

## *A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE:* A QUESTION OF VALUES

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### ABSTRACT

*A Curriculum for Excellence* outlines a curriculum for young people in Scotland from age 3 to 18. In the report, endorsed wholly by Scottish ministers, much is made of the underpinning values of the proposed curriculum. However, the absence of any consultation period has meant that such values and the report itself have not been subject to systematic debate by parliament, public, or the educational community in Scotland. This paper examines the nature of curriculum values, and the specific values outlined in *A Curriculum for Excellence*. It suggests that the absence of an overarching rationale in the Report has left the stated curriculum values, although worthy, lacking coherence and force. It further questions the concept of 'national values', raised by the Report as central to curriculum planning, as having meaning within a multicultural and multiethnic society, and queries the view that such values should be the subject of curricular prescription.

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Curriculum Review Group was set up by Scottish Ministers in November 2003. Its task was to identify the purposes of education 3 to 18 and the principles for the design of the curriculum. The Group was asked to take account of views expressed during the National Debate, account of current research and of international comparisons. As well as educational factors, the Group considered global factors which would have strong influences on the aims and purposes of education over the coming decades, including changing patterns of work, increased knowledge of how children learn and the potential of new technologies to enrich learning. In addition, the Group was asked to take a broad view of children's development, within the wider framework of Integrated Children's Services, bearing in mind the wide range of adults directly involved in the education of children and young people, in early years centres, schools, colleges and out of school learning. (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 6-7)

The Curriculum Review Group reported in November 2004 with the document *A Curriculum for Excellence*. The foreword, signed by both the Education Minister and his Deputy, states that the document 'establishes clear values, purposes and principles for education from 3 to 18 in Scotland' (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 3).

However, the Review Group's report, endorsed in its entirety by the Executive (Scottish Executive, 2004b), was never subjected either to parliamentary scrutiny nor to public consultation and, thus, its underpinning curriculum values, its view of the purposes and principles for education, have also remained beyond exploration. Given the vaunted importance of values in shaping the new curricular structure, it is timely to examine them in some detail.

### *Defining 'curriculum'*

'Curriculum' is notoriously hard to define. While the Review Group does not outline any particular theoretical position on the conceptual nature of the curriculum, it does still give an indication of its view of what a curriculum is:

The curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is designed to convey knowledge which is considered to be important and to promote the development of values, understanding

and capabilities. It is concerned both with what is to be learned and how it is taught. It should enable all of the young people of Scotland to flourish as individuals, reach high levels of achievement, and make valuable contributions to society.

The curriculum affects us all. (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 9)

This is clearly not intended as a definitive statement of what a curriculum is, since it is heavily contextualised, as indicated, at the simplest level, by the use of the personal pronoun. Nevertheless, it is the clearest statement within the document of the Review Group's conceptualisation of curriculum.

Stenhouse (1975:4) provides what is seen as a very comprehensive, and succinct, definition: 'A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.' Kelly (1989: 1) offers the following understanding of the term: 'the overall rationale for the educational programme of an institution...' The important connection to notice between these two in the current context is the alignment of 'principles' in Stenhouse with 'rationale' in Kelly. The definition of a curriculum, therefore, includes the need for some articulation of the reasoning which underpins the educational proposal or programme; a statement of the basis on which the programme has been constructed.

The Review Group recognises this: 'The starting point... is the set of values which should underpin policies, practice and the curriculum itself' (p.10). The Review Group has also explicitly avoided outlining the detail of the content of the educational programme and so in that sense it is very much in keeping with the Stenhouse/Kelly approach. It purports to outline values, and purposes of the curriculum: a basis, and ends, but not means; curriculum as process and not content. And the major subsequent action to the publication of *A Curriculum for Excellence* has reflected this stipulation of Stenhouse: working on ways to bring about the 'effective translation' of the curriculum into the syllabi and arrangements of schools.

Nevertheless, there can be seen certain tensions between the Review Group's report and the Stenhouse/Kelly approach. In the Report there is a general recognition of the socially-constructed nature of the curriculum which will reflect a society's dominant values and will have, as an aim, related goals. However, the phrase 'designed to convey knowledge which is considered to be important' suggests an epistemological position which is not in line with a socially-constructed viewpoint. It is more in keeping with the rationalist approach and a view of curriculum as content and education as transmission. It also creates problems for curriculum planners who have to identify the 'knowledge' in question, and defend the means by which its 'importance' can be gauged. As will be seen later, these are profound questions within curriculum theory and not just issues facing The Curriculum Review Group.

#### *The nature of curriculum values*

In a world tried in the fire of postmodernism, questions of values are profoundly disputable. Many in education, and in society, hold, or at least are sympathetic to the view, that there should be no values — given their subjective basis and inevitable cultural bias — either explicitly offered as central to the curriculum, or 'taught' in schools. Nevertheless, as Hamm (1989: 78) helpfully points out, even that statement is itself a value-judgement, and hence, given its own philosophical foundations, of no more status or strength than any other viewpoint. To say there should be no one set of values at the core of the curriculum is also a 'value'. Whether we like it or not, values will inevitably figure in any attempt to outline a curriculum and outline a resulting educational programme. The problem, however, is not resolved: all that has been achieved is to confirm that there can be no value-free curriculum. The postpositivist crisis remains: who is to decide the values on which the curriculum

will be structured, and on what basis? What are these values to be, and why?

There are, in fact, several aspects of education which can be helpful in formulating a response to these difficult questions. Firstly, it should be recognised that the education system is not a natural phenomenon. It is a political construct and so there already has been a considerable degree of value-driven action and purpose in the system whose curriculum is under question. That is not to say that these values are beyond reproach; rather it is to affirm that state education originates in, and has been shaped by, value-judgements. There are normative foundations: it has been decided that children ought to be educated; the state ought to provide... and so on. Thus the curriculum and its nature is not a problem floating in a vacuum; it is rooted in political and moral values, and we should not be too concerned that the construction of the curriculum is similarly rooted.

Young (1971: 24) articulates this point as an entrance to his broader position that the curriculum is socially constructed: 'education is not a product like cars and bread, but a selection and organization from the available knowledge at a particular time which involves conscious or unconscious choices'. Thus, the curriculum becomes a matter of choice, and the significant question is who should make that choice and on what (value) basis?

The problem is that objective, absolutist views of knowledge and values are no longer sustainable. As Kelly (1989: 43) puts it: 'If knowledge were God-given and if values enjoyed a similar status, curriculum development could have only one meaning as the slow progression towards perfection that Plato had in mind. Such a notion is no longer tenable.'

Phenix (1958: 551) outlines the consequence: 'The problem of the status of values is crucial in education. If values have no more standing than individual taste, then directing the development of persons becomes a matter of arbitrary imposition by some persons on others. If values are rooted in society, then personal development must be subjected to group decisions.'

The problem reduces itself to one of liberty: if values are subjective why should one set be imposed, instead of any other; if values are social, is the majority view to be imposed on others?

One appropriate way to make progress out of this potential slough of relativist despond, is to recognise a helpful distinction made by Kelly (1989: 42). He makes the point that we can be deluded by the use of the term 'values', when what we are really considering is the human activity of 'valuing'. This reminds us that there are no values 'out there' but rather within us. Valuing, therefore, is a human activity involving making choices. For these choices to be shared and accepted by others becomes contingent on the reasons offered for such particular choices amongst the many competing options. Curriculum values are therefore human choices, whose own worth depends on the rationale provided. As Peters (1966: 99) states: 'the decision must depend not on the authority or private whims of any individual but on the force and relevance of the reasons advanced.' Even Ayer (1973: 226–7), whose logical positivism lead him to scorn much in the sphere of moral philosophy, supports this approach. Although denying empirical moral knowledge, he argues that alternative moral positions can be rejected on good grounds: 'One may be able to show that their principles are inconsistent, or that they are the product of bad reasoning, or that they lead to consequences which their advocates are not prepared to stand by. Even if we are successful in this, we may not persuade them to change their principles, but at least we shall have advanced some reason why they should.'

It may be, however, as Ayer concedes, that a moral standpoint passes the test of logical thoroughness he proposes and yet may still not be acceptable to us. In a sense, this is the nub of the debate about curriculum values. There are many competing views on the curriculum, most of which could withstand Ayer's test. The issue then becomes: on what further basis can one make choice other than on subjectivist

whim? Callan (1998: 153) rejects the view that we are condemned, thus, to a choice between such chauvinism and, its opposite, non-judgemental pluralism. This sort of postmodern moral impartiality he says is not a badge of multicultural egalitarianism but instead is simply 'a way of giving up on moral reason'. Carr (2003: 3) similarly suggests that there are rational criteria which can be brought to bear on educational debate and that 'any sensible account of education needs to steer a course between reasonable pluralism and indiscriminate relativism.'

It can be argued that there are further legitimate ways in which one can weigh the relative strengths of proposed curriculum values. This depends on one's returning to the fact that education, as a system, is an intentional enterprise, a social construct (Tarrant, 1989: 39). The system is created by human will and action, and by examining the basis for these original choices one should be in a better position to determine the relative worthiness of values related to curriculum construction. This is not to argue on the basis of tradition, but rather by exploring the value-basis of the education system itself to enlighten us about the most appropriate curriculum values. It is to seek alignment between the values which underpin both the system and the curriculum. This is not a logical necessity: however, by applying the sort of test suggested by Ayer, it should at least be possible to rule out and dismiss certain curriculum options as being inherently contradictory, irrational, or not universalizable. For example, were it to be found that the system of education was based on the idea of equal access but a curriculum was presented which rejected this, then one could argue, on educational grounds, that such a curriculum was not tenable.

The way in which a significant strain of western tradition has conceptualised the issue is by the appeal to democracy. Writers such as Peters (1966) point to the essentially democratic basis of state education. In other words, state provision of education is a product of democratic ideology, is founded on democratic values, which are themselves seen to be morally acceptable, or, at least, not morally unacceptable. The corollary of this is to argue that the curriculum should also, therefore, be founded on democratic principles such as equality, justice, freedom. It is from this basis that much educational thought has developed. There is, of course, a problem in defining 'democracy', which covers a very broad ideological range, and it is here that the culturally situated sense of education becomes important. The concept and aims of education, as provided by the democratic state, reflect the values and norms of society, particular to context. The nature of the democracy will influence the nature of the educational provision, whether it be one based on a minimalist view of democracy as merely a political method (Schumpeter, 1942), or one reflecting a fuller sense of democracy as a value-system, such as that promoted by Dewey: 'A democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1916: 83).

This results in quite a fragile position, admittedly. Kelly (1989: 43) is unapologetic about this. The study of knowledge and the curriculum cannot be an exact science. What we can do is make decisions based on values with a rational justification: '...we must realise, however, that our basis for making such distinctions is insecure and shifting, and that the values we adhere to will represent our own favoured ideological position rather than our grasp on any eternal truths... It must follow from this that whoever takes decisions about the curriculum... must be encouraged to appreciate the slender nature on which any system of values... will be based. His or her choices should, therefore, be tentative and of such a kind as to avoid dogmatism. Furthermore, they should be open to continuous evaluation and modification...'

Within the restrictions outlined by Kelly, the appeal to democracy enables a structure to be developed, based on the fundamental premise that provision of education is a product of democracy, and so founded on democratic principles. On this line of argument, therefore, it can be claimed that the curriculum should, therefore, reflect values which are concordant with such principles. Democracy in practice is

shaped by the socio-cultural context, and so it is inevitable that the democratic values underpinning particular educational curricula will reflect each unique reality.

Another option, available in the Scottish context at any rate, is to appeal to something rather more practical than theoretical, second order rather than first order, perhaps. Instead of an appeal to democratic values, which may only produce a list of ill-defined concepts, whose practical application remains hugely controversial, it may be possible to determine the purpose of education from democratic legislation. Instead of an appeal to the concept of democracy — by no means an exact science — one can appeal to the objective wording of law. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 outlines what the purpose of state education is to be, and, therefore, it should be possible to extract values from such a statement and apply these to curriculum design. Again, this is not an appeal to authority or tradition, but simply a practical starting-point, open, as Stenhouse insists, to modification and later rejection.

The relevant part of the Act is Section 2, where the purpose of educational provision is made explicit: '...that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential' (Scottish Executive, 2000a: 1). From this, it is possible to extract some essential curriculum values, and, allied to them, needs to be a recognition of the further duty to: '...have due regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, to the views (if there is a wish to express them) of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect that child or young person, taking account of the child or young person's age and maturity' (Scottish Executive, 2000a: 1).

A further, or additional possibility, would be to make use of the National Priorities. These have already been through a process of national consultation and have been approved by Parliament. They could, therefore, be seen to have a strong democratic foundation. That they are relevant to curriculum values is without question. In the consultation paper on formulating the national priorities (Scottish Executive 2000b: 6), it states: 'National priorities will set out a coherent and agreed set of strategic objectives and will reflect the values, principles and aspirations of all who are committed to promoting improvement in Scottish education.' It would be odd, therefore, if there were not to be considerable alignment between curriculum values and National Priorities.

It is here, however, that a distinction requires to be made between education and schooling. The definition of curriculum, as provided by Kelly (1989) above, alerts us to the fact that it relates to a 'programme' for an 'institution'. So when considering curriculum values, it must be borne in mind, and certainly so in the case of The Curriculum Review Group, that this is not to be considered in the light of a theoretical concept of education, but the specific programme for schools in Scotland in the 21st century. Carr (2003: 16) makes the distinction between education and schooling a crucial one in his study of the philosophy of education. In a useful analogy, he argues that 'the relationship between education and schooling is comparable to that between religion and church, or justice and the legal system'. Illich (1971) recognised this clear distinction, going so far as to argue that, far from being complementary, the relationship was fundamentally flawed with schooling being inimical to education. Carr is more measured arguing that the aims and goals of schooling are more extensive and varied than those of education *per se*, and similarly, in certain respects, the aims and goals of education are more ambitious than is offered by schooling. One issue Carr highlights, as an example of the distinction, is that of the vocational, economic concern of schooling which would not be a focus in a philosophical, conceptual understanding of education *per se*.

There needs to be care taken with this distinction, nevertheless. It would not be acceptable to dismiss from the debate arguments from the philosophy of education on the grounds that what was at issue was schooling. It would not, for example, be

acceptable, indeed it would be absurd, to reject an argument based on justice simply because one were dealing with the legal system as opposed to the concept of justice *per se*. In other words, although the distinction between schooling and education is useful, it does not imply that the terms are mutually exclusive and that the rationale for one has no bearing on the other. There is undoubtedly a more situated context for schooling, than for education itself, as Carr (2003: 15) outlines: 'schooling is... a social institution that is provided for out of public funds, and is to that extent accountable to the desires of taxpayers and their democratically elected political representatives.'

Thus, we should concede that *A Curriculum for Excellence* may outline an educational curriculum but it is one restricted by being designed for schooling. It is further restricted by being designed for schooling within one country, and at one historical time. As has been noted already, the point at issue is not so much the values of education as a philosophical concept, but the values of an education system, the values fundamental to a state's provision of school education. These restrictions are very significant in defining the nature of the critical analysis to which its values can be subjected.

However, what ought to be recognised also, is the distinction between values underpinning curriculum construction and values as content of the curriculum. The former involves the recognition that the curriculum will be framed on a set of assumptions, and in a manner, which necessarily reflect values; the latter is quite a different matter, involving the explicit teaching of values within school syllabi. There need not be a necessary connection: one could quite legitimately argue, albeit with some difficulty, that the curriculum should reflect democratic values, while also holding that such values should not become curriculum content, something to be taught and learned. Similarly, one could argue that an organization be founded on principles opposed to any form of human discrimination, but it would require a separate argument to propose that such an organization actively promote such values. It is a nice distinction, but one that is relevant, as will be seen.

#### VALUES AND 'A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE'

In thus preparing to examine the stated values of *A Curriculum for Excellence*, some care has been taken to make allowances for the Review Group in terms of its task. Offering a critique of its report from the perspective of classic educational philosophy would neither be wholly appropriate nor fair. It has to be recognised that this is a curriculum for schooling, that it is a curriculum for a specific socio-political context, and that it is a curriculum for a specific historical period. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable, as has been seen in the analogy of the relationship between justice and the legal system, to expect such a curriculum (for schooling) to be founded on an educational rationale and supported by educational argument.

The Review Group, as has been noted, was very conscious of the value-base to curriculum construction, and recognised that an articulation of such values was an essential first step in constructing an appropriate curriculum. This approach is very much in line with the position of Stenhouse (1970: 82) that a starting-point in such an enterprise should be to define the 'value positions embodied in the curriculum specification.' This is essential to permit proper examination of the basis to the curriculum, for it to be open to democratic challenge, and to permit any future modification or change.

Nevertheless, little space is devoted within *A Curriculum for Excellence* to outlining values and even less to providing reasoned support for them. As has been seen above, if there is to be a way of deciding between competing values, one way is by evaluating the force and relevance of the supporting reasons. Thus, a curriculum must not only outline the value positions but argue, on a relevant and persuasive basis, that such values are indeed appropriate.

It should be noted here too that, although the report makes explicit reference to the values it outlines as the basis of the curriculum, there are three other examples of values which are present, but not identified as such, in the report. The first of those concerns Page 10 of the report where the reasons for change to the curriculum are outlined. These drivers for change are essentially a set of values but are represented in the report as 'givens'. Examples include 'the need' to increase economic performance, and the acceptance of changing patterns and demands of employment. It is not the purpose of this paper to question the values promoted there but it should be acknowledged that these justifications for changing the curriculum are, themselves, contestable value-judgements. Another set of values within the report will be addressed later: values as curriculum content, not as curriculum rationale; a normative set which is presented as worthy of being taught and learned. The final value is the eponymous 'excellence', afforded status in the title but not within the report proper.

In fact, only one page, totalling 242 words, of the slim report is dedicated explicitly to 'Values'. This page is devoted to outlining 'the values on which Scottish society is based' (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 11), and to elaborating the related claim that 'Young people therefore need to learn about and develop these values' (p.11). The Report begins by referring to four words inscribed on the Mace of the Scottish Parliament: wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. It states that these words 'have helped to define values for our democracy' (p.11) and that these are the values which young people 'need to learn about and develop'. It then goes on to say that 'The curriculum is an important means through which this personal development should be encouraged' (p.11). On the remainder of page 11 are listed a number of imperatives for the curriculum in order to achieve this stated goal. At the foot of the page is a summary which can be quoted in full: of the curriculum, it states that 'it must be inclusive, be a stimulus for personal achievement and, through the broadening of pupils' experience of the world, be an encouragement towards informed and responsible citizenship.' On the following pages are then elaborated the purposes of the curriculum which are that the curriculum should enable young people to develop four capacities: they should be 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' (p.12).

The prefatory remarks on page 11 of the Report are worthy of some comment.

Wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity: the words which are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament have helped to define values for our democracy. (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 11)

The reference to the mace of the Scottish Parliament needs some examination. On the positive side can be seen a recognition of the fundamentally political nature of state education and the necessity to probe the fundamental values of a society as a way to formulating a curriculum framework.

On the negative side, one could ask why should words inscribed on an ornamental object in a parliament building be the basis for a state education curriculum? The words — 'wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity' — were devised by the maker of the mace for the nation's elected politicians, as a reminder of some key values which he thought they should keep in the forefront of their decision-making and at the heart of their legislation. It is hard to see in what way such operational guidelines for politicians are, firstly, relevant to curriculum design, and, secondly, in any sense definitive of national values. It appears this idea has been lifted from Frank Lennon (2003) who had first linked the mace's inscription with values education. But, is it at all relevant? It is not clear why values suggested as operational for politicians should also be thought appropriate for a curriculum. Certainly, the terms are appropriate for a democracy and, therefore, for a curriculum for schooling within a democracy, but there are probably several hundred such words — largely 'condensation symbols'

(Edelman, 1964) — which could equally be applied to no great effect.

Another important argument relates to the source of these terms. When the competition to devise a mace for the parliament was suggested there was nothing in the brief about inscribed words. These were entirely the idea of the winning craftsman, Michael Lloyd. (See [www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/history/whisp/whisp-99/wh08-01.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/history/whisp/whisp-99/wh08-01.htm)) While his words may have some resonance, they remain a private contribution and of no more weight than those of any other individual person. It is not proven, at best, that his words — ‘wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity’ — are representative of society’s views as a whole, nor that they ‘have helped define values for our democracy’. To produce them as part of the rationale for the curriculum, therefore, is neither appropriate nor relevant. It is true that these words have been endorsed by the elected politicians who selected his design and so have been subjected to a degree of democratic legitimization but that does not mean necessarily that they provide a solid basis for curriculum design.

After what may be seen as a questionable start, the Review Group proceeds to redirect its line of thought, by referring to the values which young people ‘need to learn about and develop’. The attempt to identify the underpinning values of curriculum design is suspended, and, instead, the argument moves into the notion of values as curriculum content.

It is one of the prime purposes of education to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based and so help them to establish their own stances on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility. Young people therefore need to learn about and develop these values. The curriculum is an important means through which this personal development should be encouraged. (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 11)

There is much to be commented upon here. Again can be seen the commitment to a sense of national values: ‘...the values on which Scottish society is based...’. The context here, however, is not so much on such values as the foundation of the curriculum but as content. Young people are to be made ‘aware’ of these values, and ‘need to learn about and develop these values.’ From such didacticism, however, young people are to be helped ‘to establish their own stances on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility.’ An attempt to marry two different approaches to values education can be seen at work here: on the one hand is the more prescriptive, normative emphasis of ‘character education’ and, on the other, the more open ‘citizenship’ approach. With the former, young people are to be taught certain (national) values; with the latter, they are encouraged to develop their own values. Recent writers have identified this divide as a growing problem in values education (Arthur, 2005; Davies, Gorard, and McGuinn, 2005).

Apart from the reference to the Parliament’s mace, nothing more explicit is stated about ‘the values on which Scottish society is based.’ It is true that further elaboration of the intended curriculum values is given, as will be seen, but no more is produced in terms of national values.

The point can be made that Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes use of this term ‘national values’. State education is to be directed at, amongst other things: ‘...the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own’ (UN, 1989: Article 29(1)(c)). While the term is used, it can be seen that such ‘national values’ are one of a number of sets of values to be addressed, and, significantly, are not given any priority status in the Convention.

This area of ‘national values’ is fraught with problems. For a start, given that the Executive promotes the idea of ‘One Scotland. Many Cultures’, in what sense can it

be claimed that there are ‘national’ values? In Sweden, the government, through the National Agency for Education, is quite explicit about the democratic basis of the values which are to be taught and which underpin the system (see [www.skolverket.se/sb/d/354/a/1257](http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/354/a/1257)). As has been argued, this is a legitimate way out of the relativist problem: appealing to the fundamental, democratic nature of the education system, is a way in which a set of curriculum values can be identified and promoted. A *Curriculum for Excellence* is less forthright: the initial reference to ‘values for our democracy’ is not developed and, instead, comes this reference to ‘the values on which Scottish society is based’. It is true that that these could be aligned but this is not argued.

Given the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of Scottish society an appeal to ‘national values’ is contestable. If one looks at the composition of the Curriculum Review Group (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 18), one could become more uneasy. A quick scan of the 19 members and their current positions reveals a rather limited representation of Scottish society: one wonders the extent to which a set of ‘national values’ has been thought through by the committee. And if there is such a set, are they, indeed, to be ‘learned’, and why? The UN speaks of ‘respect for’ values, not for the explicit teaching of them in schools.

The Review Group does not elaborate further, however, but moves to suggest how it is the curriculum can ‘achieve this’. The demonstrative pronoun appears to refer to this whole idea of making young people aware of national values, the perceived ‘need’ they have to learn and develop these values, and develop their own stances on moral issues.

The Review Group goes on to outline five key ways in which the curriculum can promote such values:

To achieve this, the curriculum:

- should enable all young people to benefit from their education, supporting them in different ways to achieve their potential
- must value the learning and achievements of all young people and promote high aspirations and ambition
- should emphasise the rights and responsibilities of individuals and nations. It should help young people to understand diverse cultures and beliefs and support them in developing concern, tolerance, care and respect for themselves and others
- must enable young people to build up a strong foundation of knowledge and understanding and promote a commitment to considered judgement and ethical action
- should give young people the confidence, attributes and capabilities to make valuable contributions to society. (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 11)

These are, therefore, the stated, underpinning values of the proposed curriculum. A rationale is not provided, other than the earlier references to ‘national values’ and ‘values for our democracy’. Certainly what we are given is a clear set of values, as Stenhouse (1970) recommends, but there is not any further anchor to these values which makes it hard for such a set of values to be seen as either persuasive or exhaustive.

The value statements, themselves, are acceptable from a democratic perspective in that they pay attention to the individual and his/her rights, address issues of respect and tolerance, and citizenship. In addition, they address issues of schooling such as the concern with socio-economic well-being, and epistemological claims on the curriculum. In this respect, an interesting phrase is ‘...enable young people to build

up a strong foundation of knowledge' which suggests a different epistemological and pedagogical outlook from that suggested earlier in the document: 'The curriculum... is designed to convey knowledge which is considered to be important' (p.9). The former hints at the learner as active, the latter as passive.

Some of the value-statements can be seen as having intrinsic, and others instrumental, justification. However, their status as central to the curriculum is not supported by reasoned argument and, as such, it means that the curriculum is based on what could be seen as a rather arbitrary, albeit non-controversial, set of values. Far from being rooted in democratic ideology, or on any clear, sense of national values — were any such to exist — they are instead a mixture of values which relate to a (limited) number of personal, social, democratic, and economic concerns. That is not to say that they are inappropriate but rather that the absence of an overarching rationale means that there is a lack of coherence and unity. They are not dependent on a vision of humanity, not dependent on a theory of democracy, nor, even, clearly rooted in related national and international legislation.

McGrath (2005: 5) critiquing the Review Group's work from a Catholic perspective, makes a key point when he argues, of the stated purposes of the curriculum: 'These are all desirable outcomes for our young people... but are they sufficient in themselves?' The problem is that, without a clear unifying rationale, it is impossible to tell if such value statements do provide a sufficient basis, either as expressive of national values, or those of 'our democracy'.

Nevertheless, it can be conceded at least, despite reservations about the basis of such values, *A Curriculum for Excellence* does meet the requirements set by such as Kelly and Stenhouse that there be a clear set of principles stated, even if we know that the basis for such will be slender and never absolute. And in this regard, it appears to be breaking welcome new ground in curriculum development in Scotland.

#### CONCLUSION

The Curriculum Review Group rightly set itself an initial task of articulating 'the set of values which should underpin policies, practice and the curriculum itself' (Scottish Executive, 2004a: 10). In doing so, it was concerned with outlining a curriculum for schooling in Scotland in the 21st century. The uncontroversial and worthy set of values outlined is not rooted in, nor derived from, any one thesis. Instead, it is said to be related to 'national values' and a notion of what 'our democracy' represents. While an explicit set of values is vital for the creation of a curriculum that is transparent and open to future evaluation, adaptation and modification, the set offered here lacks coherence and ideological unity. The result is what could be seen as an arbitrary selection which will not provide sufficient clarity nor detailed rationale when the specific design and content of the curriculum comes to be decided.

On a more positive note, it could be argued that the lack of a rigid value base means that freedom, a degree of professional autonomy, about curriculum content is underwritten, and that a more pluralist offering is thus produced. The lack of prescription in the value base means that those who come to flesh out the curriculum are not as confined and restricted as they might otherwise have been. It could be countered, however, that if this is the case, to what purpose have these underpinning values been outlined at all? If they do not serve as much of a guide, is their inclusion in the report merely cosmetic? The answer to these questions may well be that the values outlined provide a minimum degree of guidance, with a latitude that allows curriculum planners in schools and institutions some considerable licence. The problem with this is that when disputes arise in such planning, an appeal to underpinning curriculum values will not be of much help in resolving such difficulties. This would not be the case if the rationale for such values were coherent and convincing.

The failure to open out the Curriculum Review Group's report to public

consultation represents a missed opportunity for a proper questioning and analysis of *A Curriculum for Excellence* and its underlying values to have taken place. At the very least such an exercise would have disseminated much better the Review Group's thinking and so perhaps have prevented the recent eruption of media, and professional, concerns about possible future curriculum content.

There remains a hint of prescription in the document which is manifested firstly in the appeal to 'national values', a concept which is hard to define and is not explained adequately in the document. It is not clear if 'national values' are simply a summarised distillation of the values of all citizens and cultures and ethnic groups within Scotland, or, more worryingly, if they are claimed to be the reified set of some purportedly distinctive Scottish values, as espoused by one particular group. The fact that the Review Group appears to be restricted in terms of its representativeness of modern Scottish society, adds to this concern that what is being presented is a narrow view of supposed Scottishness and Scottish values.

This prescriptiveness is also manifest when the document makes dogmatic statements such that 'Young people need to learn about and develop these values'. This represents a conflation of values as underpinning the curriculum and values as content. It can also be seen in the light of the current debate between character education and citizenship education where the former is seen as viewing learners as receptive and passive, the latter as constructive and active. Many societies, such as Sweden, have dogmatic views of curriculum values but because those within *A Curriculum for Excellence* are not founded on any explicit appeal to democracy or ideology, it becomes hard to defend them as being worthy of such a dogmatic approach.

Oddly enough, what appears to be the prime value — 'Excellence' — is never referred to in the document but merely inserted into the title. In some ways, this can be seen to be symptomatic of a certain imprecision over values in the report. If it is a curriculum for 'excellence' why is the term not defined in the document, and why is its elevated status not argued for within the document?

Finally, the rationale for changing the curriculum, outlined on page 10 of the report, is also open to considerable question. Apart from the fact that this rationale could be challenged, the values evidenced in that section are, essentially, curriculum values but are not explicitly declared as such, nor argued for.

There is a long way for this development to go. Curriculum values have been given the attention they require but one suspects that from now on the future shaping of *A Curriculum for Excellence* will have little regard at all to these values. The absence of a cohesive rationale inevitably means that they will play a minor role in what eventually happens in schools. And it is in that stage of the development that the real decisions will be made. To use a construction metaphor, one could argue that the values outlined in *A Curriculum for Excellence* may not serve as foundations for what will be built in schools but have, perhaps, at best fenced off a plot within which such structures could emerge.

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