

Editorial: What Will Become of Them?

It is sobering to think that it is little more than a hundred and fifty years since the pseudo-science of physiognomy could be presented to the public in an educational part-work magazine, *The Popular Educator*, as a serious subject for study. The illustration to accompany the article, reproduced on the front cover of this issue of *New Era in Education*, emphasises how extraordinary the Victorian world view seems to us in the twenty-first century. Leaving aside the obvious sexism and implicit racism in the way the artist has represented two alternative paths for the child to follow, it is astonishing to us how the notion of morality could be represented as a choice of life-styles, with no regard to economic conditions.

But if we can overcome our nausea at the Victorian mixture of arrogance and ignorance toward social conditions and child development, we can see that the idea of education as the key to becoming a fulfilled citizen is embedded in the artist's sketch. Until about 1980 this value of education was virtually taken for granted. Since then, an emphasis on the economic function of education, the blurring of the boundaries between learning and training, and a disdain for values such as loyalty, thrift and integrity, have all contributed to a society which is becoming dysfunctional.

So we should welcome the efforts being made by politicians in Britain, India and elsewhere, to place more emphasis on the true function of education as learning for life, and as providing the skills to become effective citizens, even if the cynical do deny that teaching values and attitudes is an attainable goal.

There was much hostile criticism of the decision by the British government to include a new subject of citizenship in the national syllabus for English schools. Two years on, it is time to take stock of how far we are fulfilling the aims of those who promoted this new subject, and whether it is serving our children well. Marianne Talbot was one of those who advised the British government, and in her article in this issue, she recognises that some confusion has occurred at the level of implementation, and makes suggestions about how the focus should be restored.

Tony Shallcross and Dean Garratt pick up some of these same ideas in their paper, which is focussed on an evaluation of a Citizenship Values Award. The value of active citizenship, whole school approaches and human rights is a recognisable outcome that accords with the intentions of the government and its advisers in imposing Citizenship upon the national curriculum.

Mark Jones uses the example of his own school to demonstrate convincingly how a School Council can fulfil many of the underlying aims and objectives of a Citizenship programme. This example illustrates that, contrary to the cynical assertions of those who objected to the idea of citizenship, it is possible to empower children as active citizens in a well-run school.

Similar programmes have been introduced in other parts of the world. Anil Kumar describes the efforts being taken in the Indian Education system to promote a culture of peace. Here again, the problem of whether the ideas should be imposed upon or integrated within the curriculum is of principal concern

J.S. Gundara goes on to try and draw conclusions from the experience of teaching about citizenship values and the meaning of education in answer to suggestions in the Delors report for UNESCO. He sees community customs as more of a barrier to equal opportunities than the state itself, but emphasises the need for non-centric knowledge and inclusive democratic values.

Finally, Mildred Masheder brings the discussion back to earth by refocussing on the communication skills required, not just as part of the new national curriculum subject of Citizenship but also as a preventative measure against bullying and bad behaviour.

One thing to emerge clearly from all these diverse reflections on the experience of carrying out the new curricular demands is that citizenship cannot be imposed from outside but must be participated in within the structures of educational provision.

William Boyd foresaw the need for changing the ethos of schools to meet the needs of citizens in democratic societies back in January 1941, when Britain was at a fragile point in the war with the Axis powers. Extracts from his article in *New Era* at the time, reproduced as this issue's "Last Word", have interesting echoes of the discussions we are engaged in today.

Just as in the past, we can look at our children and grandchildren and wonder what will become of them. We are able to present them with a far less stark, but much more meaningful choice of pathways than could ever have been imagined by the Victorian illustrator a century and a half ago.

Dave Hinton