

# The Social and Historical Constraints on Curriculum Development in C.D.T.

Anxiety about how effectively we prepare the rising generation for adult life represents, in part, a profound concern for social and economic survival. The recent 'Education for Capability' manifesto expressed such a concern, particularly for Britain's economic performance. But underlying the perceived need to launch this manifesto are deeply rooted and pervasive forces which bind together the very fabric of our society and which the curriculum developer, particularly in CDT, cannot afford to ignore.

The manifesto was signed by a large number of eminent academics, industrialists, politicians and trades union leaders, and was published widely in the national press. Linking education and training as two elements of a single process, it argued that, in Britain the process was imbalanced, looking towards insular, scholarly and specialised forms of *understanding*, rather than towards *action* in the real world. The imbalance was felt to be harmful to individuals, industry and society. It was rooted in two cultures – the arts and the sciences – and paid little heed to a third culture, recognised widely abroad. Whereas the two cultures of arts and sciences point to particular ways of understanding and interpreting the natural and man-made world, the third culture was concerned with shaping it, with doing, making and organising it. It asserted that individuals and the nation would benefit from a redressing of the balance towards this third culture and an 'Education for Capability'.

English, indeed western, educational history has been shot through with similar exhortations since industrialisation. They have more often than not been society-centred, propelled by one or more of the following motives:

the spread of technical skill and efficiency in a manufacturing population competing internationally for markets; the generation of a high degree of personal discipline compatible with the subtle structures of advanced industrial society; 'character training'; and not least, the reduction of crime and unemployment.

Social needs have not had a monopoly, however, and some expressions have clearly been broader and more person-centred. For example Dewey believed in the balance of individual and social needs in the education of children and Whitehead argued that in modern society the 'antithesis between technical and liberal education is fallacious... there are three main methods which are required in a national system of education, namely, the literary curriculum, the scientific curriculum, the technical curriculum'.<sup>1</sup>

Despite a broad and often distinguished philosophical pedigree, however, the 'capability' manifesto of 1980 is a salutary comment on the low impact of its predecessors. Without getting involved in the epistemological foundations of postulating a third culture, which have been outlined in some detail by Archer,<sup>2</sup> an attempt will be made to tease

out the underlying forces at play. This paper is therefore concerned with the relationship between schooling and society, the deep structure of English society and historical aspects of the curriculum.

The relationship between schooling and society is complex. In the development of English curricula in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in most instances of change, the links between theory and practice were tenuous. Most decisions seem to have been made pragmatically, pushed on the tide of deeper technological, ideological and epistemological forces, and revealing a marked lag between social pressure for change and actual change in schools. This must be interpreted in the light of our decentralised education system and our pluralistic definitions of social need.

Benjamin<sup>3</sup> has satirised this mismatch between society and its schooling. He portrayed a prehistoric tribe which had developed systematic schooling to teach its children how to survive in the real and dangerous world. 'Saber-tooth-tiger-scaring with fire', 'woolly-horse-clubbing', and 'fish-grabbing-with-bare-hands' formed the highly practical and socially useful core curriculum, demonstrating a tight correspondence between schooling and society. Time passed, and the tribe prospered on the fruits of its efficient schooling. But the world changed, alas, and soon it was no longer possible or necessary to perform these three hunting functions in order to survive. New survival techniques were developed and before long thoughtful and radical tribe members tried to bring them into the systematic school curriculum. They failed; solidly opposing elders and teachers ordained that schooling should not be practical as this would be mere training, not education; subjects whose practical application had long ago dissolved, like 'woolly-horse-clubbing', had excellent generalised developmental and transfer qualities; the saber-tooth curriculum was perfect, sacred and timeless. Thus a curriculum originating in a practical need



had acquired an artificial 'educational' value and a prestigious lack of bearing on real life, whilst its protagonists basked in a smug ignorance of its vocational origins in antiquity. The parable does miss the point that as societies grow richer they can devote more resources to the cultivation of non-essential activities but Benjamin is not the only critic of the tendency of professionals to erect protective boundaries by 'mystifying' their activities.

Benjamin astutely parodies today's conditions. We live in an intensely practical and materialistic culture, confronted with a stream of design, economic and technological problems, yet, as the 'capability' manifesto claims, our curricula do not seem to match social 'needs' or reflect social pressures. If a functionalist fit between society and curriculum does not exist, it does not follow that schooling and society must necessarily be dysfunctional. There is much evidence pointing to personal autonomy in the system, tempered by deeply rooted historical forces. If developments in CDT education are to take root, it is vital that they be based on a clear analysis of such forces.

Archer, one of the signatories of the 'capability' manifesto, had written in 1975 that '... design was influenced by the impact of far-reaching social, economic and cultural changes that began during the industrial revolution ... (but Britain's) educational elite despised the words 'practical' and 'technical'. Yet the whole course of design education since 1800 has been dominated by this perverse attitude'.<sup>4</sup>

This 'perverse attitude' can be traced to the slave society of ancient Greece. Perhaps, more fundamentally, it is an inherent characteristic of post-barbarian societies: throughout history non-practical social elites have emerged as soon as a surplus of wealth has been created. It is only necessary at the moment however to trace its origins within the deep 'binary' structure of English society, with the distinctive English gentry – aristocracy clearly divided from the rest of society. Musgrove argues that English life and education have been permeated by gentry hegemony and ideology for centuries and that this has been more pervasive than the capitalist hegemony that Marxists have postulated. He pinpoints the rise of the gentry from just before the civil war when it snatched power from a weakened aristocracy. It consolidated this power, latterly by absorbing the thrust of industrial capitalism until 1919, when, in Musgrove's words 'England changed hands'. But while gentry hegemony now no longer pervades, our social and educational institutions remain saturated by its influence.<sup>5</sup>

Historians would be suspicious of such a boldly simple model, and it is used here on the understanding that the barrier between the two sides of society was never impenetrable and that a good deal of social mobility occurred at the fringes. The binary model, however, is useful here to draw attention to the way English society and education are deeply influenced by social elitism.

One of the distinguishing features of nineteenth century culture was the cultivation of the ideal of the gentleman in education. It was closely related to a radical shift in English social characteristics between 1780 and 1850 from being aggressive and rowdy to being inhibited, orderly and polite. Nineteenth century economic change and in particular the imperial need for administrators stimulated a revival of the public and grammar schools. The gentleman ideal, long espoused by the leisured upper classes and coveted by a thrusting upper middle class bent on infiltrating the gentry, became the social badge by which they differentiated themselves from the lower classes, and formed the core of a *vocational* education for future imperial leaders. A classical academic curriculum was the vehicle to achieve this purpose, and with the exception of a minority of schools 'capability' education was regarded as a frill or inappropriate activity.

A second social pressure, closely related to that of social stratification, sprang from the change of the English economy from an agrarian to an industrial base in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gentry hegemony and ideology must be seen in the light of this change.

Bantock's<sup>6</sup> interpretation of the 'binary' division of English society is in terms of a minority upper class literate culture and a majority folk 'oral' culture which had a long and rich tradition characterised by an intimate relationship between people, materials and environment.

The industrial revolution destabilised folk culture and many of its members were uprooted to concentrate in the new towns. Losing its roots in this way, the cultural vitality of the folk tradition withered. Industrialisation destroyed this old folk tradition to create a manufacturing discipline imbued with methodist severity. Work became distinct from leisure, such as there was: hired men, many of whom were previously independently employed, became alienated wage earners; and an initial reduced standard and quality of living, often imposed with brutal political repression, combined to create a 'depressed' working class. Society's 'binary' structure became a scene of bitter class conflict. However, it is dangerous to simplistically equate the working class with concrete oral intelligence and the upper class with abstract literate intelligence: there is ample evidence in history to suggest that all classes or cultures have a majority of non-academic minds. There is also a strong case for asserting that there are other ways of being in the 'truth' than that of the literary-academic way. If this is correct, whilst the literary-academic mode possesses the highest status, the notion that what counts as knowledge is in some way socially determined seems highly plausible. It is to this notion that we must now turn in the examination of a third underlying social force.

The rise of meritocracy in our society has been accompanied by the struggle for and against greater social equality and an increasingly complex range of



occupations. Without becoming engaged in the Marxist account of this I will simply assume that the massing of workers in town and factories has promoted working class solidarity and class conflict.

A Marxist account of hegemony and schooling might lead to the assertion that schooling is an agent to reproduce existing class divisions and that knowledge is used as an ideologically charged tool in this process. M.F.D. Young<sup>7</sup> has argued that there is a 'dialectical relationship' between the availability of certain kinds of knowledge and the eventual power associated with each type.

Whatever one's political posture however, it can be validly argued that: knowledge is stratified into status levels which vary independently of their levels of conceptual and pedagogic 'difficulty'; this knowledge stratification is demonstrably linked to social stratification; the higher up the social order one looks, the more abstract will be the prized knowledge. Knowledge stratification is essentially a mechanism by which higher classes distinguish themselves from the rest. Abstract knowledge has thus been usurped and forged into badge of social rank. And in an increasingly meritocratic society, such a badge plays a powerful role in job selection. In a meritocracy in which the possession of high status knowledge is seen, rightly or wrongly, as a ticket to a high status occupation, a downward extension of high status education is perhaps inevitable, as ambitious parents from below lock onto such an education to enhance the career prospects of their offspring. It follows that 'capability' as low status knowledge is correspondingly lowly prized. It is to the historical reasons for the ascription of certain status levels to certain types of knowledge that we must now turn in order to fully understand the present status of 'capability' generally, and CDT in particular.

There is a large body of evidence supporting the view that English education has developed as two fairly distinct systems, with separate central cores of 'liberal' and 'practical' education. From Greek origins the 'liberal arts' become stereotyped as grammar, music, geometry, arithmetic, rhetoric, dialectic and astronomy around the first century BC. The term 'liberal' derives from their original conception as branches of knowledge suitable for free men as opposed to those skills and trades practised by their slaves.

In post-renaissance England the seven arts dwindled to two (grammar and rhetoric) and Latin language became the core, as a key to classical knowledge. Liberal education, originally the preserve of 'free men' became vocational classical training for clerical, ecclesiastical and other 'liberal' professions. It was dispensed in schools. Children of the aristocracy on the other hand were often educated privately for varied reasons. After a period in which schools stagnated, classics acquired great social prestige from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. A revival of interest in the previously torpid schools and universities coincided with social conventions for young leisured gentlemen who were

expected to know Virgil and Horace. Classical education thus became liberal education for a leisured gentry class but it was not until the great public school revival of the late nineteenth century that the classical-liberal alliance was precisely formulated and used as a basis for the cultivation of the ideal of gentlemen.

Such classical education was not without critics even in the nineteenth century. In one penetrating analysis it was noted that classical education had been 'established long ago, in obedience to an impulse which has ceased to operate, under intellectual and social conditions which have since been profoundly modified'.<sup>8</sup> One criticism is particularly relevant here. At this time an influential theory of transfer of training held that such intellectual 'faculties' as memory, generalisation and accuracy could be trained given a suitable training vehicle. Classical education and its 'useless' knowledge was regarded as such a vehicle and its importance was thus underpinned by the educational theory of transfer. The argument that 'useful' knowledge is unsuitable for training the mind however was unproven. A more recent version of this suggests that there is here an underlying confusion between the content of education and the method by which content is transmitted. Mind training has more to do with method than content, which renders the classical preoccupation with 'useless' knowledge rather pointless.

A nineteenth century drive to modernise the classical literary curriculum by adding science, has clearly been successful. Science's penetration of the curriculum perhaps parallels today's plea to add 'capability' to literary and scientific studies. In the late nineteenth century it was not widely thought that an English gentleman need concern himself with scientific and practical detail, and the range of opportunity in the imperial ruling structure confirmed this. Today, however, a restriction of job opportunity, ostensibly to those who can demonstrate requisite skill, and a complex technological requirement, may well fuel the call for a 'capability' curriculum. Musgrove, commenting on the remarkable capacity of the public schools to survive, has noted that 'The academic prejudices and obsessions of centuries dissolved in moments. Laboratories were built, science masters engaged, workshops and lathes and model furnaces became common'. Marlborough, Sevenoaks and Dauntsey's were especially notable in the nineteen-sixties for their pioneering work in the field of technological studies and activities in schools'.<sup>9</sup>

Even Eton now has a design department. Lacking the pedagogic efficiency which accrues over a long period of development, the capability curriculum in such schools is yet in an embryo condition. Given a development which parallels that of science in the twentieth century, it may well acquire an educational power about which we can only now conjecture, and in doing so become high status knowledge by association with high social class. If Musgrove is right in asserting that the major public



schools 'have now sold out to the bourgeoisie who want their sons to become accountants and technical managers'<sup>10</sup> then it may well do so.

The second tradition of education, for the rest of society, developed altogether differently. Medieval England with grammar schools and private tutors for the middle and upper classes, had a system of apprenticeship for future craftsmen and tradesmen. The peasantry in the main was excluded from formal education beyond that of the church sermon and the later charity, industrial and Sunday schools. The medieval apprenticeship system proved too inflexible for the new industrial society however, and fell out of use in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Just as the nineteenth century saw the renaissance of the public and endowed grammar school it also gave birth to a national system of elementary education, founded on the patchy church and charity systems. It replaced apprenticeship, drew into it all those who had previously lacked formal education and a series of acts of parliament in the late nineteenth century beginning in 1870 gradually extended state intervention and compulsory attendance. Factory legislation on child employment was also instrumental in removing a major motive to avoid schooling.

The system grew against a backcloth of laissez-faire philosophy, state-church confrontation, a general apathy towards education, and middle class antagonism to the rise of the working class. In towns living conditions were undoubtedly appalling: sweated labour, low wages, poor housing, drunkenness, prostitution, child abuse, violence and cruelty were rife. The middle classes reacted with mixed motives of charity and the encouragement of self-reliance, fear of revolution and crime, desires to empty the streets of the army of unemployed children and to train them for habits of industry, and the preparation of the newly enfranchised urban worker – from 1867 – for 'responsible' voting. But whilst such motives compelled the middle classes to extend elementary education, they also caused them to restrict its scope quite markedly. It was limited by a ceiling on the education of its teachers, a narrow curriculum and method and a strong motive for low costs.

The 1862 revised code blueprinted a highly unified system that lasted for thirty years. The '3Rs', religion, and needlework (for girls) predominated and the payment by results system ensured, by accident or design, that the government code was adhered to and that knowledge was taught and achievement evaluated entirely according to grant bearing potential. Discipline for perseverance and industrial organisation, obedience within the political framework and conditioning for acceptance of drudgery were openly acclaimed aims of the 'hidden curriculum'. The late nineteenth century, however, saw a decline in English industrial pre-eminence and national self-confidence, a continued rationalist challenge to religion and increasing press and trades union power. Under such pressures, a practical limb of the curriculum grew.

This practical education was encapsulated within two elementary school subjects. The first, Home Economics, can be traced to origins in social reform and vocational needs. Working girls in the new industrial order had little time to learn domestic skills from their mothers and a general decline in domestic and hygiene standards, motherhood and the quality of recruit to domestic service jobs was evident by the 1860s. Under these pressures, needlework became a compulsory (for girls) grant bearing subject in 1862. Cookery was taught to enhance the cooking and nutritional skills of future working class mothers, at first in theory but later by practice.

Needlework had similar vocational origins, being also linked to domestic service occupations, and having a longer tradition in rural schools. The poor physical condition of recruits for the Boer War led to a recommendation from the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904 that cookery, domestic economy and hygiene be compulsory for older girls. Home Economics thus originated in a felt need to train the daughters of the lower class for future occupational roles.

Manual training for boys had similar but more complex origins. The ancient guild apprenticeship system had fallen out of use and the manpower requirements of the early industrial revolution were not for technically trained labour. There was, in the nineteenth century therefore, little demand for technical education. The 1851 Great Exhibition was important in alerting industrialists to growing foreign competition however. It became increasingly believed that allegedly effective foreign technical education was instrumental in this growth, and calls for better English technical education were made. The mechanics institutes of the early nineteenth century had had little success because they assumed a background education with few artisans possessed. In 1872 the Society of Arts started a training scheme. By the 1880s individual areas like London and Manchester had developed their own schemes at elementary level. Also in this decade, the American manual training expert Woodward toured England to spread his ideas. Prominent English individuals, like Magnus, exerted considerable political pressure and by 1880 the code included manual training and by 1900 it was grant aided. Taught to boys only, it was biased towards generalised occupational training and like home economics, was practised in centres isolated from the schools. Weaving in and out of the industrial justifications was a growing belief in its 'educational' value and rival system (Sloyd) placed a greater emphasis on this.

Inter-war and post-war curriculum development have considerably changed both home economics and manual training (handicraft; craft design and technology) in the elementary, secondary, tri-partite, and comprehensive schools. It is clear from the 'capability' manifesto, however, that they remain of relatively low status. Science, on the other hand, did gain a degree of acceptance in the late nineteenth century. Its contribution to industry, its perceived educational value and its well thought out heuristic



teaching method made it more widely acceptable than either home economics or manual training.

Scientific and technical education subsequently went their own separate ways, encouraged by the 1902 Education Act and the academically elitist Secondary Schools Regulations which followed it. The only serious challenges were perhaps the inter-war junior technical schools and the abortive post-1944 secondary technical schools. Thus England 'did not follow the pattern of continental countries, especially Germany, in developing scientific and technical education, partly because the great depression of the 1870s and 1880s had intensified the tendency for British capital to be invested abroad, especially in the Empire, rather than in our own home based industries. England became the world financial centre for banking, insurance and commerce and the manpower needed was predominantly for clerks rather than technologists. Thus it was not only politically expedient but economically necessary to develop grammar schools rather than elementary and secondary education of a scientific and technical kind. In the long run, however, this decision may have been very damaging to the British economy'.<sup>11</sup> Hence the 'capability' manifesto.

It is therefore hardly surprising, in a meritocracy where schooling is an agent of job selection, that the status of school knowledge will be linked to an occupational hierarchy in which 'capability' is of low regard.

The academic curriculum is in one sense highly vocational and its vocational drive has enabled it to exert a massive pressure on all forms of secondary education. Parity of esteem between types of school or areas of knowledge cannot logically exist whilst they are geared to occupational selection in a highly status conscious, socially stratified society. 'Capability' will thus be impeded from development in education whilst it is associated with 'inferior' occupations and where its school manifestations are sundered from those in the more prestigious centres of research and advanced learning.

The hypothesis advanced is that there are deeply rooted social forces influencing the way education for 'capability' is perceived. The paper has focused on the complex relationship between schooling and society, the many ways in which social 'needs' can be defined in a plural society, and the problems in determining the extent to which these needs are met. There is often a time lag between a statement of needs and the educational response and there is scope in this relationship for individuals to influence events.

English society has had a deep, if fluid, stratification and has evolved separate systems of education to serve different social levels. Elites have tended to be educated for leadership, 'gentility', and for social differentiation whereas the rest of the population has been, if at all, educated for political conformity and practical labour. However, the common assumption that members of the social elite are in the main capable of abstract and highly

intellectual thought and the rest only of concrete 'non-literate' thought is fallacious. Fallacy becomes injustice when abstract thought is regarded as superior thought. It is likely that all social groupings have a majority of 'non-abstract' minds. However, it is common for abstract thought and literary education to become the badges of distinction worn by members of social elites. English society is still stratified and an important vehicle for upward mobility is the acquisition of such a badge from education.

English social stratification has thus spawned an educational stratification, and although the two major strands of liberal and vocational have tended recently to coalesce in a limited way in the comprehensive school status differentials continue to lurk below the surface. The inclusion of subjects within the liberal strand was guided entirely by vocational needs, subsequently buried under a pedagogical rationale which at times seems to be highly arbitrary and which, as has been shown, is not as pure in its 'nonvocationalism' as is commonly claimed. Hallowed tradition and an upper class predominance in defining what counts as high status knowledge make it very difficult for new subjects to penetrate the liberal curriculum. In a meritocratic society, in which education plays a major job selection role, ambitious parents search for an education which will present tickets to high status jobs. The backwash effect of this is to push mass education towards an elitist pattern, necessarily diluted by the relatively poor resources and motivational levels often found in mass education. In the case of 'capability' a vicious circle closes; 'capability' does not rank as high status knowledge; thrusting parents want education for high status occupations, and therefore demand access to high status knowledge; within the constraints of a crowded curriculum they therefore shy away from low status areas, like 'capability', disregarding or even unaware of, any intrinsic or vocational value it might possess; a new elite generation rises having had little exposure to such knowledge and the circle revolves again.

Breaking this circle, as the scientists did in the nineteenth century, will not be easy, even if 'capability' develops the epistemological rationale and the pedagogical sophistication of the other two cultures. However, the education system is neither mechanistic or impenetrable, and there is scope for determined effort by individuals and pressure groups. A broad front of progress for 'capability' might include: a massive attempt to define and classify the body of knowledge and/or action; having constructed an epistemological framework attempts must be made to gain for it acceptance in the prestigious higher seats of learning and research and to forge links between these seats and the teachers of capability in schools; an adequately high level political demonstration that such knowledge – action is significant for members of high status groups towards the end of this century would then be necessary for it to penetrate the curriculum of,