The Mosaic of Learning
Schools and Teachers for the Next Century

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Since the Education Reform Act of 1988 many teachers say, with some justification, that the pace of change has been too hectic and that professional morale has been corroded in a period when they have been the target of too much pressure and too little support, of too much blame and too little praise. Teachers yearn for a period of consolidation which they regard as essential if the reforms are to improve schools.

They will not get it – whichever party is in power. In this country, as in many parts of the world, reform of the education system is now endemic. The questions are these: why is the reform not having the intended effects? What kinds of reform should come next? Which are the best ideas for change? How should reform be initiated and implemented? Who and what will drive the change? What barriers need to be overcome and how? How can changes be made to stick and to work? What have we learned from the last ten years of massive reform but only marginal improvement?

The last of these questions makes a good starting point. Virtually everybody – with the exception of the unreconstructed Left which believes our schools were doing a perfectly grand job until the dark ages of the Thatcher years – knows that our educational system, and especially our schools, ought to be better and have the potential to be better. Outside central government, most also accept that it is as unsuccessful as it is unwise to seek to achieve this mainly through legislation and detailed regulation from the centre. We have had over ten years of
this and the degree of success in improving schools has been limited, falling far short of the original aspirations. The trouble is, of course, that Secretaries of State, both Labour and Conservative, have interpreted the need for radical change as an invitation to start an educational revolution – the introduction of comprehensive education, of market forces, of a national curriculum and testing, and so on – which if led from the top with unwavering fervour and tough legislation, would transform schools and dramatically raise the quality of their work. But all these revolutions have largely failed. Labour’s comprehensive school reform removed many institutional barriers to equal opportunity, but it did not solve curriculum problems or raise standards to the promised degree. The Conservative market approach has released much creativity in more self-managing schools more focused on the curriculum, but the degree of central regulation and the heavy-handed approach to accountability are choking initiative. By declaring his revolution a triumphant success, each departing Secretary of State for Education denies reality. The ever more ‘macho’ stance of each incoming Secretary of State implicitly acknowledges the limited extent of success and the size and urgency of the task that lies ahead. It needs political skill to declare how much needs to be done without impugning the competence of one’s predecessors.

The educational revolutionaries of the Thatcher years purportedly thought the unthinkable. Yet they looked backwards as much as forwards: they (and the opposition parties) declined to question many of the basic assumptions we make about schools. They clung firmly to their own theories (supposedly ‘common sense’) whilst denouncing ‘theorists’ as the architects of educational failure. In this book I argue that the continuing and now more urgent need to raise educational standards, in the face of increasing international competition, and to produce a nation where the average level of achievement is far higher than it is today, is becoming such a powerful driver of change that many hitherto taken-for-granted assumptions about schools must now be questioned. Has the standard comprehensive school outlived its usefulness? Should Islamic schools be encouraged? Has religious education for all had its day? In an overcrowded curriculum, should citizenship
education be optional? Is political education an excuse for indoctrination or a way of creating social cohesion? Could our schools be organized more efficiently? Are headteachers needed to manage them? Do the wrong sort of people become teachers? Is it fewer teachers we need rather than more? Should incompetent teachers be given their cards? How much time should students spend in school – more or less? Will the new technologies change schools or will they go the way of television and language labs in their marginal influence? In an age of mass higher education, do the universities exercise too much power and influence? Should local education authorities be revived or killed off? Are more frequent inspections of schools an effective means of improving them? Would it be prudent and ethical to conduct experiments on children to discover better methods of teaching and learning? Is the very nature of the school as an institution, modelled on the factory of the industrial revolution (shades of Mr Gradgrind), open to doubt in a post-industrial society? Is teaching a profession appropriate for a life-long career?

In the early 1990s these have not been the key issues or ones of major interest to the public and the mass media. Nor have they dominated the thinking of most teachers. In relation to innovation, most money and most teacher time and energy has been expended on the National Curriculum and new modes of assessment and testing. It was an obvious target for raising standards and achievement levels. I have supported both reforms in principle; but they will not, in themselves, deliver better outcomes. The National Curriculum will in due course settle down and no longer be centre stage. Other things will be focal points of change, and so drivers of it, as we shall see. Understanding how and why the issues of standards and performance drive educational change is a necessary starting point.
The urgent need is twofold: to raise standards, or the yardsticks by which educational outcomes are judged, and also the levels of achievement, or the actual performances of individuals or institutions in relation to the expected standards. The two are often confused or used as synonyms, which bedevils many a political statement or media report. The headline ‘Standards for 16 year-olds are falling’ may mean that a lower level of achievement is required to obtain a certain level of pass in a public examination, or that fewer people today are reaching a certain level of achievement than in the past. It could be both: the standard itself may fall as well as the number of students reaching a standard. The distinction between the two is essential, since both need to be raised: we must set higher standards and ensure that more people achieve them.

All this refers to standards set for and achieved by students in their learning. To raise both expectation and performance will require that the standards set for teaching and the quality actually achieved by teachers are also both raised. By combining the two levels, the educational challenge is simply stated: it is to raise standards of learning and performance of students and the standards of teaching and the performance of teachers. At present all four elements are at too low a level. This well understood by the Confederation of British Industry under Sir John Banham: but their strategy and setting of world class targets were not in fact adopted.
The response to the challenge should not be to re-open the debate about whether in recent years standards have fallen. This is tiresome and irrelevant for three reasons. There is simply insufficient evidence to establish whether they have or have not fallen. The evidence is incomplete or inconsistent, some research pointing one way and some the other. There is always some evidence to support one’s point of view, and sufficient to rebut an opponent; but there is never enough for a convincing case to refute the opposing argument. Secondly, there is (and long has been) a tendency to romanticise the past, to look back on some educational golden days before the rot set in. Accuracy is rarely the partner of nostalgia. Thirdly, detecting the cause of any decline in standards would not necessarily identify how to restore them. What worked in our youth is not necessarily appropriate in changed circumstances and with a new generation.

The more important question is how schools can create a better educated product. In place of recrimination, we need the imagination and confidence to set higher standards of teaching and learning and ensure that students and teachers reach higher levels of performance in comparison both with our own past and with the current achievement levels in other countries. Japanese students reach higher achievement levels than our own; we should get closer to the Japanese norms, especially at the lower end of the scale, since the costs in Britain of low skill workers are high and so the inadequately educated become an unemployable burden. At the same time, it is essential to avoid incurring the price Japan pays for its high student achievement, by which problem-solving skills tend to be sacrificed to factual retention and originality to conformity. What, then, needs to be done?

(i) Standards of learning
These are being raised through the National Curriculum which has clarified and made more precise what is expected of teacher and student at each stage. Indeed, it has had to be revised in part because some standards were set too high, causing overload. Adjusting standards is extraordinarily difficult, but is necessary not only because some competitor
countries seem to set higher standards but also because far higher standards for the lower end of the achievement range must now be set. In the past when there were many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs on the market, employers had scant regard for a literacy and numeracy that might never be used by an employee at work. Such jobs are disappearing rapidly and so employers are right to raise their expectations of minimal standards for employability.

(ii) Levels of achievement

Surveys in newspapers and popular magazines regularly report worrying results, and more systematic research has often shown British pupils to have a weaker grasp of factual knowledge and basic mathematical competence than their age peers in other countries, especially Germany and Japan. At the end of compulsory schooling, too many British students show negative attitudes to learning, teachers and school; it is not surprising, then, that more drop out of full-time education than in comparable countries. The recent survey conducted for Sir Claus Moser’s National Commission indicated that among 14 year olds:

- over half say that most of the time they don’t want to go to school
- one in four thinks teachers are too easily satisfied
- one in four admits to having played truant
- one in five denies being happy at school.

At the same time, they do not deny the importance of education, since

- over 90 per cent think school work is worth doing
- over 95 per cent think schools should teach things useful for jobs
- over 97 per cent say their parents think it important to do well in school.

At the upper end, particularly for those children who enter higher education, standards and performance levels are generally high, but at
the lower end many students achieve far too little and are poorly motivated. This is bad for them and bad for society: they are below their potential and below the levels needed for work, further education and the capacity to enjoy an higher quality of life.

(iii) Standards of teaching

It is very difficult to know what these are and how cross-national comparisons might be made. Most teachers are appropriately qualified, have been well trained, are dedicated to their job and work very hard. There are gaps in terms of qualifications, however, and in too many cases teachers of mathematics and science have no relevant higher education qualifications. There is also a minority of teachers who, for a variety of reasons, cannot manage an orderly classroom and who are judged by students and colleagues alike to be of doubtful competence. Most of these teachers survive; few are dismissed or guided into alternative employment. The measures for removing incompetent teachers are slow and complicated, demanding remarkable patience and skill from a complainant headteacher. Worse still, everybody in schools knows this is a problem that needs to be addressed, but is too embarrassed to do so openly.

(iv) Teaching performance

Annual reports of Her Majesty’s Senior Chief Inspector of Schools have indicated that around 70 to 80 per cent of lessons are satisfactory or better. This means, of course, that one out of every four or five lessons is unsatisfactory. In a forty lesson week, then, between eight and twelve lessons are unsatisfactory – between a day and a half and a half is effectively lost for pupils. This is an average figure. In good schools, unsatisfactory lessons will be much rarer. In how many schools will the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons be well above average, wasting half the week?

Politicians of all parties are right to conclude that the evidence about the quality of schooling gives no ground for complacency. To enhance standards and performance for teachers and students will
require both that more pressure is put on them and that they are given more support. In turn this will mean some bold and radical thinking about how schools, classrooms and the teaching profession are best organised. It may mean more resources, but they will need to be resources directed at new ways of doing things rather than pumping extra money into existing structures and practices.

Much will have to be done at the political level, where there are the most significant drivers and barriers. Politicians control much of the funding of the school system; they have huge powers, more than ever before; they set the tone for how the public regard schools and the standing of teachers; they influence the visions of a future society and the role the education system plays in its creation and maintenance. But brilliant teaching and enthusiastic learning cannot be legislated into existence, though politicians sometimes act as if they could. The style and skill with which they work with the teaching profession has a powerful impact on what goes on in classrooms, the part of the education service where it is hard for legislation to reach. What the education system does, what schools and classrooms will be like in twenty years, depends in part on what politicians choose to do – or not to do – and the manner in which they do it. At the same time, politicians are wise if they recognize the limits of their powers. If educational policy is to have any profound and enduring effect on schools, it needs to be an educational strategy devised and implemented with and through the wider community, not just a series of ad hoc tactics imposed from above as has been the case with much recent educational reform.
The Main Barriers Against Change

Bold reforms, however, must take account of the many barriers against any fundamental re-shaping of the education service.

(i) Utopianism and education

In a well-publicised speech in January 1994, Michael Portillo argued that in the absence of respect for traditional British institutions – Crown, Parliament and Church – social disorder and disintegration follow. This nostalgic back-to-the-future fantasy is as unconvincing as the Labour Party commitment to full employment. In both cases the slogans and rhetoric hide a lack of specific policies about the long-term character of British society and the role of its education system.

Utopian social engineering – defining an ideal, such as comprehensive schooling or market mechanisms, and then sticking fast to a rational blueprint to achieve the ideal – will no longer do. We have had thirty years of it in education and it has not worked well. We need a larger dose of what Karl Popper calls the piecemeal approach to reform – detecting weaknesses and failures and then undertaking the necessary experiments and readjustments to set things right. It puts trial and error ahead of ideology and considers experience as important as inspiration. Making mistakes is a necessary feature of making progress, a sentiment as familiar to the teacher as it is alien to the politician. It has become commonplace criticism of the Thatcher years.
that a government committed to reducing the powers of the state in practice increased those powers through massive centralisation: many are persuaded by the original rhetoric, so ways of creating a government truly reduced in scale and scope must be sought, but then dedicated, as John Gray has convincingly argued, to the creation of vital communities to bridge the yawning and dangerous gap between the individual and the state. In his 1990 Reith Lectures Jonathan Sacks pointed out that:

‘Poverty, under-achievement, educational standards, birthrates and rates of divorce are relatively resistant to government action, whether the state is pursuing a maximalist or minimalist course. The forces that shape a society lie too deep …’

For Sacks, as for Gray, there are important mediating structures between the individual and the state – the family, the local community, the religious congregation, ethnic cultures -which provide the moral ecology of the nation and whose disintegration may be perilously close.

(ii) Schools as peculiar institutions

The distinguished American educator, Philip Jackson, tells the story about how he changed his research interests from the study of student ability to institutional structures and cultures. Jackson was during the 1960s a leading figure in the development of tests for creativity which attracted interest as a new angle on intelligence. One day the principal of a high school telephoned Jackson and told him how he had given the creativity tests to all his students and all his staff and made up a class of the most creative students with the most creative teachers. Would Professor Jackson like to witness the exciting results of this experiment? Indeed he would. But when Jackson visited the school and sat at the back of the purportedly creative classrooms, all he could think of was the similarity to his own schooldays. What most struck Jackson was how little classrooms had changed in the intervening
years. He stopped doing research on creativity and wrote a classic book on the nature of classroom life.

Schools, and especially classrooms, are remarkably resistant to change, much to the consternation of politicians, policy makers and innovators. This is a difficult, bitter and costly lesson for reformers – and one, apparently, that every reformer has to learn anew. Indeed, the main barrier to change may be the professional culture of teachers and the nature of school and classroom organisation (rather than the resistance of a so-called ‘educational establishment’, many of whom are as frustrated as anybody else in their failure to change schools). Professional and institutional structures and cultures are resilient; they withstand many an assault and have powerful capacities to maintain and reproduce themselves despite surface changes.

This was recognized by that educational guru of the early 1970s, Ivan Illich, who saw the universal school as a modern invention, quickly taken for granted, but nevertheless deeply unnatural. For Illich, the pernicious effects of school are to persuade people that education is the same as schooling (whereas in reality most education takes place in the home, with friends and family, and through the various mass media); that learning is a consequence of teaching (whereas plainly it often is not); and that teaching is something to be undertaken only by those who are qualified as teachers (whereas the great miracle of learning – language acquisition – takes place before the child goes to school and the mother is teacher). In contrast to such perfectly natural learning stands the artificial, contrived and formalised nature of much learning and teaching in schools, which can so easily remove the pleasures of and responsibilities for natural learning in natural (i.e. non-school) settings. Illich sought to return teaching and learning to people who wanted to work together as they shared a common interest, complementing the didactic style of school with the more frequent observation, imitation and trial and error of natural and curiosity-driven learning.

Illich’s position was utopian. He had a powerful ideal of a ‘deschooled’ society in which the education service would be organised to allow people to gain access to the resources they needed to learn; in which people would exchange skills through voluntary association; in which people
could contact partners for learning. He was, of course, twenty or even thirty years ahead of his time: and he openly stated that his proposals were ‘meant to serve a society which does not now exist.’ Modern information technology allows some of these ideas to be put into practice, even if currently on a relatively small scale. We could be on the edge of the possibility of turning some of Illich’s ideas into practice; indeed, Howard Gardner, in a recent Demos publication, has offered a variation on these ideas for today’s world.

Whether schools and classrooms will resist contemporary reformers as much as they did Illich is difficult to say. In the United States of America over the last ten years or so, the schools, especially the high schools, have as a result of intense political concern about low educational standards faced a new set of imposed three R’s – reform, restructuring and redesigning. It has all produced limited change and even more modest improvement. One of the USA’s most incisive observers of education, Ted Sizer, has noted with regret that:

‘the routines of school and the assumptions that informed these routines, persisted. Bells continued to signal the progression of fifty-two-minute periods… The tests came at the students much as they always had, although they were now given in greater profusion and more was made of them. The teachers’ responsibilities remained as before, and the contracts negotiated on their behalf were familiar. Visitors could detect little change in the feel or intensity or purposefulness or culture of [the] High School over the decade. It was as though most of those well-intentioned calls to ‘reform’ had never really been trumpeted, or at best had been heard faintly… Individual schools respond poorly to detailed commands for reform by distant authorities.’

(iii) Schools as places of custody for the young
One of the reasons for Illich’s failure to capture the imagination of the general public was that many were terrified of what would happen to
young people if there were no schools as we have come to know them. Schools share a function with prisons and hospitals, namely to keep (young) people off the streets, out of harm and out of sight, and with luck in a caring environment where inmates will profit from their stay. The rest of us are all too busy, too occupied with other things to have time to care for the sick, reform the criminal or educate the young in our homes or in the community. Schools and classrooms are likely to survive unless and until other ways of meeting this custodial function are found; they will be allowed to be restructured only insofar as they do not seek to renounce this custodial function without provision of alternatives. Indeed, this feature seems to be increasing, rather than decreasing. There may be sound reasons for providing schooling for the very young, for an expanded early years education and nursery provision for every parent who wants it: but a key motive is undoubtedly the desire or need of many women to be in paid employment when their children are young. Indeed, for many single-parent families the lack of nursery provision may lead to relative poverty and unsought dependence on welfare benefits. ‘Custodial provision’ may not be an appealing concept, but its function is real enough.

(iv) The narrow definition of ability and achievement

Paul Johnson once said:

‘A school where academic attainment is virtually the sole criterion of success is likely to be an ineffective and sad place because it is in fact valuing only one kind of skill, the ability to pass exams. If this were the key to success in life we should end up being ruled by dons who, almost by definition, possess this skill (and little else) in the highest degree. What a terrifying prospect!’

The Inner London Education Authority had anticipated him, since in 1984 it accepted the principle of four aspects of achievement for
school students:

**Aspect 1** The capacity to express oneself in written form, to retain propositional knowledge, to select from such knowledge quickly and appropriately as in an examination.

**Aspect 2** The capacity to apply knowledge, the practical rather than the theoretical, the oral rather than the written; problem-solving and investigational skills.

**Aspect 3** The capacity to communicate and cooperate with others and to work in groups or teams; initiative, leadership, personal and social skills.

**Aspect 4** Motivation and commitment; willingness to accept and overcome failure; confidence, self-esteem, belief in oneself; perseverance and enterprise.

In 1982 I suggested that abilities could be classified into five categories:

- cognitive-intellectual
- aesthetic-artistic
- affective-emotional
- physical-manual
- personal-social.

At that time Howard Gardner proposed his theory of multiple (seven) intelligences, as a wider and more universal set of competences than had usually been considered under the umbrella of a narrowly defined conception of intelligence reducible to a numerical IQ. The intelligences are:

- linguistic intelligence
- musical intelligence
- logical-mathematical intelligence
- spatial intelligence
Despite all this, a narrow definition of ability and achievement – encouraged by the enormous significance given to public examination results – continues to dominate many people’s conceptions of education, as well as much classroom practice, curiously unaffected by rhetoric about educating the whole child. But if more young people are to succeed in formal education and develop the whole range of ability, knowledge and skill, then conceptions of intelligence and achievement must be widened to promote the diversity of the nation’s talent, too much of which lies dormant and under-valued.

(v) The university monopoly over credentials

The universities are at the heart of our system of credentials, which they keep within a very firm grip. They control not merely the award of their degrees to their own students. By arrangement with professional bodies they also control much of the entry to professions. Through the examination boards they control much of the system of giving academic awards to 16 and 18 year-olds, whether or not they are intending to go to university. No wonder, to recall Paul Johnson’s sentiment, these examinations are so very academic, so narrow in their conception of learning, skill and achievement.

But by far the greatest achievement of the universities in the matter has been to persuade the public to call the sixteen-plus examinations, the GCSE, ‘qualifications.’ In what precisely are they qualifications? One cannot simply be qualified tout court: one is qualified as something in order to do something – a qualified doctor to practise medicine or a qualified car mechanic to run the garage. So far as I can see, success in the GCSE for the most part qualifies one as or in very little: it qualifies one to take an examination at the next level – the ‘A’ level – on the path to – guess where? – the universities. We dupe ourselves by calling them qualifications rather than educational and academic achievements. This university monopoly over the content and character of achievements
should be ended. The universities are a vital part of our culture and civilisation as well as making an important contribution to wealth creation. But the power they exercise over the credentials that relate so closely to the allocation of occupations, and the associated status and income, is often unwarranted. Tragically, converting the former polytechnics into new universities reinforces the old university culture rather than creating new directions in continuing and higher education.
The Seeds of Change

In this book I pick on five seeds of educational change which I believe could germinate and flower in the next twenty years, and with largely beneficial effects; but I am not confident that any will. They are discussed in declining order of their likelihood of flowering. The most likely to do so is:

Seed 1: The Increase in Diversity of Provision in Schooling and Parental Choice of Schools

The standard ‘comprehensive’ school in the secondary sector is probably in decline. This trend should continue and not be reversed, even under a different government. The end of the comprehensive school does not mean the end of the comprehensive principle, which can be realised through a variety of forms. There should be a vigorous programme of increasing the degree and forms of variety in the school system. Grant-maintained schools are not what I have in mind. Grant-maintained schools are here to stay: if the governing body and staff are happy with their self-managing, independent status, as they seem to be, why should we quarrel? Indeed, the government should go the whole hog and abolish local education authorities so that all schools become self-managing, funded from central government on the basis of national formula (to replace the present highly diverse and inequitable patterns of per capita spending according to local whim). Schools which seek, or for certain
purposes gain from, collaborative relations with other schools, in consortia, or with outside agencies and consultants of various kinds will do so and the most valuable functions of local education authorities will be replicated by voluntary association between schools.

City Technology Colleges are not what I have in mind either. These are an expensive and misguided distraction: there are few of them and hardly any are doing truly innovative work. Collaboration and partnership with business or industry applies to all schools not just the few. Even where CTCs do promote good practice, there is no strategy for dissemination to the rest of the school system. There is no basis for a more differentiated system down these routes.

Some would opt for selection by ability, a return to the eleven-plus examination and grammar schools. The trouble with the so-called ‘tripartite system’ was not that the grammar schools were bad, but rather that those pupils who did not ‘pass’ the scholarship examination – the majority – went to secondary modern schools which never achieved the ‘parity of esteem’ intended for them at the time of the 1944 Education Act. Far too many of their students believed themselves to be ‘failures’. Revisiting the ‘sec mods’ is an unlikely recipe for raising educational standards. In any case, the tripartite system was actually bi-partite, since sadly few technical schools were created. It is too late for that, since it is accepted that all students now need a good grounding in science and technology during their secondary schooling and that vocational orientations should not begin at the age of eleven.

The comprehensive principle rejects the notion of different types of child who should from the age of eleven attend different types of school with no common curriculum.

No, the differentiation I have in mind is neither as trivial as the City Technology Colleges nor as regressive as selection at eleven by intelligence testing. Institutional diversification is needed along two rather different lines. The first is curriculum specialisation – specialised schools, in urban areas, in science and technology, languages (both modern and classical), the arts, and sports. To some, such an idea is too close to the ‘magnet’ schools developed in the United States in the early 1980s, or even the later ‘charter’ schools. The fear is that they threaten
the principle of comprehensive education, selecting by ability rather than aptitude, interest and preference. The magnet schools themselves are impressive and so rarely criticised directly. The argument is that they leave a remnant of ‘sink schools’ attended by the most deprived; this is said to offend the comprehensive principle. But there are already ‘sink schools’ within the comprehensive system, so the argument is not convincing. Moreover, it is perfectly possible to have specialised schools where admission is not based on some general ability: there is no need to return to some kind of eleven-plus. We have seen how many adolescents are less enthusiastic about school than about education: if more schools developed a curriculum specialisation attractive to students, their motivation and achievement might rise sharply. And since the National Curriculum now requires schools to offer breadth and balance in the curriculum, specialised schools would not sacrifice breadth to depth.

These specialised schools would, of course, have more staff in the subject of curriculum specialisation. They would be better resourced in their field, and be the site of innovations in curriculum and teaching method. They should, therefore, be schools which serve as teachers’ centres, offering professional development and in-service training to all teachers of that subject in other schools in the area. In addition, since such schools would attract high calibre staff, they could play a central role in the initial training of teachers in the specialism.

The other form of diversification is specialisation along philosophical, ideological or religious lines. That is, state-supported schools should offer choice to parents, not so much in terms of rank in league tables of exam results or truancy rates, but in terms of distinctive educational and religious values – as has been the case in the independent sector for many years. This means the acceptance of Islamic schools as well as Roman Catholic, Anglican and Jewish schools. It means many smaller schools, especially before the age of 16, i.e. more 11–16 rather than 11–18 schools, to provide the necessary range of choice for parents.

Teacher choice of school is as essential as parental choice, since unless a school is staffed by teachers who are committed to the school’s philosophy, educational and/or religious, the notion of a distinctive
ethos is largely rhetorical. As Peter Drucker puts it, ‘Only a clear, focused and common mission can hold the organisation together and enable it to produce results.’ Too many schools are prevented from developing a clear and distinctive philosophy, and then living by it, simply because some staff decline to commit themselves to it or strive to subvert it. Such people would not be allowed to survive in a business: why should they in a school?

**Drivers and barriers**
The need to raise students’ levels of achievement is the main driver here as elsewhere, but the 1988 reforms will probably increase the sophistication among parents in their notion of choice and demands to have their preferences met. Suspicions that diversification will mean a return to 11-plus type selection could slow the process if they are not actively allayed. The reluctance of governing bodies to diversify or be too distinctive, and their inclination to compromise to avoid upsetting local interest groups, could also work against diversification. Parents’ demands for religious education are not likely to be satisfied by non-denominational and multi-faith provision and this will strengthen the desire for religious schools. The general hostility towards religious groups outside the mainstream Christian denominations could delay the granting of equitable rights to religious minorities. With increased numbers in higher education, a surplus of graduates could lead new teachers to be more selective in their choice of school. Schools should also appoint new staff who share the school’s philosophy and values.

**Seed 2: Better Organised Schools and New Types of Teacher**
The introduction in 1988 of LMS (local management of schools or devolved budgets and powers) made schools more self-managing. Schools would, as just suggested, enjoy more of the benefits attributed to businesses if they had more freedom to lose staff who do not pull their weight or do so in the wrong direction. Other reforms are now possible. Schools should, by relatively small steps, improve their organisation: by
separating administrative and management functions from academic and pedagogical functions, and by a more rational division of labour in teaching.

Compare the management and organisation of a teaching hospital with that of a comprehensive school. The main difference is that in schools qualified graduate teachers comprise most of the staff and undertake most of the work, whereas in hospitals doctors are a minority of the staff and do only selected and specialised aspects of the total work. Schools should in some ways become more like hospitals. First, schools should develop non-teacher chief executives to administer and manage the school, leaving the teaching staff to spend far more of their time and energy teaching. We should abandon the pretence that gifted teachers necessarily make good headteacher–managers; and advancement should no longer entail less teaching. The present system takes many of the best teachers out of classrooms, and leaves the less effective there for life. Promotion of teachers should not normally be into management but instead to the consultant-like status of the ‘master teacher’. The head teacher would be just that: the leading educational professional working in partnership with the professional manager. Indeed, much of the so-called senior management in secondary schools could be reduced. The division of teachers into ‘management’ and ‘teachers’ has not served schools or teachers’ relationships well. Any management tasks, pleasant and unpleasant, that are indeed better undertaken by teachers rather than administrators should be shared or rotated and all teachers should see themselves contributing to the formulation of school policies as well as to their implementation. A much flatter professional hierarchy is essential to more collegial structures, and collaborative styles are appropriate for high quality teams of professionals – in this regard the teachers could set a pattern for doctors to emulate.

Secondly, schools should acquire the equivalent of nurses, i.e. assistant teachers who work under the supervision of teachers, are less qualified but carry out essential support to students leaving the design of the curriculum and the overall organisation of teaching and learning to specialised and demonstrably competent teachers. At present
teachers spend far too much of their time in the supervision, management and control of children in classrooms and around the school: such tasks do not require a person of graduate status. Assistant teachers need not be graduates and could be prepared for the job with a relatively short training. They would be paid less than teachers. As qualified highly skilled teachers become fewer, they should be paid more. Young people of 18 years of age or more might become assistant teachers to test whether they liked the idea of being a teacher. Assistant teachers of any age could, after a few years, proceed on a full or part-time basis to a University degree and more formal training for full professional status. A hospital run entirely by doctors without the support of nurses would be grossly wasteful. Why do we not see schools without assistants to teachers as similarly prodigal with scarce resources?

Thirdly, the problem of the ineffective head and the ineffective classroom teacher has to be openly addressed. For many years the issue of how to make schools more effective has been discussed and debated, but one fundamental aspect, how to get rid of a small but significant minority of incompetent teachers, is constantly side-stepped. All teachers should be on five-year renewable contracts and performance-related pay. The majority would have their contract renewed regularly and many would be more effectively rewarded for their dedication and achievement. Those who for whatever reason contribute less should with reason forfeit some pay and those who become seriously deficient cannot expect to have their appointments renewed. The departure of incompetent heads, who sell their teachers short, and incompetent classroom teachers, who sell students short, would probably make the single most important contribution to raising standards and performance of both teaching and learning. Without radical action here, it is unlikely that the worst schools can be levered up to the levels of effectiveness that their students and parents deserve. And it is such schools that constitute the drag on national standards.

Radical as all this might seem, it is not enough. It has been shown that virtually every 14 year-old thinks school should teach things that are useful for jobs. But most teachers are in a weak position to do this, simply because teaching has been their only job. Most teachers are
occupationally sanitized, though one (just one) of the functions of schooling is to prepare the young for the world of work. If teachers are to make their teaching genuinely and usefully more relevant to the world of work, they must have more direct experience of other occupations. This is not best achieved by occasional short secondments to business and industry, beneficial as these might be to the minority who have the opportunity. The best starting point is the lack of satisfaction many teachers experience in teaching. If one were to ask those who have been teachers for (say) fifteen or more years since graduation if they would like an opportunity (a) to work full-time in another occupation or (b) to work part of the week in another job, which is then shared with teaching, I suspect a majority of teachers would be interested. To provide them with such opportunities would be good for them as people and good for their teaching.

Such a possibility is on the horizon. We are entering an age of multiple careers, when people do not want a single job for life, but rather a succession of jobs, serial occupations (with or without serial monogamy). A change of job at regular points serves as a renewal and reinvigoration, as many find. The alternative is the portfolio occupational pattern, so attractively described by Charles Handy. In this version, one’s occupation is ‘a collection of bits and pieces of work for different clients’. Why should there not be teachers one of whose ‘bits’ is part-time work in schools combined with a range of other ‘pieces’ in business and industry, in consultancy, in working from home as a telecommuter? In my experience, part-time teachers of this kind make refreshing and invigorating contributions to school life. Their alternative occupational life outside schools provides antibodies to the debilitating occupational diseases to which the full-time teacher is prone.

The traffic between schools and business and industry ought to be two-way. There are many people in industry who might wish to spend some time teaching in school. At present they are put off by employers who do not see the potential advantages, by the problem of different salary and pension arrangements, and most of all by the requirement of lengthy training to become a qualified teacher in school. Ironically some of these people are engaged in educational activities in business
and industry, where they are not required to take a teaching qualification. The system needs a radical overhaul so that those with relevant experience from outside teaching can enter school teaching with a minimum of fuss and with maximum support through on-site training, allowing them to adjust to the different world of schools.

Once the principle of ‘portfolio teachers’ is accepted, the new sources of teacher supply are readily found. Recently Handy has reflected on the Third Age, which follows the period of full-time employment but which comes too early for full-time retirement. People want, and increasingly may need, to supplement their reduced income; they want something useful and constructive to do. If the existing barrier of the requirement for extensive and expensive initial teacher-training could be removed, a new generation of teachers, from a rich variety of backgrounds, might be discovered.

But it is not just the teachers, in their many new varieties, who will move between sites. Students also should be on the move. There is no good reason why students spend so much time in schools: it has simply become accepted that this is where they belong. Business and industry already do much of the further education and training of their employees. Why should not schools contract some of their teaching out to business and industry, allowing students to spend some of their time off-site? This would be enormously attractive to many students, who usually find the now common short work-experience placements interesting, partly because at their best they confer a sense of maturity and seriousness about relevant learning. Business and industry will, over coming decades, have to spend more time and money up-grading employee knowledge and skills: constant retraining is becoming part of all jobs except the lowliest. This means that those in the later years of schooling and the first years into the job are likely to be pursuing education and training with older and more experienced colleagues. What a virtue this would be, for it would mix people of different ages and end the absurdly rigid age-grading that characterizes schools. If one wanted to create a separate teenage culture, if one wanted to make adolescents feel cut-off from adult responsibilities, the best way would be to do as we now do: segregate them for most of their lives outside the family.
with those who happen to have been born in the same year. If workers and students of different ages were to mix on school sites and in business and industry, many of the ‘disciplinary’ problems created in our age-graded custodial schools might begin to fade.

Ten years ago, it would have been unthinkable for state schools to ‘contract out’ any of their activities; it is now commonplace. It simply remains for them to contract out more of the teaching, not just the school dinners: it could be cost-effective for business and industry to take on some of the work. Teachers should be on both sides of the school-industry divide, regularly moving between sites. The very nature of what it means to be a ‘teacher’ must change – and so should how they are prepared for and supported in their teaching activities, now to be partially embedded in other occupational activities.

Fundamental reform of the initial training and continuing professional development of teachers has already begun, though the changes continue to be tenaciously resisted by the academic community of teacher educators. For people whose allegiance is mostly to the political left, their views on teacher education are remarkably reactionary. The move to more school-based and school-led teacher training has threatened their power and their jobs in universities. They defend the status quo by claiming that the reforms will sever the links between teaching and higher education, reduce teacher quality and distract schools from their primary task of teaching pupils. The education service should, as we shall see, retain a strong link with universities, just as medicine does; but it should not be in its present form, for it can justly be said that substantial parts of initial training do not need to be located in universities. Pupils will be neglected only if there are insufficient resources for training in schools: teaching hospitals do not necessarily reduce the quality of care provided for patients.

But the teacher trainers’ most effective defence has been that by weakening the link with higher education, a reformed teacher education de-professionalises teachers, since it has been a pillar of the professions such as law and medicine that entry to the profession is preceded by a lengthy training and the acquisition of esoteric knowledge. In fact, neither is necessary for education. Teaching is not a profession in this
sense, and it is pointless to try to make it so. But it is a profession in the sense that it requires some expert knowledge (usually acquired through a university degree in a subject); that considerable skills are needed in its successful exercise; that it puts the needs of clients (students, parents) at the core of its purpose; and that it is a profoundly moral and ethical, not just a technical, activity. That these skills and values are best acquired, nurtured and matured largely in schools progressively over a period of continuing professional development, rather than off-site and before entry to the profession, simply makes teaching different from law and medicine, without being inferior to them. It is the deep insecurity and confusion among teacher trainers that induces the close-minded antagonism to any reforms that challenge their existing assumptions.

Teacher trainers, based in universities, are losing their power over credentials, as teachers can be recognised as qualified by other routes. One of the reasons that universities are anxious to keep teacher training within their fold is that here may be the thin end of a very large wedge, the one which threatens their monopoly over many educational credentials. The universities are on the defensive, for the legitimacy of their credentialling power is under challenge. It would be desirable for many occupations and industrial and business organisations, either alone or in consortia, and led by a prestigious body such as the CBI, to make a determined bid to play a more active and assertive role in the credentialling process, especially insofar as they are concerned with awarding qualifications in the strict sense of the word. A reduction in the excessive deference paid to universities would not come amiss.

Schools, then, will become in some respects more like hospitals, especially in the way they are managed and in the distribution of labour within them. At the same time they will in other respects, especially the notion of a closed profession which is entered only after an initial professional (not just academic) training, become less like hospitals. The boundaries between schools and other kinds of institution will weaken, as will the boundaries between those we call teachers and those who wholly or partially work in other occupations. No other profession or institution serves as a future model for schools and for
teachers. This is as it should be. Schools, teachers and teaching should take their own shape and follow their own evolutionary path.

**Drivers and barriers**
The terrible realisation that recent reforms, focusing on curriculum, assessment and school governance, have been insufficient to raise standards to the necessary extent will focus attention on teachers, and the need to deal directly with their quality, effectiveness and efficiency. Radical solutions will appear on the agenda. A few schools ready to pioneer new developments will probably receive much public attention as well as political support. ‘Portfolio’ and ‘Third Age’ changes to the wider occupational structure will create precedents for changes among teachers. One of the regular cycles of teacher shortage would as usual lead to an opening of new forms of entry to teaching, and a more school-based and school-led system of teacher training and professional development will provide the flexibility needed to manage these changes, most of which will be resisted by the teachers’ unions and associations (as well as those in teacher training). Since these associations will be characteristically divided in their response, the opposition should be short-lived. Parental familiarity with the idea that schools are run by headteachers will influence governing bodies and make them cautious about new approaches to school management, and in this they will be supported by many heads, reluctant to abandon their bureaucratic power base to become leading professionals. In the same way governors of small schools will resist combining into consortia to provide a shared administrative infra-structure. Salary differentials between occupations and non-portable pension arrangements will persist as a barrier, but government intervention is likely, since people working less but more flexibly is one of the few means of reducing unemployment.

**Seed 3: The Establishment of Civic Education**
The problem of Britain as a pluralistic society is how to find some social cement to ensure that people with different moral, religious, and
ethical values as well as social, cultural and linguistic traditions can live together with a degree of harmony; and to discover the contribution that the education system should play in generating social cohesion. Jonathan Sacks has rightly pointed out that the more pluralistic a society we become, the more we need to reflect on what holds us together.

Part of the solution is:

‘to think of a plural society not as one in which there is a Babel of conflicting languages, but rather as one in which we each have to be bilingual. There is a first and public language of citizenship which we have to learn if we are to live together. And there is a variety of second languages which connect us to our local framework of relationships: to family and group and the traditions that underlie them.’

Schools are in a state of confusion over religious, moral and civic education. Recent government reforms have created chaos. Far more clauses of the 1988 Education Reform Act are devoted to religious education and worship than to the rest of the National Curriculum and in 1994 the Department for Education issued a 60-page circular on the theme in a desperate (and unsuccessful) attempt to clarify matters. Many parents who support the provision of religious education are not themselves active members of a religious community; over two thirds want their children to be taught that there is a God, yet more of them think the main purpose of RE is to learn a moral code rather than to acquire religious belief. Evidently they want RE as a kind of social antiseptic, to endow young people with moral and ethical values to protect them from the ubiquitous dangers of drugs, sex and crime and guide them into being upright and happy. This is natural enough, since the dangers are real and immediate, whereas the concept of social cohesion is abstract and remote. And they are following a line established by government in 1944, when religious education became compulsory – at that time the only such subject – with a right for parents to withdraw their child from RE lessons. The aim has been not so
much to make children practising Christians, for the teaching is non-
denominational; rather it is to provide the religious (and implicitly
Christian) basis for morality and teaching the difference between right
and wrong. It is, perhaps, part of British culture to assume that the
Christian religion forms the best, or even the only, basis for morality.

This conflation of moral and religious education persists. To be
sure, the emergence of ethnic minorities with other religious affilia-
tions, especially the Muslims, added complications. At school level RE
was transmuted, in the interests of meeting the needs of all students
and of increasing understanding of different religions, into a multi-
faith study of religion; and the corporate act of worship, where prac-
tised, lost many of its Christian trappings in order to avoid causing
offence to other religious and non-religious groups. This challenged
the dominant position of Christianity in the curriculum and thus its
distinctive basis for a shared morality. In 1988 there was a determina-
tion to restore the position of Christianity. This irritated other reli-
gious groups, especially those who, like the Muslims, aspired to have
their own state-funded religious schools, partly to maintain their own
religious, cultural and linguistic identities and partly to transmit to
students a morality grounded in their culture and faith.

By March 1993, just weeks after the murder of two-year-old James
Bulger by two ten-year-old boys on Merseyside, the National Curricu-
lum Council (NCC) was issuing to schools with guidelines on spiritual
and moral development. This horrific murder had brought to a head
current concerns about delinquency, violent crime, one-parent fami-
lies and the collapse of the traditional nuclear family; heated debates
on these matters dominated the media for months afterwards. It was
inevitable that schools would be seen both as part of the problem in
having failed in their function of transmitting moral values and as
being part of the solution in restoring that function. But the NCC doc-
ument, like most of its ilk, is notable for its lack of specific or novel
ideas; among the platitudes is the renewed assertion of the particular
importance of RE to moral development.

Many parents, in their natural concern for the moral develop-
ment and welfare of their children, will continue to support religious
education, perhaps in any form, because they see few alternatives. Yet there are times when government should beware of responding directly to parental wishes, and instead look beyond them to the more deep-seated needs of the young within a rapidly changing society. In this case it means acknowledging that the attempts to bolster and rationalise RE since 1988 have failed; that morality is not as closely linked to religion, especially the Christian religion, as in the past; and that moral education will in the future need to be more closely linked to civic education if it is to provide a common core of values shared across communities in a pluralistic society.

The notion of a non-denominational core RE to be offered in all schools as a buttress to moral education is becoming less and less viable and should now be abandoned. The multi-faith pick’n mix tour of religions easily trivialises each faith’s claims to truth. As an academic discipline, it has little appeal to most children and comes before they are mature enough to engage in the necessary historical and philosophical analysis. But what could and should replace RE? Several changes are needed.

First of all, there should be more religious schools, of Christian and other faiths, and a requirement that all schools, religious or secular, should provide a common core of civic education. The increasing differentiation between schools is a growth point and an opportunity for religious schools, for all the main religious groups in contemporary Britain and for all the denominations or subgroups within these religions. Within this more differentiated system religious schools should nourish a distinctive ethos, thus increasing the choice available to parents. More importantly, such schools could confidently and without apology assert the fundamental link between morality and religious faith which is so prized by religious groups. This is achieved by religious schools, especially when home and school are jointly committed to the transmission and living experience of a shared moral and religious culture, but not when schools are expected to transmit and practise what is ignored or denied in the home. Such schools would, then, sustain the very communities, including the family, on which moral and religious convictions ultimately depend for their sustenance and development.
This proposal is vulnerable to a double argument; on the one hand that religious schools are socially divisive and on the other that the creation of secular schools (though they exist in many European countries) undermines the moral education that parents and politicians wish to strengthen. The existence of religious schools is not inherently divisive any more than the existence of different cultural, linguistic or ethnic groups is inherently injurious to social harmony. Indeed, the resistance at local and national levels to state support for Islamic schools is inconsistent (since such schools would undoubtedly buttress the strong moral basis of the Muslim community), hypocritical (as long as voluntary aided Christian schools are supported) and racist (white British religious minorities rarely meet such opposition). The existence of such schools does, however, entail that members of society respect the differences between sub-communities, teach their young to do so, and introduce penalties for those who will not abide by that minimal respect, the tolerance of difference. Indeed, a central feature of a harmonious pluralistic society is an acceptance by all that the right of their own community to practise its way of life depends upon the granting of similar rights to others.

Secular schools do not have to abandon moral education because they no longer teach religious education. On the contrary, they have to show that whilst many people see a close link between the moral and the religious, even seeing the former as deriving from the latter, there are many others who believe that morality does not require a religious basis and that a moral code without religious belief is tenable. Of course such a moral education could not entirely ignore religion. Religion, and in Britain the Christian religion especially, has exerted a deep influence on so much of our culture – our social institutions as well as literature, art and music. This is sometimes used as a justification for RE. But the importance of religion in these regards could be as well taught through the curriculum in English and the arts. If religious schools do have an advantage over secular schools in these matters, that is a factor which parents will take into account in making their choice of school.

Religious and secular schools will approach the fields of religious and moral education in different but complementary ways. Religious
schools have a duty to teach their students that morality without religion is an intellectually defensible and socially respectable position; in the same way, secular schools have a duty to explain to their students why a morality grounded in religious belief takes a certain form. Both kinds of school can remain committed to some notion of a common curriculum with regard to religious, moral and civic education, and especially in regard to the last of these.

To help to create social cohesion, to develop a moral cement that will withstand the strains of being pluralistic, schools should take the lead in teaching what Sacks called ‘the first and public language of citizenship’: here is the shared or common core of a civic, moral and religious education. The government mistakenly took religion to be this first language. It is not. As Sacks rightly noted:

‘our second languages are cultivated in the context of families and communities, our intermediaries between the individual and the state. They are where we learn who we are; where we develop sentiments of belonging and obligation; where our lives acquire substantive depth.’

Secular schools cannot teach these second languages; only specialised and religious schools can do that. But all schools can and should teach the first language. By a terrible irony the government introduced citizenship as one of five ‘cross-curricular themes’ at the time of the National Curriculum. They were not mandatory, but many schools took, and still take, them seriously. But the National Curriculum is under reconstruction by Sir Ron Dearing because it is so badly overloaded. The first report of Sir Ron’s review makes little of citizenship: it is in danger of being pushed to the margins by subjects considered to be more important, including religious education. The first language is being taken out of schools.

Civic education is about the civic virtues and decent social behaviour that adults wish to see in young people. Citizenship is also more than this. Since Aristotle it has been accepted as an inherently political
concept that raises questions about the sort of society we live in, how it has come to take its present form, the strengths and weaknesses of current political structures, and how improvements might be made. In the popular mind political education has sometimes come to mean party political education, and the propagation by teachers of their own political beliefs. In practice, the majority of teachers are wary of disclosing to students their political convictions and are able to promote political literacy among the young through a balanced presentation of positions and arguments. It should be a matter of deep concern that so many young people are politically illiterate: they have little understanding about quite basic political concepts, such as democracy, and frequently display boredom, indifference or cynicism in relation to political issues and participation. But how can there be any form of community participation that is not in some sense political? Community participation stripped of its political content is no more than self-serving neighbourliness. Active citizens are as political as they are moral; moral sensibility derives in part from political understanding; political apathy spawns moral apathy.

In secular schools, a basic civil and moral education should normally precede any systematic RE. In part this is because it is essential to demonstrate to the young, from the beginning, that whilst a moral stance may be, and frequently is, grounded in religious belief, moral and civic values are just as important and tenable in the absence of religious belief. In part it is because understanding a religious faith from the outside requires a degree of maturity; much school RE comes too soon and leaves a residue of religious faith as a mixture of superstition and fairy stories. A sound, core civic and moral education should inculcate a respect for beliefs, values and ways of life that one does not immediately understand.

The British have produced some outstanding contributors to political theory and philosophy – Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham, William Godwin, John Stuart Mill. We should be proud of them and be ready to discuss their universal contributions to an understanding of modern societies and citizenship. Yet their names are hardly known to the vast majority of
British school-leavers. We should be deeply embarrassed at this neglect. Of course some students will find political and moral philosophy, even in elementary forms, difficult to grasp. This is not of grave consequence, since civic education should be taught by example as much as by study. Civic education, like any moral or religious education, requires immersion into a shared culture and is best practised before it can be intelligently discussed. Students should learn how to value and sustain a wide range of communities in a pluralistic society that has means of avoiding or resolving inter-community conflicts. This would entail the school becoming a more central and therefore permeable institution in the community and one in which parents were evidently in a more extensive partnership with teachers.

A core civic education could be taught more readily and with more conviction by most teachers. At present there is a shortage of qualified teachers of religion, and many teachers (especially in primary schools) feel they lack the expertise required by the syllabus. If there is to be a worthwhile civic education, it is one where virtually every teacher has a degree of interest and expertise. Because it will be clear to pupils that all their teachers have some commitment to civic education, the message is that all teachers regard civic education as central to the concept of an educated person.

If over the next few years the schools cannot respond with a rapid improvement in civic and moral education, then more authoritarian solutions to law and order problems will be adopted by politicians – the pattern is being set in places such as Singapore – as well as the idea of compulsory national community service being advocated by Amitai Etzioni and Christopher Dandeker.

**Drivers and barriers**

The increasing collapse of community social controls and shared moral and religious values combined with the failure of ‘law and order’ measures to stem high crimes rates, especially among the young, could encourage the provision of moral and civic education in all schools. A greater emphasis on prevention rather than punishment will increase
the pressure on schools to contribute to solving this crisis. In the short term, however, government insistence that religious education should have ‘first language’ status, and politicians’ persistent preference for preaching about morality rather than long-term remedial action, are likely to marginalise citizenship education.

**Seed 4: The Advance of the New Technologies**

The educational potential of the new information technologies, especially in interactive forms, is considerable, but has yet to be realised. This potential lies particularly in its capacity to motivate young people, to make learning more enjoyable and less judgmental. Teachers make poor entertainers of bored and reluctant students. There are severe limits to the capacity of classroom teachers to motivate that substantial minority of young people with little commitment to conventional schooling, who develop a sense of failure and resentment, whose achievement levels are worryingly low and who are destined to be an unemployable and alienated under-class. The challenge they pose should be a general driver; but recent reforms, such as the National Curriculum, do little for this group. If a fraction of the time and money of the multi-million pounds computer games industry were devoted to education rather than leisure, we might, under certain conditions, retain these young people’s commitment and esteem. Computer games motivate and challenge; they do not lower their expectations because of the perceived background of the player. If the game is hard, the machine frustrates, but is far less likely than a teacher to humiliate. Information Technology (IT), like teaching assistants, potentially permits teachers to spend less time on what Oakeshott calls the communication of information and more on the heart of education, the communication of judgement. Moreover, IT allows schooling to overcome the geographical limits of the school, by providing students with opportunities to work more at home and become ‘tele-commuters’ working from home but in touch with teachers and fellow learners via the technology (alongside parents who could take a more active role in formal education than they do). IT opens up new forms of interactive
communication between home and school, and between students and distant peers and mentors. Here are the seeds of a major challenge to teachers’ monopoly over teaching; they should respond to the challenge by ‘contracting out’ pedagogic activities and functions to a whole range of new agencies, some community-based and others based in the world of work.

Technology, then, could support Gardner’s notions of ‘assessment specialists’ to understand the abilities and interests of students, ‘student-curriculum brokers’ to match student abilities and interests to particular curricula and styles of learning, and ‘school-community brokers’ to match students to learning opportunities in the wider community – all of which are a contemporary re-assertion of Ivan Illich’s (1971) conceptions of educational networks and learning webs. But look what happened to Illich’s prescient ‘deschooling’ ideas: they crashed on educational conservatism and the popular assumption that schools are custodial institutions for young people and the best place to learn. Exciting ideas may be a necessary condition for reform, but they are never a sufficient one. The IT enthusiasts are still a small minority; the majority of teachers remain indifferent. Though most schools now have computer suites, the impact is relatively limited and many teachers and heads are now rather sceptical about the educational value, not least in the light of high recurrent costs, which always make a solicitous nurse of an infant doubt. As Larry Cuban has pointed out, certain deep-seated cultural beliefs:

‘such as that teaching is telling, learning is listening, knowledge is subject matter taught by teachers and books, and the teacher-student relationship is crucial to any learning, dominate popular and practitioner thinking. Most taxpayers expect their schools to reflect these centuries-old beliefs. School organizations shape classroom practice with its self-contained classrooms separating teachers from one another, a curriculum divided into segments of knowledge
Schools are still modelled on a curious mix of the factory, the asylum and the prison. New technology will not change this. Schools must be constructed on the basis of a new institutional model before the technologies will be admitted and allowed to develop to their full potential. Factories are disappearing: modern businesses look very unlike the nineteenth-century, heavy-industry factory. Changing the character of the teaching force, moving students between education and business premises, letting students spend more time working from or at home – all these should lead to a restructuring of the school day and the school year. But it will also be necessary to build on experiments conducted by a few pioneering schools – those restricting conventional lessons to the morning, and using the afternoons for project work and independent study; abandoning the conventional school day or week for integrated, complex and real-life problem-solving projects with students working in supervised teams in a variety of settings; flexi-time arrangements that give teachers and students more control and reduce the sense of oppressive routine and predictability; restructured days giving teachers space to devote more time to planning and preparation; parents abandoning their conventional prejudices about what ‘schooling’ must mean when they see new structures enhancing the commitment, motivation and achievement of their children. In schools engaged in rethinking their organisation, such as the Brit Performing Arts and Technology School in Croydon, the visitor is instantly struck by the fact that the school feels less like a school – a sensation that is profoundly refreshing. This is the shape of things to
come, as schools come once again to resemble contemporary institutions. We are glad to see the end of the traditional factory; why should we expect the school modelled on it to be welcome to children? The public will not be easily persuaded that new structures and styles promise better educational outcomes; to dent the conviction that the most reliable foundation for more effective schooling rests with traditional structures and styles, there will need to be hard evidence to support alternatives.

**Drivers and barriers**

Increasing concern about under-achievement and the unemployability of a significant minority could soon lead to more imaginative innovations with school structures. The most adventurous schools will explore alternative ways of teaching and learning, including ‘contracting out’. Lack of money and imagination will retard the development of educational applications of, and high quality software for, the new technologies and teacher unease with, and scepticism about, the new technologies may be overtaken only when the new teachers who have grown up with such technology assume senior positions.

**Seed 5: Better Research to Guide Educational Policy and Practice**

Very little of the implementation of educational innovation, especially in the curriculum and methods of teaching and learning, is preceded by a period of rigorous trial and test. In practice a new development is a matter of individual initiative, personal preference, or (as in the case of the National Curriculum) well-intentioned imposition. It is hard to imagine what would be the state of the nation’s health and health services if medicine aped education in its reliance on fashion and fad or the arbitrary judgements of ministers and their advisers. Medicine advances in part through its reliance on the clinical trial. Doctors do not always give patients what might be the best treatment. Initially, a promising drug or treatment is subject to rigorous clinical trials before the benefits are established and dangers detected or removed and it is
allowed into general use. In this sense doctors constantly experiment with patients. In education controlled experiments and the equivalent of the clinical trial are virtually unknown.

There are several reasons for this: an aversion to experimentation in the field of education; government suspicion of ‘experts’ and reluctance to test out educational policies before implementing them; the poor quality of much educational research and the low esteem in which it is held by teachers (and many social scientists).

(i) The aversion to experiments in education

Many teachers, like parents, would make the obvious moral objection: it is simply quite wrong to experiment on children. This is in fact a weak objection, since teachers have to select the content of lessons, a way of teaching the material and a form of assessing both student progress and the effectiveness of the teaching, and for the most part this is a matter of personal preference and the conventions of practice. There is rarely any scientific basis for what the teacher chooses to do. In that sense, most teaching is experimental, but it has all the unreliability of a personal and uncontrolled experiment from which no generalizable conclusion can legitimately be drawn. A formally structured experiment is more likely to generate worthwhile evidence about the value and effects of educational materials and styles of teaching. Popular fear about educational experimentation arises when it is taken to mean some grand, utopian experiment such as ‘progressive education’. In reality blind implementation of some utopian scheme is absolutely never what is needed, but rather piecemeal experiments on selected aspects of the particular features of the curriculum and teaching, experiments which would normally affect only a relatively small part of any one child’s life at school. But it is the outcomes of very many small experiments that accumulate into worthwhile knowledge: that, indeed, is how we came to put men on the moon.

A different form of this objection is to say that teaching is essentially an artistic activity, not a scientific one, a moral as well as a technical activity: that the knowledge required to be a successful teacher is at
heart _craft_ knowledge, which is not readily reducible to scientific or technical language and forms of analysis. There is much to support such an argument. Teaching is a strongly personal and interpersonal activity – involving more complex human judgements than, say, a doctor deciding which pills to prescribe or where to make the incision during surgery. But the differences between professions are a matter of degree, not kind: it is in the nature of a profession that the relationship of professional to client is at the heart of the relationship and informs the judgements made by the professional. To concede that the professional’s work is not entirely or even largely reducible to technical operations is not to dismiss the role of science entirely: it is a _non sequitur_ to assert that therefore scientific studies cannot improve the moral craft, including elements of it such as course design and use of materials. The fact remains that many teachers – and policy makers – have an aversion to scientific studies of education, believing that they are generally of little value (unless, of course, scientific findings happen to support their prejudices). In the United States Ted Sizer’s primary explanation of the failure of the reform movement is that ‘it did not spawn a fresh and ambitious research effort’. It applies here too.

(ii) Government suspicion of experts and research

The policies of governments in recent times have certainly been driven by prejudice and ideology largely uninformed by any kind of evidence except that which is selected for convenience. Indeed, prejudices are frequently presented to the public as ‘common sense’ which is adduced in contrast to the opinions of ‘experts’ who by definition are not to be trusted. (Experts should not indeed be trusted to make policy: their function is to give advice which has to be weighed, sometimes rejected but never, surely, ignored on principle.) The trouble with this approach is that policies are generated with enormous confidence and then subjected to instant implementation. Perhaps the best recent example of ‘the grand experiment’ is the National Curriculum and new modes of testing following the 1988 Education Reform Act. By April 1993 the National Curriculum was in such deep trouble that Sir Ron Dearing...
was brought in to sort it out. Many of the emerging problems had been predicted earlier (by experts and practitioners) but ignored as opposition and resistance. The cost of this arrogant haste is huge: the official estimate of the National Curriculum that has been ditched was at the end of 1993 (excluding the tests) put at £469,000,000; and the Dearing review itself costs several million pounds. These official figures, deeply embarrassing to government, are almost certainly an underestimate. One has to add the incalculable amounts of time and energy that teachers put into trying to implement it. Two questions spring to mind. If the government had put the National Curriculum out to tender, would more than half a billion pounds have been accepted as a reasonable market cost for its creation and implementation? If in 1988 the government had offered half a billion pounds for a programme of school improvement to raise standards and levels of achievement, what imaginative options might have been devised for such expenditure?

The lesson is clear: when government has a revolutionary idea for reform, finding very substantial sums of money is apparently no object. In fact, the National Curriculum could easily have been implemented stage by stage, each element being put to trial in a limited number of schools and then disseminated nationally only when the difficulties had been ironed out, defects removed and the beneficial effects carefully assessed. In other words, the introduction of the National Curriculum should have been an occasion, not for what Popper calls utopian engineering, but for piecemeal engineering, whereby from smaller experiments:

‘we make mistakes and learn from our mistakes, without risking repercussions of a gravity that must endanger the will to future reforms. Furthermore, the utopian method must lead to a dangerous dogmatic attachment to a blueprint for which countless sacrifices have to be made. Powerful interests must become linked up with the success of the experiment. All this does not contribute to the rationality, or to the scientific value, of the experiment. But the piecemeal
method permits repeated experiments and continuous readjustments. In fact, it might lead to the happy situation in which politicians begin to look for their own mistakes instead of trying to explain them away and to prove that they have always been right. This – and not utopian planning of historical prophecy – would mean the introduction of the scientific method into politics, since the secret of scientific method is a readiness to learn from mistakes.’

With such an approach, the cost of the National Curriculum would have been but a fraction of the half a billion pounds – or would have left substantial resources for other elements in an experimental programme of school improvement.

The government’s commitment to utopian engineering entails an inspection or quality control system to check whether schools are doing as they should, for example delivering the excessively prescriptive National Curriculum. The new system of an external inspection every four years will have some beneficial effects, but schools see themselves under pressure to conform to a standard model of school that easily inhibits diversity and innovation. The system is very expensive and is better designed to detect defects than to remedy them. Identifying failing schools through inspections does nothing to remove the damage already done to children or to improve schools rapidly. Prevention is far better than cure after complaint or detection. Ironically, for education to follow Japan and the best industrial practice would mean abandoning traditional inspection and quality control in favour of schemes of customer-oriented quality assurance and total quality, by which schools become committed to a process of continuous improvement by a series of small-scale incremental steps. In place of such a cost-effective national strategy of incremental school improvement, the government has imposed an expensive and out-of-date quality control system that the despised experts reject as fundamentally flawed.

Governments should not impose poorly planned and monitored monolithic schemes, making all schools work on untried and untested
ideas, accusing teachers of being obstructive when the innovations don’t work, and then producing yet more untested ideas as the substitutes when the original ones have to be withdrawn. Governments should not create novelties, such as the City Technology Colleges, as so-called ‘beacons of excellence’ unless there are built-in control groups, evaluation procedures and, if success is achieved, dissemination strategies. Inspection systems should not be introduced unless it can be shown that they are more effective than alternative approaches to improving the quality of schools.

(iii) Educational research

The quality of educational research is generally disappointing. Educational studies is not a field that attracts the most able young academics and researchers. Moreover, the people recruited to universities to teach student teachers are (rightly) expected to have been highly successful schoolteachers: they rarely have a social science background or training and experience in research, and many have little interest in it. The absorption of the former teacher training colleges into the university sector now compounds the problem. As university lecturers all these ex-teachers should, as part of their contract, engage in research. Not surprisingly, there is much poor quality research and tedious writing, both of which help to meet university ‘performance indicators’ of research activity but make little contribution to either the accumulating body of research evidence about education or to the continuing education of serving teachers. Naturally among the dross there is some very good research, comparable in quality to that in any discipline; but it is overwhelmed by the mediocrity of the rest, which with justification is treated by the teaching profession with indifference or contempt.

If educational research is to achieve its potential and play its proper role, we need less educational research but of a very much higher average quality. This means ending the pretence that all who are engaged in initial teacher training should or could be researchers. Instead, research should be concentrated in a small number of centres staffed by well
trained and creative researchers. To do this the £27,000,000 currently given to universities for research in education would be allocated through the Economic and Social Research Council to selected centres and individuals, working very closely with the teaching profession and with schools. The partnership with schools ought to be in a ‘research and development’ framework, the school getting consultancy advice and support in exchange for contributing to the research. This does not mean that all of the research should be ‘applied’ rather than ‘basic’: fundamental research should be conducted by the research centres, but the close partnership with users would ensure that opportunities for and insight into application are never neglected. Other forms of basic research are in any event being conducted in ‘mainstream’ university departments, especially those in cognitive science, with which educational research centres should be closely allied. As John Bruer puts it: cognitive science is to education what biology is to medicine. If classroom teachers are involved in the planning, design, conduct and application of such cognitive research, there is real promise that far more school pupils than in the past can be taught to reach higher-level cognitive skills. Better applied research might then be disseminated to the profession. Teachers should have not just the ubiquitous Times Educational Supplement but an educational equivalent to The Lancet and the British Medical Journal. It would be a true indicator of their growth in professional stature.

Drivers and barriers
Public fear of conducting ‘experiments’ on children will not easily be overcome. Schools linked to research centres could potentially acquire the prestige of being ‘leading edge’ institutions (like teaching hospitals) and give research a more positive image. The presumed acknowledgement (in private) by ministers and the Department for Education that millions of pounds could have been saved if the National Curriculum and assessment procedures had been put through trials might seem to be a positive sign, but the extraordinary disengagement by the Department for Education from research and evaluation in recent times
surely dashes any such hope. It will need some unusually outstanding research to cure the addiction of all who discuss education to exchanging prejudices and reinforcing preferences unencumbered by careful argument illuminated by any evidence beyond personal experience and anecdote.
Sketching the future of schools is a hazardous business: it is easier to state predilections than to make predictions, to say what schools should be like than what they will be like. Later, when certain developments have flowered, we shall all with hindsight detect the historical seeds and explain why one germinated and another died. Our capacity to predict which among contemporary embryonic developments are likely to flourish over the next two decades is limited, probably because the ‘drivers’ and the ‘barriers’ of educational change are too little understood. Predicting and prescribing does, however, widen the menu of policy choice and so potentially aids a wiser course of action. Debating what schools should be like might influence what they will become.

Schools for the next century should:

- be smaller, differentiated and specialised, giving more choice to students, parents and teachers
- be independent institutions, financed on the basis of a national formula, accountable to parents and collaborating in consortia as voluntary associations
- be committed, within a national strategy for school improvement, to quality assurance and ‘total quality’ schemes in place of traditional school inspections
- be staffed and managed in new ways by a wider range of personnel and by a richer variety of teachers
Conclusion

- have a head teacher as leading professional but with a professional manager in charge of administration
- have a core of full-time, highly trained professional teachers, on five-year renewable contracts, supported by a range of assistant teachers and part-time teachers who also work in other fields
- contract out substantial parts of their teaching functions, so that secondary pupils spend less of their time in school
- be permeable to their community, to business and the world of working adults, so that the boundaries between school and the outside world weaken
- be committed to a common civic education for a cohesive but pluralistic society, but with more religious schools for those who prefer them
- be better equipped with the new interactive technologies
- be guided in their policies and practice by substantially better research conducted by selected research centres in close association with schools.

Even if all the seeds described in this book take firmer root over the next few years, they are not likely to grow at the same rate. But they do all need to grow, and grow together, for they offer one another mutual support as they intertwine. No single reform will ever do the whole trick; a strategy is needed, not just a sequence of tactics. But this does not require further massive bouts of legislation to enforce a detailed blueprint; it does not require Secretaries of State for Education who are convinced that they have all the answers and that a more compliant teaching force shorn of its lefty theorists and troublemakers is all that is needed. By contrast, it does require from government an educational vision for the evolution of schools at whose heart is a commitment to achieving the end of better teaching and learning, an end that is far more open and flexible than in the past with respect to the means of achieving it. This requires from political leaders a playful attitude to ideas and alternatives, a readiness to experiment and mount clinical trials, a pragmatic philosophy that will learn from experience. Perhaps
most of all, it requires an enthusiasm to carry teachers, parents and employers forward, since without some shared commitment the tough, painful and unpopular decisions that are part of radical change will simply demoralise and reinforce the very conservatism and inertia that are part of the problem.

The key driver should be the Secretary of State’s active encouragement of governors, heads, teachers, parents, local communities and employers to think up then test out new ways. There are plenty of exciting ideas around; people just need the permission and support to try them out so that the seeds germinate and flower – or deservedly wither and die a natural and unmourned death. The legislative powers of a Secretary of State are better used sparingly, and more in removing the barriers to change than in imposing the inevitably flawed blueprint devised for a party manifesto. Perhaps an acknowledgement that the success of recent reforms has been limited will eventually temper arrogance with humility, and so open the way to a more piecemeal and pragmatic approach in place of ill-conceived utopian revolutions imposed through legislation. If the schools are left as they are, in twenty years time they will probably be much the same as today, and in consequence the target of yet more legislation hastily drafted by frustrated politicians. There has to be a way forward between utopian revolutions from above and defensive inertia from below.

Most of us have inherited a British (perhaps English?) tradition whereby the good life is to be lived in the mono-cultural, unitary and largely segregated institutions of family, work, leisure and religion, and life courses take the form of single, life-long careers between the end of schooling and the beginning of retirement. This neat, linear, predictable picture is familiar and comforting, but it is giving way to a far more complex mosaic of institutions and life patterns in which boundaries weaken, edges blur, colours blend, lines curve, shapes fragment; and patterns, though undoubtedly present, are less easily discerned. Schools remain as in the first picture, protruding from the changed landscape like carcasses of the factories on which they were modelled, out of their time and beyond anybody’s powers to make them efficient. If we transform our schools and teachers to catch up
with the mosaic world of institutional fluidity, multiple or portfolio work styles and highly distinctive sub-communities within a pluralistic whole, there is a chance that they will, within the next twenty years, became sources of satisfaction to those who teach and learn and so achieve the standards of excellence and performance levels so urgently needed.
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