

## We need something more robust

Ian Barr made a presentation to the Tide~ conference which captured the mood of the day and set the scene for a number of challenges in the early stages of the Commission process.

The presentation started by reflecting on how education has changed. There is now an almost universal demand for access, much more is now expected of schools and they are central to the lives of virtually all young people.

In many respects, however, little has changed. In terms of the curriculum, the timetable, the environment in which learning takes place, and the techniques of teaching. Teaching is still generally understood as largely about the transference of ideas, concepts and facts.

*"It almost seems as if we had persuaded ourselves that at some time in the past we found an everlasting and perfect blueprint, [bar some minor tinkering], for school education, regardless of the nature of the world in which it takes place."*

Our attention was drawn to the way in which issues usually at the margins of educational policy have proved to be ideas and principles now central to policy considerations.

*"Politicians are concerned about matters such as connectivity, justice, inclusion, creativity, community development and the importance of education in addressing these issues."*

These issues, such as sustainable development, social inclusion, international development, citizenship, creativity and the education/care interface are proving to be a challenge to many in education, as they cling to traditional views of what education is actually about, and how it should be organised.



Ian Barr focused on 3 factors *"which must be faced up to if we are to develop an education system suited to the kind of world we live in."*

He posed questions about:

- ❑ **new models of learning and everyday learning in a socially complex society;**
- ❑ **the knowledge society and increasing access to information;**
- ❑ **a society which is experiencing the dynamic of a series of revolutions.**

New models of learning are radically changing our concept of education. Education is a means of enhancing human development which might be defined as *"a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with their environment."*

[Bronfenbrenner 1979] He describes this environment as a set of "nested structures", each inside the next:

1. The immediate setting ~ the developing person, the home, the classroom, the workplace;
2. The interconnections among these basic settings and in the community, seen, as they need to be, in relation to one another;
3. The level that profoundly affects a person's development is those events that occur in settings in which the person is not present: in government departments; money markets; technological laboratories; ... in globalised decision making.
4. The cultural context in which the individual operates.

Increasingly, what people need is to be able to make smooth transitions between these different levels of their environment.

**As well as living in a socially complex society we also live in a 'knowledge society'.** Terms such as this are used without much sense of what they actually mean. Historically, all economies have been dependent on knowledge applied to trading goods and services. Drucker first coined the term 'knowledge society' meaning a society where the knowledge that had previously been applied to materials and work was now applied to knowledge itself, where the knowledge worker takes existing knowledge, adds value to it, and in doing so creates new insights, possibilities or meaning.

In the nineteenth century knowledge became what Whitehead called 'professionalised', whereby groups secured the power of certain domains of knowledge which became their exclusive property. Acquisition of knowledge became the currency by which access was gained to the different professions. In the post-industrial society that tidy and restrictive practice has been fundamentally undermined by mass communication systems and access to technology.

To what extent are we still in a nineteenth century mindset about the 'professionalisation of knowledge' paradigm? How does this influence our assumptions and thinking about schooling and the curriculum or about development education?

**So, we live in a relational society that, amongst other things, requires effective human interaction across ever changing contexts and, in a knowledge society, that requires collaborative learning and involves focusing on 'meaning-making' and 'knowledge building' rather than simply information processing.**

**We also live in a revolutionary society,** or more accurately a society experiencing a set of revolutions which have and will have a very considerable influence on our lives. Ten such revolutions [Dalin] contribute to the current dynamic of change:

- ❑ The **Knowledge and Information** Revolution, [as above]
- ❑ The **Population** Revolution, or the population explosion which is covering the planet at exceptional speed.
- ❑ The **Globalisation and Localisation** Revolution, caused by a new world political picture resulting in new alliances, globalisation of trade, major population movements, accompanied by ethnic and political crises which are changing cultures.
- ❑ The **Social Relationships** Revolution, minority groups and women for example are taking new roles, creating new ways of living in a multicultural and pluralistic society.
- ❑ The **Economic** Revolution, economic growth which is reaching new countries at faster speed, creating new competition, developing towards a global economy featuring enormous multinational companies and new goods and services.
- ❑ The **Technological** Revolution, creating new perspectives and possibilities, as well as new products and services, solving a wide range of problems and creating unanticipated problems.
- ❑ The **Ecological** Revolution, forming a new meaning for life on Earth and boundaries for our future sustainable development .
- ❑ The **Aesthetics** Revolution, creating a complex artistic transformation and renewing people's lives.
- ❑ The **Political** Revolution, raising fundamental questions about democracy and the rights of minorities.
- ❑ The **Values** Revolution, calling up questions about the pluralistic society and possibly contributing to a set of global values.

It might also be reasonable to add the **Cognitive** Revolution, brought about by new understandings of how the brain functions and how we learn.

These are all part of a larger process of change and other forces are at work, but these ten, Dalin argues, are fundamental to the future of education. It is important to understand that they are interconnected and constitute an integrated phenomenon. It is necessary to see them as a complex whole and as individual revolutions. It is also crucial to understand that these forces function in combination and that the synergetic effect of several revolutions will have significant consequences that cannot be anticipated.

The challenge that all of this presents to education and schools is very considerable.

Ian Barr argued that ~  
*"What learners require for human development in the 'knowledge society' is a set of educational experiences that provide them with the capability to see connections, to move with ease between different contexts and to have the skills to compare, critique, and connect disparate items in the context of constant change. Despite that widely accepted scenario we have schools, particularly secondary schools, in which the curriculum is still conceived, designed, implemented and taught in terms of fragmented pieces."*

He referred to his part in the Development Education Commission and in particular the ideas in *Essential Learning for Everyone*.

He went on to point out that to replace History and Chemistry and Music with Development Education, Peace Education, and Media Education is only to replace one set of inadequate first order organisers with another set of equally inadequate first order organisers. **We need something more robust.** Perhaps we must seek new understandings of what useful educational objectives might be, new standards that we aim to achieve, and new means of assessing these.

Ian's central challenge it is about building something "more robust". It is about building common agendas, but most importantly about taking a role in enabling a wide range of 'actors' to take on the creative work, to respond to these challenges as part of their own everyday core priorities. **It is this that which demands new approaches to unlocking teacher creativity.**

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Ian Barr was Director, Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum. At that time we was also a member of the Tide~ 80:20 Development Education Commission. He is now an education consultant.

- ❑ Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979 The Ecology of Human Development, Harvard University Press
- ❑ Dalin P and Rust, V.D. 1996 Towards Schooling for the Twenty-first Century, London, Cassell
- ❑ Drucker, P.F. 1993 Post-capitalist Society, New York, Harper Collins
- ❑ Whitehead, A.N. 1948 Science and the Modern World [ed Mentor], New York, New America Library

## There is a need to build common agendas

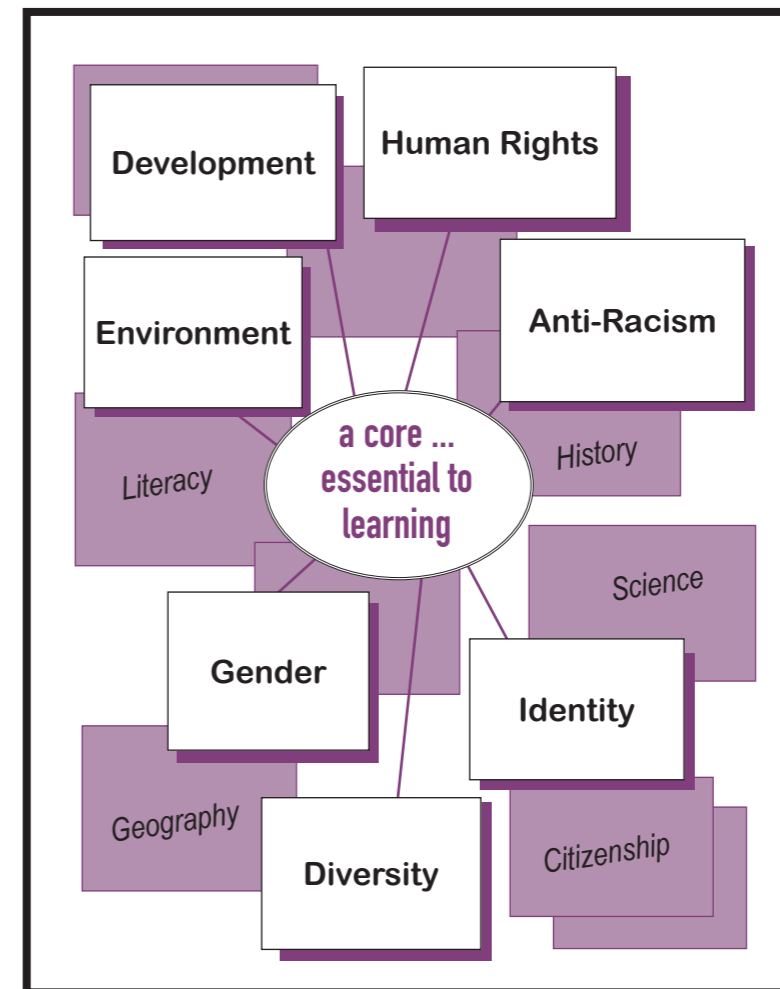
The "educations" that have evolved from different social concerns and movements need to work on a common agenda. The potential for such an approach is most clear when priority is given to the educational needs of young people rather than the interests and views of particular movements.

The organisations supporting particular "educations" have on the whole worked in isolation.

Little has been done to support teachers in bringing these dimensions together yet different groups [often including politicians] will criticise teachers for not dealing with particular issues.

There is scope for creative work engaging teachers in developing new learning strategies which offer more coherence to students and enable each of these dimensions to contribute to a sense of citizenship.

All have a contribution to meeting core educational needs.



All have a contribution to Citizenship.

From  
*Essential Learning for everyone ~ civil society, world citizenship and the role of education.*  
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