See http://www.timsellers.net/steinerhomeschooling/thegradeyears.html

'bought into' students in the same school "[…] for children with a range of special educational needs, very often at the severe and complex end of the spectrum and which did not easily fit in to 'mainstream' SEN provision".[3]

Close attention to participatory processes is also evident in the Reggio approach, which promotes learning in small groups of between two and six children. The attention in Reggio Emilia (pre-school) education to *how* children make meaning is in contrast to the outcomes orientation embedded in summative forms of assessment. The Reggio approach gives greater priority to the learning of adults than conventional approaches and positions teachers as theory builders as well as curriculum implementers. This conception of theorizing, agentic educators has relevance for the formation of professional development programmes for the maintained sector. Children and adults form a community of learners engaged in collective projects (Krechevsky and Stork 2000).

The democratic or free schools movement shares this concern with inclusiveness, participation and dialogue. There are only such two democratic schools currently active in the UK: Summerhill in Suffolk, founded by A.S. Neill, and the Sands School, Devon. The popular notion of school/student councils is drawn from free schools, although in the maintained sector councils lack the power to effect real change that is a feature of school meetings in democratic schools (Taylor and Johnson 2002). Although pupils exert negligible influence on decision making in the maintained sector, much greater attention is now afforded to the pupil perspective and to children's rights (Rudduck and Flutter 2003). The increasing attention given to pupil 'voice' in evaluating interventions and the introduction of citizenship education as a school subject (in England) reinforces the notion of pupils as stakeholders within school and within society.

The 'affective turn'

Recent work on emotional literacy and the development of caring thought (as exemplified within Philosophy for Children) draws attention to the affective domain in support of learning and the promotion of responsible citizenship. There has been a great deal of attention focused on children's emotional literacy, emotional well-being and emotional resilience in policy circles in recent years. Sharp (2001: 1) defines emotional literacy as 'the ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions.' Much of this attention has been predicated on concerns around behaviour management in schools. Renewed interest in the affective domain has developed concurrently with the use of sanctions contained in the *Anti Social Behaviour Act* (2003) and the use of voluntary Parenting Contracts and civil Parenting Orders (DfES 2004). In 2002 the DfES commissioned a review of how children's emotional and social competence and well-being could most effectively be developed at a national and local level. The report by Weare and Gray (2003) recommended a holistic, whole school approach and the development of explicit teaching and learning programmes and curriculum guidance to support schools in this area. In June 2005 the DfES responded by circulating the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning toolkit (SEAL), a curriculum resource to support the development of pupils' social and behavioural skills.

The enhancement of self-esteem or self-worth has long been a central tenet of primary education in UK schools. Self-esteem is associated with having the 'confidence to act' (Cigman 2001), feeling competent or possessing optimistic beliefs regarding self-efficacy. Many contemporary initiatives draw on the 'positive psychology' advanced by Martin Seligman (1990, 1995) in his work on 'the optimistic child'. There has been an expansion of interest in esteem within strategies to tackle exclusion, disaffection and underachievement. Mental health professionals and psychotherapists have become the 'cultural retailers' of the

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[3]   See http://www.cosla.gov.uk/attachments/execgroups/ed/edapr02item8.doc

self-esteem concept (Slater 2002) and trainers have engaged in lucrative 'policy entrepreneurship' (Ball 1994) advancing the merits of interventionist strategies to repair an 'esteem deficit'. The self-esteem movement developed from early interventions in the USA such as the California Task Force to promote self esteem and personal and social responsibility (Cruickshank 1999; California State Department of Education 1990). It is championed in the UK through commercial companies such as the Pacific Institute and Learning Unlimited. Following the discussion paper *Confidence in Scotland* (Scottish Executive 2005), the Glasgow-based Centre for Confidence and Well-Being, directed by Carol Craig, received £750,000 over three years (2004-2007) to promote positive attitudes, confidence, individuality, creativity, innovation and well-being. Some of the discourse makes its way into funded national developments in Scotland such as Assessment is for Learning (AifL), and thence to the newly developing *Curriculum for Excellence 3-18*, which aims to take AifL as a model for implementation.

In both the USA and UK concerns have been voiced about these developments by commentators in higher education (Baumeister *et al*. 2003, Elmer 2001) and in the media (Toynbee 2001, Slater 2002). Ecclestone (2004), drawing on Furedi's (1997, 2004) 'fear thesis', has expressed concern over the rise of a 'therapeutic pedagogy' which aims to 'empower' less confident learners to overcome (self-imposed) barriers to the achievement of learning goals. Fineman (2000) has pointed to the commodification of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) as a newly constructed competence to be traded by trainers. Research conducted by Emler (2001) found that low self-esteem was damaging to the individual, but did not promote anti-social behaviour. He also questions the positive relationship that is often assumed between self-esteem and academic attainment; arguing that both high and low achievers mediate results according to pre-existing views of themselves. Emler concludes that therapeutic approaches to tackle the self esteem deficit are little more than 'snake oil remedies.' Other writers have adopted a governmentality perspective and suggested that the self-esteem movement proceeds from a deficit model in which targets of intervention need to be worked upon to encourage 'care of the self', to re-make themselves as virtuous self-regulating subjects. Helsby and Knight (1998: 6) argue that the notion of empowerment here is one which 'appears to value atomized, technique-centred empowerment of execution, rather than holistic, critically-aware empowerment of conception'.

> Self esteem … has much more to do with self-assessment than with self-respect, as the self continuously has to be measured, judged and disciplined in order to gear personal 'empowerment' to collective yardsticks ... a forever precarious harmony ... has to be forged between the political goals of the state and a personal 'state of esteem'.
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> (Lemke 2001: 202)

The coupling of the affective with the performative is illustrated in the pervasive use of target setting to raise standards in mainstream schooling. Target setting is an integral aspect of the school improvement cycle. Measurable performance targets for age-related performance are monitored against performance outcomes at Key Stages and National Curriculum levels. The purpose of target setting is to encourage self-responsibility by moving from what has been achieved at a particular point in time (measurement), to what *can* be achieved in the future (enhancement). There has been a discernable shift from reliance on summative assessment towards a much stronger focus on formative and ipsative assessment. This is premised on the belief that dispositions to learning are not fixed but can be altered with appropriate feedback from skilled teachers (Black *et al*. 2003; Hayward *et al*. 2004). The self-monitoring of attainment operates at the level of overall pupil performance between institutions (for example, national comparisons using the Pupil Achievement Tracker), between teachers in the same institution, between pupils in the same classes to ipsative assessment of individual progress over time. By attending to the affective, a

narrative unfolds in which it is possible to fail constructively, a process of 'failing forwards'. The skilled educator supports the learner in building emotional resilience and developing reflective self-esteem. Cigman (2001: 573) offers a composite of the 'good failure' who is 'motivated to struggle, to tolerate pain', and for whom '"I can" is supplemented (not as a prediction but as an intention) by "I will"'. From this perspective, educational failure is reconfigured as a problem of 'self-care'.

Educational alternatives

As we suggest above, alternative provision has been and continues to be an enduring feature of British education, as indeed it is of other polities (most especially the United States and Canada). Some of this has been controversial with schools such as Summerhill having been subjected to substantial scrutiny. The continued existence and, more importantly the very significant growth of these alternatives (Davies *et al*. 2002), despite successive legislative encroachments, is testament to the maintenance of certain liberal impulses alongside the enduring strength of will which continues to motivate those who propose, sustain, support and make use of them. Of course there are other impulses governing the decisions of some parents to opt out of mainstream state and private provision which are more likely to be grounded in the negative emotions of fear. There are those (Ball 2003; Power *et al*. 2003) who see this drift as occasioned by the drive of middle class parents to seek positional advantage in an increasingly competitive era. But this is not a sufficient explanation for the many who clearly lack consumerist and political ambitions. As Davies *et al*. (2002) point out, while motivations vary, one set of issues is the sustainability and integrity of the family unit. Another sustaining factor is likely to be the existence in developed economies of a vast army of university educated parents. Clearly the drivers of alternative provision are diverse. For some it is the claim that schools as institutions are not conducive to the developmental welfare of children, for others, the curriculum has become too rigid, for yet a third group there is a belief that the curriculum is insufficiently demanding. Each of these broad scripts embodies other sub-texts some of which would appear to be in conflict. For example, in the case of those who think that developmental welfare is the issue, some will argue that both curriculum and the governing rubrics are too harsh, for others, they are too loose failing to nurture substantial moral and intellectual character.

Still influential in the world of alternative curriculum are the writings of Rousseau and Dewey as well as the children's rights inflected theories of John Holt (1983) who claims that late industrial forms of education stultify children's creativity and undermine their energies for learning. Children, he argues, should be much more self-determining with regard to the curriculum, pursuing those things which they find interesting. The underpinning belief here is that their 'natural' love of learning will not be undermined by having foisted upon them an education which in both style and content is constraining and ultimately alienating. These ideas find particular resonance in the growing number of private small schools. One of the most interesting and instructive examples from a curriculum development perspective is the Fayette Street Academy in Santa Fe, New Mexico (Chamberlain 2001)[4], which combines a profoundly child centred and structurally informal approach with the study of a classical curriculum including, even in the elementary curriculum, consideration of classical languages and engagement with algebra not to mention the continued use of traditional texts such as the McGuffy reader! Even more interesting is the way in which the texts are used to help students explore social and historical conditions and the attitudes that both inform and issue out of these. Moreover, in a world which has become simultaneously risk averse and

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[4]   It is interesting that the title, *The Heart of the Matter,* is the same as a 1995 discussion paper published by the then Scottish consultative Council for the Curriculum on education for personal and social development which emphasises culture and ethos as the foundational condition for effective learning.

deeply anxious that children do not play enough and take enough exercise, Fayette Street offers a robust outdoors environment.

Home schooling

What distinguishes what we might call these 'small schools' from mainstream state funded education is altogether more complicated than simply being a desire for an alternative curriculum. Rather the distinction tends to centre on the belief that the more subtle environment and more comprehensive balance of the academic, practical and artistic is more carefully modulated than in mainstream schooling. Moreover such approaches have become quite a significant shaper of certain strands in home schooling. It is not long since home schooling or home education was considered the domain of two discrete groups. First, those who partook in the lifestyle and ambitions of advanced industrial democracies but who, for geographical or logistical reasons could not take advantage of formal communal schooling. Second, there are those who had, often for religious reasons, withdrawn from socio-political engagement. The Bob Jones University Press Testing and Evaluation Service[5] provides the largest home school testing service in the United States. Given its provenance as a robustly conservative religious institute this offers at least some indirect or circumstantial evidence of the motive power of religion in the early drive for home schooling. Both the numbers opting for home schooling and the range of motivations of those wishing to do so have expanded considerably in recent years. One substantial and growing group is comprised of those who have abandoned formal schooling because they believe it to be too constrained by the imperatives of performativity and the curriculum limitations imposed on the cultivation of the imagination in consequence thereof. In this group are parents who wish to see a greater emphasis on cultural and aesthetic engagements as well as those who want to see the world brought into learning in an unselfconscious way. What many home schooling families share across their political, religious and cultural differences (and indeed something shared with small school movements) is a significant emphasis on engagement with story. Moreover, there are many home school resource providers who offer curriculum materials that meet nationally determined targets. Most are values-based, some are professional and others emerge out of co-operative associations of home school organisations such as *Education Otherwise* in the UK[6] and *A to Z Home's Cool* in the US[7]

Much of this material does not differ markedly from that to be found in the majority of state funded primary or elementary schools. At this stage and given the growth in such alternatives as home schooling we might wish to explore some of the lessons to be garnered from its curriculum and pedagogic practices which might, in turn, inform more general question about the shape and content of any putative future primary curriculum. But such lessons as there are may not be predicated on the growth of home schooling per se. Rather, if such provision makes a positive difference to children's achievement, there may be something to be learned in re-thinking a curriculum of and for the future. Such an enquiry is likely to begin by asking the basic question, 'do children educated in such environments significantly out-perform those in regular public and private schools irrespective of the curriculum adopted?' It is to this we now turn.

In the midst of the many differences in philosophy, outlook and practice of home schoolers, from those who follow the national curriculum pretty rigidly to those whose approach makes Summerhill seem like a model of mainstream pedagogical rectitude, home schooling appears to consistently offer children a more efficacious educational experience even as measured by the standards of normative performativity. One constant in the midst of much

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[5]   See http://www.bjupress.com/
[6]   See http://www.education-otherwise.org/
[7]   See http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/e

complexity is the better than average performance of home schooled children when compared to age cohorts in the general population. Rudner's (1999) study illustrated that those in grades 1-4 who are educated at home, on average, perform one grade level higher than their public and private school counterparts. Lest this be thought as an effect of early nurture likely to dissipate later in the child's educational development, it is striking that the performance gap expands as the student progresses so that by 8th grade such children are performing at four grades above the national average in the US.

Of course interpreting such outstanding performance is not uncomplicated and there are a range of pertinent factors apart from curriculum choice, not least of which is that in this study home schooled children typically come from families with relatively high incomes (although interestingly not very high), family stability and a strong commitment to education. Welner and Welner (1999) urge some caution in over interpreting the performance gap; arguing that many of the students, by Rudner's own admission, come from families with slightly above mean national income. It is not clear how pupils from such backgrounds would have fared against the mean had they been educated within state or private schools or that home schooling is axiomatically superior. Nonetheless, and with rare exceptions studies of home schooled children show clear and substantial evidence of high (and above average) performance (Ray 2000). Indeed Rothermel's (2004) more recent study would suggest that students from lower socio-economic groups relatively outperform middle class peers. One reason for this, she suggests, is that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds who are home schooled are free from the stigma of poverty in the public space. Importantly she argues that while early intervention and pre-school attendance is increasingly seen as the future (on the basis of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project, Sylva *et al*. 2004) that sample cohort was selected with a bias towards the 'underprivileged' and the sample did not include those intending to home school.

Conclusion

There are several salient features of the home schooling paradigm which may be of interest when considering the shaping of the curriculum into and for the future. These include a recognition that both television and computer use in home schooled environments was seen to be much lower than national patterns. In an educational and political climate which suggests that the future shape of the curriculum is likely to be dictated by shifts in technology (Hargreaves 1997) it is at least clear that having only moderate access to technologies is unlikely to be injurious to a child's educational attainment. Arguably, the reverse is the case so it may be that the imagined primary curriculum into the future need be rather less reliant on technology than the rhetoric would have us believe. A second consideration for curriculum development is whether or not the fashion for meta-cognitive exercises, which we have detailed earlier, need be as robustly sustained as is presently the case. Rather, reading would appear to be a more salient and potent educational stratagem. In this sense we might argue that we wish to go 'back to the future'. Perhaps more important than either of these is the clear intimation that what is at stake here is flexibility. What the growth of educational alternatives, from Reggio schools to home schools, amply demonstrates is that there is no single account of the effective curriculum. There are available a wide range of approaches which may need to be more carefully considered with respect to each child. In the structured and resource constrained environment of a public (or for that matter private) school compromises are necessary but flexibility may need to represent the heart of any developments if we are to fit children to their own educational and developmental project while simultaneously recognising that public education (of both state and private varieties) represents not only individual achievement but the common good. Moreover, the experience of alternative forms of schooling would appear to go some way in

vindicating our opening remarks that what appears to be emerging in mainstream curriculum thinking is indeed a stronger emphasis on individual capacities and a more significant focus on the affective.

Skills in literacy and numeracy and the ability to use available technologies to support those skills are likely to remain at the centre of the primary school curriculum for the foreseeable future. But the context within which those skills are developed may increasingly be one where the conventional organisation of knowledge is less important than ensuring that children become confident and independent learners. Thus it may be that curricular elements are increasingly determined at a local and regional level, with teachers and pupils themselves playing a significant part in their determination, thus ensuring that these young learners are developing experience of responsibilities for decision making and for collaborating with their peers and with adults. Such a curriculum would reflect diversity and the lived histories and geographies of the multiple communities which young people today find themselves to be a part of. If primary school is indeed a preparation for secondary education, then it is crucial that the primary students make that transition into secondary as prepared as possible to learn further and to act as a citizen of that particular community who can contribute to his or her own development and welfare as well as that of others.

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APPENDIX 1

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 2

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 4. 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 replacment of DfES by two separate departments, DCSF and DIUS, it is anticipated that there will be further meetings with this committee's successor.

APPENDIX 3

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. *Primary curriculum and assessment: England and other countries*. Research survey 3/1 (Kathy Hall and Kamil Øzerk)

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. *Primary curriculum futures.* 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 4/3 (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 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).

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,
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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