Education is the 'all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit'.

'Education must touch every aspect of daily living and help every man and woman to be a better citizen of their village, and therefore a better citizen of India and the world'.

'The real remedy [for exploitation and injustice] is non-violent democracy, otherwise spelled true education of all. The rich should be taught stewardship and the poor self-help'.

– MAHATMA GANDHI

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

Memorial Lecture Series

NCERT

First Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture – 2007

BY CHRISTOPHER WINCH

1869-1948

NCERT
MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

First Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture
India International Centre, New Delhi

17 January 2007

CHRISTOPHER WINCH

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

OUR OBJECTIVES

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an apex organisation, assisting and advising the Central and State Governments by undertaking research, survey, development, training, and extension activities for all stages of school and teacher education[1].

One of the objectives of the Council is to act as a clearing-house and disseminator of ideas relating to school and teacher education. We have initiated the current Memorial Lecture series in order to fulfil this role and to commemorate the life and work of great educational thinkers. Our aim is to strive to raise the level of public awareness about the seminal contributions made in the field of education by eminent men and women of India. We expect that such awareness will set off a chain of discourse and discussion. This, we hope, will make education a lively subject of intellectual inquiry while simultaneously encouraging a sustained public engagement with this important domain of national life.

The memorial lecture series will cover public lectures commemorating the life and work of nine eminent Indian educational thinkers and practitioners.

Title	**Venue**
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lectures	India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi
Zakir Husain Memorial Lectures	Regional Institute of Education, Mysore

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[1] More information on NCERT is available at: www.ncert.nic.in

Gijubhai Badhekha Memorial Lectures	Regional Institute of Education, Ajmer
Tagore Memorial Lectures	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lectures	Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lectures	North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong
Savitri Phule Memorial Lectures	Nehru Centre, Worli, Mumbai
Majorie Sykes Memorial Lectures	Egmore Museum, Chennai
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lectures	Indian Institute of Social Sciences, Kolkata

We will invite men and women of eminence from the academia and public life to deliver these lectures in English or in any other Indian language. Our intention is to reach a large audiences consisting in particular of teachers, students, parents, writers, artists, NGOs, government servants and members of local communities.

The lectures will be made available on Compact Discs (CDs) and in the form of printed booklets for wider dissemination. Each booklet will consist of two sections: Section One highlighting the purpose of the memorial lectures and providing a brief sketch of the life and work of the concerned educational thinker and Section Two giving the lectures in full along with a brief background of the speaker.

We hope all these lecture series will be of use to our audiences as well as the wider public.

ANUPAM AHUJA
Convenor

EDUCATION FOR LIFE, THROUGH LIFE : A GANDHIAN PARADIGM

Anil Sethi*

One of the elements in Mahatma Gandhi's intricate homespun shawl — that his life was — has been his contribution to educational thought. Gandhi's intervention in this field, as in many others, was a product of imaginative action as well as constant dialogue with others. First advanced in 1937, Gandhi's ideas of *Nai Talim* or 'Basic Education', (as he termed it), generated instant interest and controversy all over the country as they continue to do even today. Our fast-changing world — unequal, consumerist and poverty-ridden — can benefit from various Gandhian antidotes, not least his views on education.

We all know Gandhi was not a trained educationalist, teacher or philosopher. As with many other subjects, his views on education did not emerge from any theoretical engagement with the issue but from his wide public concerns. A prolific writer and debater, Gandhi would initiate public discussion on the burning questions of the day. His movements, based on mass-mobilization, were civic, participatory and dialogic in nature. Gandhi resisted chauvinistic and divisive politics of various hues as also the eschewing of debate and discussion that is so central a feature of such politics. He wished to establish dialogue with comrades, opponents and others alike, so much so that scholars refer to his political style as 'dialogic resistance'. From 1937 to 1948, therefore, Gandhi often wrote about educational questions, first announcing his ideas on the subject in the *Harijan* of 31 July 1937 and seeking to establish a dialogue with others about them.

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Issues of Basic Education have obviously been relevant beyond the context in which they first arose. Even so, it would help to clarify that original context. After forming governments in many of the provinces of British India in 1937, the Congress was called upon to expand and revitalise the country's educational system. But the financial resources at the disposal of the ministry in each province were limited and did not permit any increase in expenditure on education. Since Excise was a provincial subject, a way out was to tap it as a source of funding the schools as efficiently as possible. The Congress, however, was committed to prohibition as a matter of national policy. G. Ramanathan describes the dilemma of the party's ministers thus:

> To introduce prohibition meant, on the one hand, the loss of so much revenue and, on the other, some additional expenditure to enforce prohibition. This two-fold drain on the resources would leave little in the hands of the ministers to be spent for nation-building purposes such as education. Thus ... the Congress ministers had to [either] defer educational expansion and proceed with prohibition, or to defer prohibition and use the liquor revenue for building schools and paying teachers. The problem was to devise a solution by which two ideals could be pursued simultaneously. In other words, an educational policy had to be evolved under which schools could grow without dependence on large financial resources.[1]

As ever so often, Gandhi responded to the challenge creatively but also controversially. He offered a radical solution:

1. Primary education should consist of the present Matriculation minus English, plus a craft. It should cover the ages of 7 to14 or more.
2. The craft should be chosen from among the main occupations of the people.

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[1] G Ramanathan, *Education from Dewey to Gandhi: The Theory of Basic Education* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 3-4.

3. All instruction should be correlated to the crafts.
4. Such education should be productive and self-supporting.[2]

The last proposition advocated that schools financially sustain themselves through the crafts that children produce. It was this statement that attracted some hostility. Even a conference chaired by none other than Gandhi, and held at Wardha in October 1937, was not willing to offer unqualified support to the scheme. It toned down his suggestion, resolving only 'that the Conference expects that this system of education will be gradually able to cover the remuneration of teachers'. Educationalists feared that Gandhian schools would reduce a vocation-centred education to child-labour. On the other hand, a fair degree of acceptability for the idea had also been created. A contemporary Government of India report, for instance, (drafted by the Education Commissioner, John Sargent), conceded the validity of Basic Education.

The Wardha Conference appointed a Committee, under the Presidency of Zakir Husain, to formulate a scheme of Basic Education for the country. The Committee perceived this new education as fundamental to the 'all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit'[3] and to the creation of 'co-operative communities' in which 'the motive of social service will dominate all the activities of children during the plastic years of childhood and youth'[4]. The Committee's Report was categorical in stating :

> The object of this new educational scheme is NOT [sic] primarily the production of craftsmen able to practise some craft *mechanically*, but rather the exploitation for educative purposes of the resources implicit in craft-work. This demands that productive work should not only form a part of the school curriculum – its craft side – but should also inspire the *method*

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[3] *Harijan*, 31 July 1937.

[4] *Basic National Education: Report of the Zakir Husain Committee and the Detailed Syllabus* (Wardha, 1938), p. 38.

> of teaching all other subjects. Stress should be laid on the principles of co-operative activity, planning, accuracy, initiative and individual responsibility in learning. [Emphases in the original].[5]

Objective commentators of later decades have made similar observations. Yet, this paradigm has too often been dismissed simply (and simplistically) as education through crafts.

Craft-work may have been central to Gandhi's tool-kit but this was not the 'whole truth' about *Nai Talim.* For Gandhi, local crafts immediately connected the young to the regeneration of the local economy, eco-systems, society, culture and the locally prevailing mores of physical culture. Thus, Basic Education meant the learner's active involvement with his or her existential condition and with her society so that she could work out her emancipation from drudgery and exploitation. As Gandhi stressed, 'education is that which gives true freedom'.[6] His educational philosophy was closely related to his seminal concerns about the removal of tyranny and unfreedom: *Gram Svaraj*, local self-reliance, bread-labour, the need to arrest the various forms of alienation individuals and communities faced under conditions of haphazard colonial industrialization. It is not surprising that some of the most influential of modern economists also view development as 'a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy' and the spread of education as a critical component of that process[7].

Contemporary cognitive child psychology too endorses many of Gandhi's educational ideas. Critics have shown how the child's immediate milieu may be used to teach Languages, Science, Social Studies and the Arts and how various topics can be taught by integrating knowledge and learning with real-life activities. In this perspective, children ought to be given opportunities to work independently of the teacher/ facilitator and to regularly work outside the classroom. They ought to be trained in small groups as well. It was, in fact, this orientation that had led basic schools to disregard the scriptural status of prescribed textbooks, so much a part of our textbook-examination culture even today. Teachers in these schools were expected to develop their own teaching-learning activities and materials. They were discouraged from using textbooks in the early classes and were advised to keep them to a minimum in later ones. Gandhi's rejection of textbook-centred instruction, seen by him as colonial importation, is well-known :

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[6] Quoted by J.D. Sethi in 'A Gandhian Critique of Modern Indian Education in Relation to Economic Development', *Gandhi Today* (Delhi, 1978), p.126.

[7] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York, 1999), p3.

> If textbooks are treated as a vehicle for education, the *living world* of the teacher has very little value. [Emphasis mine]. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils. He himself becomes a slave of textbooks and has no opportunity or occasion to be original. It therefore seems that the less textbooks there are the better it is for the teacher and his pupils.[8]

Nevertheless, as Krishna Kumar argues, if textbooks cause artificiality or drudgery for teacher and taught alike, the problem may lie in their poor quality or in related syllabi, not in the idea of using them.[9]

The relevance of Gandhi's educational views is further borne out by our accumulated grass-roots experience of the past six decades. Our activists and planners have looked upon education as a key factor in an integrated multi-level strategy to fight deprivation and under-development with learners, first-generation or otherwise, becoming effective agents of social change. But for this to happen, we need to devise a system that does not assume 'children are clean slates to write on'[10]. When, for instance, working children enter 'organised' education, they do so with skills, knowledge and social insights acquired as workers, so what is offered to them must build on their prior and on-going experiences. The knowledge and skills of their parents too, as Yash Pal passionately holds, must not be treated as redundant. What is taught to these children should be chosen and designed in a manner that enables their 'productively-educated' parents to help the children gain further education. Not only would this strategy, so evocative of Gandhi's 'education for life, through life', recognise the child's own experiences and activities at school, it would also ensure that the teacher and planner learn from an exploited underclass of landless labourers, rag-pickers, mechanics and the like. The experts must stoop to conquer. This was Gandhi's ideal of cooperative communities. All this also reminds us of that vital Gandhian link between political *svaraj*, people's empowerment in the localities, and wider social change, quintessentially Gandhi's 'gift of the fight'.[11]

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[8] 'Text Books', *Harijan*, 9 December 1939. Quoted in Krishna Kumar, 'Listening to Gandhi' in Rajni Kumar, Anil Sethi and Shailini Sikka (Eds.), *School, Society, Nation: Popular Essays in Education* (Delhi, 2005), p. 43.

[9] Krishna Kumar, 'Listening to Gandhi' in Rajni Kumar, Anil Sethi and Shalini Sikka (Eds.), *School, Society, Nation: Popular Essays in Education* (Delhi, 2005), p. 44.

An important feature of *Nai Talim* must be underscored. The scheme did not contain any provision for religious education although the communal biases of some of its advocates may have been reflected in its implementation in the various provinces. Writing in early 1947 to E.W. Aryanayakam, the Convener of the Zakir Husain Committee on Basic National Education, Gandhi criticised the suggestion that the state should concern itself with religious education:

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[10] Yash Pal, 'Foreword' in Karuna Chanana (Ed.), *Transformative Links between Higher and Basic Education: Mapping the Field* (Delhi, 2004), p. 7.

[11] 'The Gift of the Fight' is Rabindranath Tagore's phrase for Gandhian resistance. Tagore first used it when Gandhi was fasting in opposition to British Prime-Minister, Ramsay McDonald's Communal Award of 1932. See Jehangir P. Patel and Marjorie Sykes, *Gandhi: His Gift of the Fight* (Goa, 1987), p. 21.

> I do not believe that the State can concern itself or cope with religious education. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. I believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the State. By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics but what goes by the name of denominationism [sic]. We have suffered enough from State-aided religion and State Church. A society or group, which depends partly or wholly on State aid for the existence of religion, does not deserve or, better still, does not have any religion worth the name.[12]

This statement is worth taking note of because Gandhi is all too easily characterised as not subscribing to the doctrine of the separation of religion from the affairs of the state. His life-long commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and his passionate anti-communal work are often seen as based on an equal respect for all religions rather than on Western-style secular principles. His prayer meetings and his frequent references to a religiously-informed conscience influencing his politics tend to reinforce such a conclusion. But we must remember that his religious tolerance was strengthened by the Lockian doctrine that the state should not seek to intervene in the sphere of private belief – this was a purely personal concern. Gandhi brought religious discussion into the public domain only for promoting a ‘fundamental ethics’, harmony, fellowship and friendship. As and when he felt that the public use of religion can ignite conflict, violence or narrowness, he condemned such use and argued for a clear separation of the affairs of the state from religion.

Gandhi loved children. Majorie Sykes’s memories of him are full of children: ‘Children skipped and danced around Gandhi on his evening walks; they clung to his hands and chuckled at his jokes. Gandhi himself was absorbed and relaxed; for that half-hour he gave himself up completely to his delight in the children'.[13] It would be befitting to conclude this tribute to an extraordinary educator by recalling a volume of essays written by German teenagers entitled *What Gandhi Means to Me*.[14] These children discuss a range of issues: from Napoleon to Saddam Hussein, from forbearance and inner strength to wealth and power, from fasting to modern medicine. The essays sparkle with a delightful honesty and a spirit of goodwill and human neighbourliness. They remind us that Gandhi saw education and health as the key to *svaraj* at the grass-roots. This is reminiscent of Marjorie Sykes's description of how Gandhi extended his understanding of *Nai Talim* while in prison in 1942-44. Education, he said, must continue throughout life, 'from conception to cremation'. 'It must touch every aspect of daily living and help every man and woman to be a better citizen of their village, and therefore a better citizen of India and the world'.[15] He called for a comprehensive training in 'non-violent democracy': 'the real remedy [for exploitation and injustice] is non-violent democracy, *otherwise spelled true education of all*. The rich should be taught stewardship and the poor self-help'.[16] Gandhi was exploring the dialectic between this all-important social education and the deschooled 'schooling' to be imparted to those between the ages of seven and fourteen.

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[12] Gandhi to E.W. Aryanayakam, 21 February 1947, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Delhi, 1999), Volume 94, p. 19.

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[13] Jehangir P. Patel and Majorie Sykes, *Gandhi: His Gift of the Fight* (Goa, 1987), p. 50.

[14] Benjamin Putter, *What Gandhi Means to Me?* (Delhi, 2001).

[15] Jehangir P. Patel and Marjorie Sykes, *Gandhi : His Gift of the Fight* (Goa, 1987), p. 120.

[16] *Ibid.*, p.121.

INDIVIDUALS, WORKERS OR CITIZENS? REFLECTIONS ON THE LIMITS OF SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATIONAL REFORM

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Christopher Winch is currently a Professor of Educational Philosophy and Policy at the Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's College London. He works with colleagues in the Centre for Public Policy Research, which is primarily concerned with public sector restructuring, professional change and development, professional values and ethics, and equality and social justice. The Centre engages in a wide variety of projects concerned mainly with education and health issues.

His work currently is concerned with applying philosophical techniques to policy issues and he is a core member of the Nuffield Foundation. At present the foundation has funded a review into the future of 14-19 education in Britain. This review is concerned with fundamental issues concerning the nature of purpose of this phase of education, as well as gathering data on the extremely complicated situation in England, Scotland and Wales. Many of the findings of this ongoing review inform the arguments in the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture. He also co-directs (with Professor Linda Clarke) a Nuffield Foundation funded project which examines the attempted integration of vocational qualifications within the European Union. Particular attention is given to the cultural, political and conceptual difference that underlie vocational education in different European countries and the difficulties that they pose for further integration.

Professor Christopher Winch studied Philosophy as an undergraduate at Leeds University, trained as a primary school teacher and worked for many years in primary schools in and around Leeds in the north of England, eventually becoming acting head teacher of a primary school in Leeds. This period had a deep influence on his thinking on educational matters. Working in areas of material deprivation and ethnic diversity, he experienced first hand the problems arising in a decentralized education system and also began to appreciate the daunting difficulty of attempts to overcome social divisions through educational policies. Later he came to more fully appreciate the way in which the impact of the broader society and of employment in particular has had profound bearing in the scope and limits of educational reform.

Professor Winch studied for a Ph.D part time at Bradford University with Professor Philip Pettit while working as a teacher and subsequently spent many years teaching in higher education at what is now the University of Northampton, including holding a post of responsibility for teacher education for English for primary teachers and developing a successful undergraduate programme in Philosophy. He moved to King's in 2004, taking responsibility for courses in Educational Management and for the Professional Doctoral Programme in Education. During this period he published widely in the Philosophy of Education, including work on educational achievement and language (1990), quality and education (1996), the nature of human learning (1998), social capital and vocational education (2000) and autonomy as well as critical thinking in education (2005).

He has been an active member of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain for over twenty years. At present he is vice chairman, responsible for the annual conference programme. He is also managing editor of the policy-oriented pamphlet series called IMPACT, which deals with controversial topical issues in educational policy from diverse philosophical perspectives. He also has close links with German philosophers of Education through membership of research groups organised by Dietrich Benner of the Humboldt University.

Professor Winch has family ties as well as signifanct academic connections with France and Germany. According to him these countries have made him aware of the importance of understanding the different historical and cultural traditions that inform educational concepts and practices. An understanding of cultural variation and similarity in educational work, he believes, is useful in thinking about indigenous educational reform.

THE TEXT OF THE LECTURE

The last thing that I could claim would be any deep knowledge of the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, let alone of his educational thinking. The little that I do know, however, leads me to believe that his insights into education were profound and are not merely relevant to India but to societies like the UK as well. By this I mean that he seems to have regarded education as being a preparation for life in the broadest sense, to develop human beings who were capable, not just to manage their own affairs but to serve their society and to achieve their own unique individuality and dignity. One of the features of his writing that I find particularly admirable was his realistic recognition of the nature of the adult lives that young people were being prepared for and his belief that the lives of workers and farmers, however modest their circumstances, were to be given the highest priority by educators. In this respect, he breaks with the assumption that educators from Plato and Aristotle onwards have assumed: namely, a preparation for a life of cultivated leisure is an appropriate goal of education. Gandhi's view seems to have been that work not only contributes to society's well-being but also to the dignity and spiritual beauty of those who practise it with love and care. In this sense, worthwhile work represents one important aspect of the life of a complete human being; not the only aspect, to be sure, but a centrally important one.

This view continues to be relevant to the educational problems confronting developed societies like the UK, but I think that it will have increasing relevance to those societies like India, which are now firmly set on the path of rapid economic development. A significant part of the destiny of most of the population in both developing and developed countries is to work, usually within the labour market as employees. If education is a preparation for life, then it must be, at least in part, a preparation for working life. The quality of working life will have a critical impact, not only on education provided for future workers, but also on their perception of the value of that education to them. One point about this that I wish to emphasise is that young people really do expect education to prepare them for life. This does not mean that they can or that they should only select from education what they take to be relevant to their future lives, but rather that their reasonable expectations concerning what education has to offer them be properly taken into account. In brief, I am going to argue that in our society at any rate, these expectations are not adequately being met and that the sustained programme of educational reform in England runs the risk of stagnating because young people realise that what is being asked from them at school does not necessarily correspond with employers' expectations. Let me spell this out:

A] A process of sustained educational reform that has been going on for at least twenty years has now reached an impasse.
B] The central issue of the aims of education in our society has been avoided to the detriment of coherence in the reform programme.
C] Work is central to education and to educational reform and employers need to make their contribution.

This last point seems to make the solution to education problems one that has to be solved outside education, but I will argue that this is not so. Rather, the relationship between vocational education, employers and the labour market needs to be addressed and further school improvement depends to a large extent on the satisfactory resolution of this relationship.

ENGLAND AS A TEST-BED FOR STATE-DIRECTED EDUCATIONAL REFORM

I have already suggested that there is a general aim of education, to prepare young people for life. But of course that general formulation begs a number of questions about educational aims which clamour for an answer:

1. *What kind of life and for whom?*
2. *What if different aims conflict with each other?*
3. *Even if they don't, how should we prioritise aims in their order of importance?*

To take the first, do we expect everyone to be prepared for the same kind of life, or are different kinds of lives appropriate to different kinds of people? The answer given by Plato and his successors has almost invariably been that education properly so called is a preparation for leisure, contemplation and governorship of the society. Such an education is only appropriate to the small élite who are capable of benefiting from it. For those destined to work, either as peasants, tradespeople or slaves, some kind of basic vocational training is necessary. The objection is, of course, that such a basic education would not enable people to become informed citizens in a democratic society. Nevertheless, the idea that different forms of education are appropriate to different kinds of people is still a significant undercurrent in contemporary thinking. It is rarely articulated explicitly because to do so exposes painful fault lines in our society which we do not really want to talk about in too much detail.

To take the second, the aim of developing a ruling élite and that of a subservient worker class are incompatible if applied to the same group of individuals. In order for both aims to coexist they have to be applied to different groups. To take another example, one cannot easily prepare the same person both for a life of leisure and personal cultivation and, at the same time, prepare that person for a working life. Difficult choices have to be made and one of these objectives has to yield to the other. A solution can obviously be found through prioritisation: both these aims are compatible if they are jointly pursued with respect to the same individuals, with one of them assuming priority. But one cannot escape the further question 'Which of the two is most important?' Conflict may well arise between those who say that personal cultivation is the most important goal and those who say that being an effective and fulfilled worker is. We can therefore see that the aims that a society adopts for its education system may be highly contestable and a source of much potential conflict. One possible solution is to be bland, an approach favoured in England. Here are the aims of the School Curriculum enshrined after (apparently) a debate in1999. As far as I know this is the second time (the first was in 1988) that such aims have been put in a statutory instrument.

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

For very understandable reasons these aims have been written in order to avoid controversy. However, they don't address the issue of what education is for. This is simply a question that cannot be ignored. If it isn't addressed explicitly by the society, it will be addressed in the day to day practice of that society: in schools, homes and workplaces. Even the production of explicit aims cannot guarantee that they will be adopted in practice. But without them, one can be sure that the 'default' norm of assumptions, values and practices within the society will continue to express the *de facto* aims of education in a largely implicit way.

Aims of education are thus unavoidable. But what should we do about them? Are they a necessary tool or a painful running sore? The English experience suggests that official explicit reflection on the aims of education that ignores taboos is too painful to be contemplated. Such reflection would very rapidly expose fault lines within the society. Much the easier option is to continue with the implicit default norm and to seek to subtly change public opinion through 'kite flying' or putting up ideas that one hopes will seep into the bloodstream of the society. As an example, I will draw your attention to what recent legislative proposals concerning the reform of 14-19 education are designed to do.

1. Tackle our low post-16 participation. We want participation at age 17 to increase from 75% to 90% over the next 10 years;
2. Ensure that every young person has a sound grounding in the basics of English and maths and the skills they need for employment;
3. Provide better vocational routes which equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need for further learning and employment;
4. Stretch all young people; and
5. Re-engage the disaffected. (DfES 2005, p.5).

These five aspirations tell us a great deal about how successive recent governments have viewed the purposes of the education system in England. 2. and 3. tell us that entry into employment is a key aim of education at this phase. 1. is concerned with moving more young people into vocational education rather than straight into the labour market as a preliminary to later entry onto the labour market, including the 11% of the age cohort who are NEET (not in employment, education or training). These are a major segment of 'the disaffected' referred to in aim 5. Aim 4. refers to the boredom of young people and the low expectations that are often had of them within our education system. These aspirations tell us far more about what successive governments think they want from the education system than do the official aims of school education. One telling omission is any reference to the *quality* of employment into which young people are supposed to be going. The aspirations set out above are rather modest, to put it kindly. Young people are to go into work and they need to be equipped for that. But the question of what kind of equipment for what kind of work is left unanswered.

However, the picture is more complicated because such stated aims may be difficult to achieve given other political imperatives and, in particular, the ever-present political need to attend to powerful interests within the polity. The achievement of aims requires that the appropriate conditions obtain for those aims to be realised. This can often be difficult.

Often one of the most important implicit aims of any education system is to maintain existing social structures and, consequently, relative inequalities, particularly of wealth and income. It is much easier to debate educational aims in relatively homogenous societies as the social structure is a less contentious matter. But if debates about educational aims are painful when conducted in such a way as to probe the divisions within a society, maybe there are ways to address those divisions through educational reform that can avoid the painful divisions. It may be possible to do this by emphasising neglected aims in the broader context of necessary reforms, particularly those to do with citizenship in a democratic society and the changing nature of economic activity. But don’t underestimate the difficulty when powerful and entrenched interests are involved. The thesis that I want to develop concerns the limits of educational reform and how much can be achieved through a certain kind of change within the school system. I will use England as a case study of such reforms and try and show their limits, going on to suggest how educational reforms beyond the school system may bring further progress, but at the risk of upsetting powerful interests.

By the standards of Western Europe, England traditionally ran a low skill economy. It needed a political and administrative elite, scientists, professional, technical and clerical workers. Up until the 1960s those needs could be met by providing an academic education up to the age of 16 and, for a much smaller group, further and higher education beyond that. The remaining four fifths of the population were largely destined for semi-skilled and unskilled work, a small minority becoming apprentices in traditional skilled trades and crafts. It is fair to say that, for most of them, their time in school was more of a form of warehousing prior to labour market entry than it was education in a meaningful sense, despite the heroic work of many teachers in the secondary modern schools. By the 1960s it had become abundantly clear both that the electorate would no longer tolerate such electoral apartheid, but also that our education system had become a poor performer compared with those of some of its European neighbours. Slowly but surely a reform process began to get under way. It is thus worth using England as a starting point for thinking about educational reform issues for a number for reasons. Bear in mind, though, that some of the lessons are general ones and some are more particular. I wish to concentrate on the points of general application. But, before I do so, it will be helpful to draw to your attention the educational situation pre-1988 in England and the political philosophy that underlay, and continues to underlie, those reforms.

ENGLISH EDUCATION PRIOR TO 1988

i. There were no explicit aims for the education system.
ii. De facto curriculum control rested in the hands of schools and teachers.

iii. There was no universal mandatory testing of pupil achievement, either formative or summative.
iv. There was no universal inspection.
v. Teacher education had just begun to be lightly regulated.

It can easily be seen, therefore, that the country had a remarkably decentralised and unregulated education system despite the fact that the UK has a very strong state. This had arisen because successive governments had consciously decided to minimise state involvement in education. England was one of the last of the northern European countries to develop a state education system and did so with reluctance. The influence of both Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, with their minimalist ideas about state intervention in education, continued to exercise a dominant influence over the society (although it could be argued that, taken to their logical conclusions, their liberal philosophies of education had the potential for very vigorous state intervention in the education system).

ENGLISH EDUCATION AFTER 1988 AND THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF THAT YEAR

It is worth mentioning that from 1987 onwards, education has been a major theme for reform that has been mentioned by politicians as a central plank of their programmes. Tony Blair, when asked in 1996 to identify his priorities, replied, ‘Education, education, education’. The main impulse behind this was largely to address perceived problems of economic competitiveness, which turns out to be rather ironic when we come to consider the labour market policies of the successive Blair governments.

- ***The National Curriculum:*** a detailed prescription of the curriculum from the ages of 4 until 16 across nine subjects. There have since been changes in a more permissive direction, particularly after the age of 14.

- ***National testing and published attainment tables:*** at 7, 11, 14 and 16. The amount of testing has since been reduced, but national tables of attainment are still published and have considerable political influence.
- ***Inspection:*** after 1992, a semi-private inspection regime was installed, which visited every school every four years and the results of these inspections were published. It was possible for schools to be deemed to offer an unsatisfactory education and to be put into 'special measures' and, if these failed, to be closed. This harsh regime has been modified somewhat in the intervening years. This regime is also applied rigorously to teacher education institutions. In addition, this approach has been increasingly supplemented with the use of pupil level data with which to analyse the expected outcomes of children in different categories, so that inspectors and the schools themselves can assess school outcomes against expectations generated through the use of statistical techniques.
- ***Strategies:*** to increase student achievement. There have been four broad strategies, three of them centralising in their assumptions, the other one decentralising. These diverging strategies sit rather uneasily with each other.

TESTING

National testing allowed trends in achievement to be monitored. With the installation of the Labour government of 1997, target-setting became a major policy instrument across a range of public services, including education. Thus persistent shortcomings in achievement in literacy and numeracy in particular, led to the development of explicit targets for these subjects and science, particularly at Key Stage 2 (age 11) and the development of strategies which it was the presumption that teachers should follow, unless they had overwhelmingly good reasons not to. These strategies were meant to address shortcomings in teachers' initial and continuing professional education which were perceived to be serious, despite reform that dated from 1983 at least. These strategies have now been extended into Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4.

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS TECHNOLOGY

The second concerns, the rise of the technology of 'school effectiveness', which aims to assess student progress against contextual factors and to identify the characteristics of effective schools.

From the 1980s onwards, academics in several countries, notably the UK, Holland and the US, developed a technology of school effectiveness, which after 1997 came to have a profound effect on national policies for improving school performance. This technology was based on one important normative assumption, that the key indicator of a school's success was in high levels of achievement in the academic curriculum, as measured through testing. The fundamental methodological assumption was to adopt a measure of *progress* rather than of *achievement* in order to measure that success. A further assumption was the adoption of a working hypothesis that there was a 'school effect', that the particular school a pupil attended could affect his or her expected progress either positively or adversely. Progress measures were to be contextualised to take account of the social composition of the school's intake. This programme led to the development of regression equations which made it possible [a] to plot prior and posterior achievement scores [b] to construct a regression line allowing comparison of measured schools on a progress measure [c] to rank order schools according to contextualised progress [d] to identify the independent variables responsible for progress or the lack of it.

NATIONAL PEDAGOGIC STRATEGIES

Concern over slow progress is raising achievement in the key areas of literacy and numeracy led, in 1997, to the implementation of a national literacy and a national numeracy strategy which, purporting to make use of the best pedagogical research in these areas, proposed detailed prescription of lessons to be undertaken for an hour a day in these subjects, initially in the primary phase. It was evident that the government had little faith in the ability and/or the willingness of teachers to make an effective contribution in these areas without considerable assistance. In the space of nine years the English school system had thus passed from one in which teachers had *de facto* control of curriculum and pedagogy, to one in which their lessons in two important areas were laid down virtually minute by minute.

MARKETS AND DIVERSITY IN SCHOOL PROVISION

The fourth of these strategies is concerned with increasing the diversity of schooling, particularly at the secondary level. This strategy has been designed partly to break the monopoly of the state education system, partly to cater for the diverse needs and interests of children beyond the age of 11, and particularly of age 14 and partly to find ways of extra funding for schools in 'deprived' areas. Thus there have been City Technology Colleges with private sponsors, specialist schools with limited additional funding for academic specialisms and the Academy programme, which involves modest private sponsorship in return for a very considerable control of the day to day running of the school, which will receive considerable funds for starting up. Alongside the strategy of diversity has been developed much enhanced parental choice of school, which has tended to accentuate the class polarisation of pupils within schools. Free choice in school places tends to favour those parents who have both the desire and the knowledge of how to place their children in schools with middle class parents. Such actions reflect a reality which the school effectiveness research programme makes clear, that both achievement and progress are closely associated with the social class composition of the school intake (Gorard 2005).

There is considerable tension between the micromanagement and the market strategies. The former involve detailed intervention in the workings of the school using tools developed by the government. The latter involve devolving power from the government to the school particularly in respect to whether the National Curriculum needs to be rigorously followed. It is far from clear that running two such strategies together is really coherent.

The progress to date that results from such measures is modest, but at least measurable. The National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy have, until 2005, yielded approximately 1.5% cumulative annual increases in pupil target achievement in meeting basic functional standards of literary and numeracy over a 9 year period. There are signs, however, that the limits of these strategies have now been reached and that this progress has now become stalled.[1]

Approximately 20% of 11-year olds failed to reach Level 4 in the English National Curriculum in 2005, which requires that they should "show understanding of significant ideas, themes, events and characters, beginning to use inference and deduction. They should refer to the text when explaining their views. They locate and use ideas and information". It should be noted that the chances of progressing beyond level 4 if it has not been attained at age 11 are not good.

Current government statistics on the achievement of Level 6 in Key Stage 3 in 2005 assessment of Mathematics, which is below the basic level of simple algebraic competence, is 52% for all pupils at age 14 (53% teacher assessment, 51% test assessment) (DfES 2005).

These figures for the education system of one of the wealthiest countries in the world, achieved after 17 years of sustained educational reform focussed on increasing achievement, are extraordinary. They suggest that endogenous school-focused educational reform has its limits and that there is a need to consider external factors that may have an impact on achieving enhanced performance against benchmark standards, and also possibly that many of the reforms are misconceived or poorly implemented, particularly those that seem to be in tension with one another. Unless we make the assumption that there is a genetically based limitation in our population that is a natural bar to further progress, we must assume that improvement is, in principle possible and that it can be achieved through collective action. In what follows, I will identify what are the most important of these factors and how they can be addressed. Before I do so, however, I would like to suggest that there are three aspects of our humanity that need to be addressed before progress can be made. One of the problems with the English system is that not all of these are not adequately addressed.

DIFFERENT FACETS OF EDUCATION

In what follows, I look at three different aspects of education, which of course, have considerable overlap with each other (which is also my main point). I suggest that education needs to address at least three important aspects of our humanity.

Human beings as individuals, with their own interests and needs. We need to address their acquaintance with their own culture, their spiritual, personal, moral and social interests and their desire to forge their own destiny. Traditionally the English education system has always recognised this, but in a way that presupposes that the human being in question is a member of the aristocracy or the gentry rather than a citizen and worker (see below).

Human beings as citizens. Here we are concerned, not merely with citizens as voters, or even as political activists, but as participants in the civil society of their country, whose sphere of interest and operation extends beyond the confines of family life into churches, clubs, associations, trade unions, charities and businesses.

Finally, there is the category to which I want to devote most attention, although it should be obvious that the fate of the worker is tied up with that of the individual and the citizen.

Human beings as workers. Economic activity is not merely an economic, but an action category and should certainly include paid employment but also activity such as raising a family, that contributes to the maintenance and improvement of a society's productive potential. This clearly includes work that is in the 'public sector' such as teaching, medicine and even religion which is not directly connected with the production of goods and services. There is clearly an overlap between humans as citizens and as workers. The most striking manifestation of this, however, is that of employee self-governance or industrial democracy, a development anticipated by John Stuart Mill in his 'Principles of Political Economy' in 1848 but which has only really flourished in Germany in the system of 'Mitbestimmung' or co-determination, in which workers in enterprises of over 2,000 employees have an equal say in the governance of their businesses. This has also been an economic success and it is now envisaged that Mitbestimmung may be extended into firms of up to 1000 employees. Note though that this is a unique development with strong cultural and historical roots in German society.

I am going to suggest that the key to future reform, once the limits of strategies such as the one outlined above have been exhausted, lies in labour market reform and in education post school, both the compulsory and the non-compulsory elements. Why is this the case? We need, I would suggest, first of all to look at education from the point of view of parents and their children at the very least as a starting point. Rightly or wrongly, the idea that education is going to prepare them to be workers is very prominent in their thinking. For example, the commission on education in England found that:

> *"The vast majority (sc. of children) believed that schools should help them to do as well as possible in their exams and teach them things that would be useful when they entered jobs" (National Commission on Education 1993, p.151).*

Such sentiments may seem unwelcome to those reared on the aristocratic conception of education favoured by the élites of countries like England but they are, nevertheless highly significant for those concerned with educational quality and accountability. I would suggest that they are also views shared by the vast majority of parents. What they tell us is that the dominant conception of education held by the vast majority of the population who have to enter compulsory education is that in which human beings as workers is dominant. Their view of quality is thus dominated by how effective education is for their entry into economic activity. Clearly also, in a public education system they are an important constituency to whom accountability has to be rendered. This view is partly a reflection of reality; people recognise that they are going to have to participate in paid employment and that education could have a bearing on what employment they are going to take up. Consequently, we can expect them to take a view of the importance of education which is strongly dependent on how well they think that it achieves such an aim. Rightly or wrongly then, many people attach more importance to the preparation of people as workers than they do to their preparation as citizens and individuals, supposing no doubt, that such things can take care of themselves without much contribution from formal education. It is an important corollary of this position that in those communities in which the view is taken that education does not contribute to employability, the view may also be taken that it is of little or no value at all.

Now it may well be the case that such views are limited in certain ways. For example, parents and children may well only think about the job opportunities that education may lead to, in the sense of getting paid, although I personally think that that is a somewhat patronising view of what they think. Nevertheless, taking the views of education that parents and children seriously and trying to at least combine them with the views of other influential interests to develop a consensus of some kind, seems to be both an equitable and a sensible strategy.

Once we look at educational reform through this prism, the picture looks interesting and also, I would argue, gives us an insight into why school-based endogenous reform may reach limits, even within a wealthy and developed society such as the UK. One thing that we know about the UK economy is that is largely what is known as a 'low skill equilibrium', which is to say that the dominant mode of exchange is of low specification and low quality goods and services to low paid, low-skilled workers (Ashton and Green 1996, Keep 2006, Coffield 2004). Indeed the UK government often takes pride in this, lauding a 'flexible' economy in which formal training is minimal and where hiring and firing are easy and unregulated. The government's own figures for projected increases in skill demand (DfES 2003) forecast little or no increase in demand for level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications (roughly 11, 16 and 18 year old school achievement respectively), while forecasting some increase in the demand for higher education and a declining but still substantial demand for unskilled labour. There is also evidence that relatively few of those who attain level 2 vocational qualifications, rather than level 2 academic qualifications progress to level 3 vocational qualifications (Hayward 2005, Keep 2006) and that the economic returns on vocational level 2 qualifications are zero or even negative (Keep 2006).

In a high-skill equilibrium, by contrast, represented by Japan and most of the countries of northern Europe (the US is thought by some commentators to be a mix of low and high skill segments), goods and services of high quality and specification made by highly skilled workers are bought by highly paid and discerning consumers. It is important to stress that both high and low-skill routes can lead to economic success in terms of employment and GDP growth, although they each have their dangers. However, by its nature, the low skill option is going to require much smaller educational inputs than the high skill one. Let us now look at what this means to the parent and child in a group that traditionally have entered low-skill employment.

Their experience of schooling has largely been that it is unnecessary to excel in order to become economically active. The structure of the UK economy gives them little reason to suppose that this situation has changed or is about to change drastically in the near future, although there are signs that migration from Eastern Europe will change this picture. They also know that the returns on school exit qualifications are low. Consider someone leaving at 16 with sub level 2 qualifications, who is considering acquiring level 2 vocational qualifications. They also have to consider deferred wages and, post 18, the considerable deferred costs of undertaking higher education. We also need to factor in peer pressure, reluctance to move from one's community and a desire not to break a settled pattern of life. Putting all this together, it is not difficult to see why a very large section of the population does not judge that it is getting an adequate return from school-based public education.

It isn't really helpful to respond that parents and their children *ought* to like education more. They look at the benefits of education in a certain way and draw their own conclusions. Furthermore, successive governments have *encouraged* them to think of education primarily in terms of economic benefit and lifetime earning power. A particularly striking example of this has been the introduction of higher fees for students in higher education, premised on the human capital idea that the fees paid initially will be more than remunerated by a lifetime earnings premium. What then, if you encourage young people to pay more attention to their education and they find that getting more education does not really help them economically, because of the way in which the British economy is structured? This is a very dangerous strategy as it looks like a piece of trickery; young people are being asked to do something for a reward that is not forthcoming. And it won't take very long for them to realise that they are being tricked.

'But surely', one might reply, 'if one enhances the education and the skills of the population and increases the supply of employment relevant skills, that supply will generate its own demand?' This has been the premise of VET policy in England for many years now, but there is no evidence that increasing supply generates demand on its own. Employers need to demand skills and then prospective workers will demand them in order to fill job vacancies. Potential workers won't demand skills unless employers want them. For them, a huge risk is involved, which they will only take if the rewards are adequate. Indeed, in some respects, the British government itself encourages employees to think in this way.

I have argued that the low skill strategy of employers in England is a rational if rather narrow-minded one; they are in an equilibrium with their employees and their customers. For them, there could be risks in moving out of that equilibrium if other players do not also do so. Of course, there are risks in running an economy as a low-skill equilibrium since countries such as India might be able to compete not only on price, but also on skill, thus threatening even those activities which require a considerable level of education. However, much of the British economy is locally and regionally based and involves the exchange of services on a local and regional level. These cannot be outsourced to other countries. Such is the demand for low skill work that British employers are happy to engage workers from Eastern Europe, often at minimum wage levels, in order to fulfil that demand. The conclusion that I, and many other commentators draw from this is that employers have no individual or collective economic interest in making any dramatic and considerable shifts in skill demand in the medium future and that consequently they will not do so.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM BEFORE SOLVING IT

Before we can propose a solution, we must first define the problem, and this is not as easy as it might seem. Employers in general do not have a problem with the levels of education and skills available in the British workforce, although they often claim that they do. Neither do young people in general have such a thirst for either general and vocational education that they are clamouring for more of it. Indeed, as Hayward has shown, if anything, there is a decline in demand for vocational education amongst that 58% or so of the population who are not moving on to matriculation for higher education. Something like 11% of the 16-18 age group are classified as NEET (not in employment, education or training), which means that, of the 58% or so not going on a higher education track, that figure is nearer 20%. This is a truly devastating indictment of a failure in aspiration in a wealthy and developed country that has ambitions to educate its population to higher levels.

The people who really see the difficulty in raising levels of educational achievement are the government and politicians more generally, who have hitched their star to ever increasing performance as a way of enhancing social inclusion and increasing international competitiveness. Their views, however, are not shared by the bulk of the population or employers (despite lip service that the latter often pay to the benefits of enhanced education) – as the Bible says, ‘By their deeds shall ye know them’ and their deeds tell us most of what we need to know about what they consider to be important.

I think that low levels of educational achievement do matter, and I think this primarily as a private citizen of my country. My reasons are as follows:

- poor levels of educational achievement perpetuate the relative social inequality which is a scourge of our society.
- With poor education, people's lives are impoverished culturally and intellectually.
- Poor education is associated with insecure, badly paid and uninteresting employment
- Poor levels of educational achievement compromise the workings of our democracy
- In the longer term, low levels of educational achievement and skill will compromise the prosperity and security of our country.

These five reasons are good enough and I guess that they will be relevant to most societies. So what is to be done?

The place to start is with employer demand for education and skills. There is ample evidence to suggest that this won't arise as a result of the spontaneous operation of market forces, for reasons already suggested. This leaves government with the major responsibility. Governments can create a climate in which it is in employers' interests to demand higher levels of skill from their workforce. Once young people know this, we may begin to get incentives in place for getting better educated.

One mode of generating employer demand is *hortatory*: government exhorts employers to demand more skills. This has been tried with limited success.

Another method is *persuasion*, by encouraging employers to work together with government agencies to work up a demand for more skills. Again, this approach has had limited success.

Another method is *financial*, through subsidising employer-based apprenticeships. This has been operating for about 15 years through the Modern Apprenticeship scheme, again with limited success, particularly in those sectors of the economy which have not traditionally taken on apprentices.

The final method is *regulatory*. This involves using legislative or executive instruments to either encourage or to compel employers to demand qualifications. The first of these instruments is the *license to practice*. Licenses to practise are a key characteristic of those occupations that we call professions, such as medicine or the law. Typically the license is only awarded on the achievement of a certain level of professional educational qualification. One also finds it with safety critical occupations such as gas fitting. One option would be to progressively extend the license to practice to a wider range of occupations. A more radical option would be to specify an educational threshold to be achieved before one can enter the labour market. Such a measure would bear directly on both employers and potential employees as a direct incentive to achieve threshold levels of general education.

Interestingly enough, a thinker most associated with keeping the State out of employers' business, Adam Smith, proposed just such a thing in Book V of 'The Wealth of Nations', published in 1776. He proposed that, in order to practise as a tradesman or to be a member of a body corporate (i.e. a guild or profession), all young people should be educated to a basic minimum level in literacy and numeracy. This was not because this would help them with employment, but for civic reasons. Young people with a general education will be less inclined to sedition than they would otherwise.

> "They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, on that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government."[2]

Thus for Smith, the main justification for the labour market license to practise is civic rather than vocational. Indeed, and notoriously, Smith's vision of work in an industrial society was unremittingly bleak. Fragmentation of the labour process, while highly productive, has a devastating effect on the cognitive abilities of those who submit to it. Again, to quote from the *Wealth of Nations*:

> "The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become."[3]

So Smith's economic vision was of a society in which there were a few inventors and a stratum of manager-owners and foremen who supervised the line along which products passed in the course of their manufacture. In other words, it is a vision of a highly efficient low-skill economy. One of the striking features of Smith's vision is the dissonance between the civic and the economic aspects of humanity. At work, one is expected to be a moron; as a citizen however, one should be alert to and critical of the ranting of revolutionary demagogues. This vision seems to be skewed. Human beings may be citizens as well as workers, but the two aspects of their lives cannot be compartmentalised in this way. An alert citizen is likely to take an interest in the workplace, to demand independence and responsibility for the work he carries out and even to claim some role in the governance of his firm or organisation, even if it is through membership of a trade union rather than a seat on the board. Had it ever been put into effect, Smith's general license to practise would have had far-reaching consequences in English society which he would have found, in the main, most undesirable.

Such a generalised license to practise would politically impossible to achieve in the short term. The main alternative is to introduce occupational licenses to practise so that only a properly qualified workforce can enter the labour market. This gives employers an immediate incentive to contribute to vocational education and to ensure that it is working properly in order to secure a steady supply of labour. Young people likewise are given an incentive from their schooldays onwards to work towards school exit qualifications that will qualify them for apprenticeships or college courses. If the state also makes a financial contribution to such programmes, then it too will be able to demand continuing elements of general and civic education as part of these vocational programmes. Perhaps most important for the school system, minimum requirements for literacy and numeracy for the entry onto vocational programmes will provide a powerful incentive for students to improve their individual performance. This time, though, they will know that becoming literate and numerate will actually prepare them for jobs. The major problem with such a programme of course, is that employers would vigorously resist any such attempt to interfere with their power to hire and fire workers at will and to employ the skill strategy that they feel best suits the market conditions in which they operate. With governments such as those in the UK, it is inconceivable that employers would ever be challenged in such a way.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEVIES

The other regulatory approach is through *training levies* within a particular economic sector. Firms are charged a levy for training new entrants to the occupations within the sector. They recoup this levy by drawing from it to train their employees. This again provides a powerful incentive to train as the costs of training are already sunk through the levy. Once again, however, employers have tended to resist levy schemes and they have all but disappeared in the last fifteen years.

CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Social class is officially defined by economic status in the labour market. But the official classification hides the cultural reality behind the classifications: the aspirations, the inequality, the poor life chances. This is a universal phenomenon. In every society, people measure their worth according to how they stand relative to other people and they pitch their expectations according to what they think are their chances in life. The degree of relative inequality that exists within a society has an effect on life expectancy, health, criminal behaviour and educational outcomes.[4] A large gap between the skilled and the unskilled is both symptomatic of and a continuing causal factor in the reproduction of such social inequalities. Increasing skill levels and reducing relative inequalities is thus a social good, whatever one thinks about its economic benefits strictly conceived. In addition, skilled work usually implies flatter management hierarchies, more room for independence of judgement and action, not to mention teamwork, within the workplace. These are all factors that contribute to an increase in the quality of life. Where societies' own expectations of its future workforce are low, that future workforce will respond in kind. They won't in the end, be fooled by conflicting signals that 'education is good for you' if the message from the workplace continues to say otherwise.

We all know that, from the 1960s sociologists were fond of saying that class was the main determinant of educational success. The school effectiveness movement that appeared at the end of the 1970s arose partly to oppose such pessimism and cynicism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the regression-based models that the movement developed sought to identify the characteristics of effective schools and the associated school improvement technology sought to put those lessons into effect. By 1997, the school effectiveness/school improvement paradigm had captured Downing Street and formed the basis of the various strategies that were employed to improve schooling in lower class areas. Despite all the disclaimers that there were poor schools in well-off areas and good schools in poor areas, it remains a stubborn fact that poor school achievement remains mainly rooted in lower class areas. This is so despite the use of progress 'value-added' measures rather than exit achievement scores.

I would first, however, like to make three observations about value-added methodology. The measure of progress for each individual pupil is subject to statistical error. At the aggregated level, measures of progress can only be accepted within a wide 95% confidence interval. It was known, as early as 1988, that these confidence intervals overlap to such a degree that one can only say, with security, that the highest achieving 20% of schools perform discernibly better than the lowest 20%. It is therefore highly misleading to compare schools within the mainstream 60% with each other on progress measures. Secondly, because value-added methodology makes use of background variables such as prior achievement and a proxy measure for social class in order to adjust scores, the so-called 'school effect' : that is to say, the difference that being a good school makes to pupil progress, is quite small, less than 10%. This is not negligible in terms of the effect that it has on the life chances of thousands of individual pupils, but it is clear that the school effect is limited, even according to the technologists of school improvement. Finally, progress measures are computed through the cohort comparison of schools. They are thus *relative* measures, not measures of what a school is theoretically capable of. It might be said that such measures can tell us the performance of schools relative to each other, they cannot, however, tell us what schools might be capable of in optimum conditions.

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS – AN IMPASSE?

Unfortunately, there is worse news concerning school effectiveness, recently pointed out by Stephen Gorard. The point is a simple one. It is generally accepted that the main determinant of progress, alongside social class is prior educational achievement. That is, the more that you have already achieved educationally speaking, the better your chances of progressing. But of course prior achievement is embedded in its own set of causal and background factors. And since prior achievement is itself an effect of prior educational progress, it should be evident that it cannot be considered in isolation. In fact, as we already know, prior achievement is heavily dependent on the social class of students. This means that one of the main independent variables that determine progress is confounded. It itself heavily involves the other main factor, namely social class. School effectiveness methodology then seems to be measuring, to a more considerable degree than was realised, the effects of social class on progress, working their way through seemingly independent variables. Gorard's own (2005) analysis of the government's own figures bears this view out, showing that 71% of the variation between schools in value added can be accounted for in terms of prior achievement at KS2 at age 11. These tables show progress between the ages of 11 and 16. There is a correlation of 84% between raw achievement scores at age 16 and progress between 11 and 16. There are no mid to low attaining schools with high value added scores, and all schools with a benchmark 16 year old score of 40% or less are deemed to be achieving less than the norm in value added terms. Gorard argues that the value added scores, like the exit achievement ones that they are designed to replace, are largely proxies for the effect of social class on educational achievement.

This observation is, I think, an apparent blow to the dominant school effectiveness research paradigm which shows once again, what the sociologists of the 1960s claimed, that social class is an enormously important determinant of educational success. I hope that I have given some reasons for showing why that is so. Does this mean that there is no such thing as a 'school effect'? I don't actually think so, but I accept that school effectiveness methodology has now reached an impasse.[5] It is a good way of getting some basic preliminary information about systemic functioning, and, at the school level, can serve as an indicator of likely problems. But it cannot give us valid information about the effectiveness of particular schools.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

It looks as if the limits of systemic reform of the state school system in England may have been reached. But the lesson is, perhaps, a more general one. There comes a point at which the realities of social class and the demands of the labour market set external limits to continuing educational progress. Further progress is possible through a revival of the post -16 vocational education system, but this can only be realistically achieved through an expansion of demand in the labour market for young people. The evidence of the post war years suggests that the economic strategies and attitudes adopted by the country's employers are not likely to change through exhortation, persuasion or financial incentive. The answer has to involve some kind of regulation to raise the expectations of employers. This may be a step too far for any imaginable future British government, but it is the price that will need to be paid in order to achieve future progress, let alone any reduction in the social class related relative inequalities that pervade educational outcomes and the consequent relative income inequalities that result.

Educational reform needs to go together with economic and social reform. In particular, relative inequality needs to be addressed and, as a complementary strategy, a high-skill equilibrium needs to be developed through state-initiated development of the labour market and the economic environment. The main target of educational reform should, then, be in vocational education for the 16-19 group and it needs to deal with the exogenous factors that affect the take-up of educational opportunities. School-focused educational reform can, on its own, make limited progress, but remains in danger of being undone by exogenous factors and will almost certainly be limited by them.

CONCLUSION

So what can we usefully say about the enormous natural experiment that the reform of the English education system has been over the last 20 years? I would like to draw out a few lessons and bring together the main themes of this lecture. No doubt my audience will draw their own conclusions in relation to India, but I hope that the themes that I have addressed bear some passing relevance to the Indian situation.

The first point that I want to make is that educational reform cannot avoid the big question of what education is for. We cannot address change in a national education system unless we get to grips with this issue. Admittedly to do so poses political dangers, but I would suggest that this is one area in which political parties need to do some work together in order to avoid such very important discussions fragmenting along narrow party political lines. Failure to do so leads to the default aims implicit in the education system continuing to assert themselves, thus tending to reproduce the very problems that reform was designed to address.

The second point is that in addressing such issues we need to consider all the important aspects of our humanity and their relationships with each other. We cannot just consider humans as workers or as individuals or as citizens, but as people whose lives encompass at least all three of these aspects, ideally in such a way that each enhances the other. We have seen, in the English case, a fundamental failure to address what was the unstated central aim of educational reform, namely the preparation of the population to become more knowledgeable, engaged and highly skilled workers.

The third point is that educational reform is unlikely to succeed if it is conceived of as solely a matter of making the existing mechanisms for teaching and learning more effective. The place of education in its social, economic and political environment needs to be taken into account and the necessary changes to that environment need to be made in order to secure educational reform. This all goes back to the point made earlier about the need to engage all the interests in the society in the process of reform.

Finally, it may well be the case that, when all else fails, political courage is needed to confront powerful interests whose perception of what is best for them continues to be at odds with what most consider to be the public interest. In such circumstances, political conflict may be an unavoidable preliminary of educational reform. But if the reform is necessary and well thought through then, in the end, it will come to be accepted. The German law of 1976, which extended industrial democracy through a broad reach of German businesses, thus enhancing the role of worker as citizen, aroused the fierce resistance of the Christian Democrats, then the opposition party and large sections of business. So much so, that the legislation was challenged in the constitutional court before it was implemented. Now however it is largely accepted as successful, both in economic and social terms, so much so that there is talk of extending its provisions to smaller firms by the Christian Democrats themselves. Political courage and determination, harnessed in the cause of what one believes to be right are sometimes necessary ingredients of reform, including educational reform.

I imagine that “Gandhi would have been unhappy about many aspects of the rapid economic development of his country. It seems to me, though, that his insight that we have to keep in mind the central role of a citizen as a producer, who manifests a significant part of his humanity, and indeed, his spirituality, through work is one that needs to be cherished, perhaps all the more so in a situation of rapid economic change in which all kinds of temptations to ignore considerations that are not strictly economic become almost overwhelming”. I think that this is one of the most important lessons that the story of recent English educational reforms has to tell us.

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1 See the latest statistical release from the DfES, http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000673/index.shtml, consulted 23/11/06.

2 Smith op.cit. Bk 2, p.788.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Richard Wilkinson (2005) *The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier*, London, Routledge.

5 However, this result depends on how value-added is calculated. See J. Foreman-Peck and L. Foreman-Peck (2006) 'Cognitive Achievement and Behaviour in School', forthcoming, in the way in which quite radically different results can be obtained depending on one's assumptions is made clear.

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