

# What is Education For? The purposes of education and their implications for the school curriculum

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I should like to begin by saying how honoured I am to be invited to give the International Baccalaureate Organization's 2004 Peterson Lecture. My credentials for doing so are limited. My links with the IBO are recent, with the exception of some lengthy and helpful conversations in my last job when my school was considering adopting IBO programmes but then decided in the end not to do so. I have clearly been forgiven for that episode. My knowledge of the world of international schools is also far from extensive and largely confined to the International School of Geneva which, though many worlds in itself, is, as I am finding, *sui generis*. And I have never considered myself to be an educationalist, that is someone devoted to the study, as opposed to the practice, of education.

I have one qualification for giving the Peterson Lecture. Alec Peterson and I went to the same Oxford college: Balliol. It is a college noted for producing politicians—a large number of twentieth-century British prime ministers were among its alumni—but not for producing people who devote their lives to education. So it is a particular pleasure for a Balliol man who ran the curriculum, assessment and qualifications part of England's *national* education system for a number of years to give a lecture in memory of a fellow Balliol man who made such a massive contribution to the furtherance of *international* education. And one of the themes of this talk will be the relationship between the purposes of national education systems and those of international schools.

There is another link with Alec Peterson. I met him once, briefly. It must have been in 1962 when I was a very young undergraduate. I think it was on the edge of an Oxford cricket field. He was the cousin of one of my best friends. I was introduced to him as "Professor of Education", although I don't think that was his actual title. My only recollection of the event is the fleeting thought that went through my head: "What sort of a job is that? What on earth can a professor of education actually do?" Being a rather reticent, as well as reasonably polite, eighteen-year-old I didn't put the question to him. I have to admit that there have been times in subsequent years when, introducing controversial national reforms and under attack from an articulate but politically hostile academic educational establishment (with my old university, and Alec Peterson's successors, sometimes leading the charge), I have again asked and, indeed, in moments of frustration given my own answer to, the same question.

I have an unfortunate habit of choosing rather inflated titles for lectures, months before having to start thinking about them, and then, when the time comes, bitterly regretting that I have committed myself to talking about something so vast and inchoate. Today is no exception. However, I believe in keeping promises and what was advertised is what you will get. I intend to talk about the following: the importance of constantly thinking and re-thinking the fundamental aims of education; the notion of what it is to be an educated person; the purposes of education in nation states; the purposes of education in international schools; the relationship between these two; and the curriculum implications of some of these purposes.

## The purposes of education

Alec Peterson's answer to the question "What is education for?" is explicit in his writings and both implicit and explicit in his many and wide-ranging educational activities. He had a vision of an educated person that stressed breadth of knowledge and understanding, in contrast to the narrow arts–science specialization that had become such a feature of the English education system since the early 1950s. He saw the need for a greater emphasis on skills rather than content, so that young people were better equipped to deal with a world in flux. He saw explicit attention to philosophy and epistemology as an important part of the intellectual formation of an educated person. He believed in the role of education in helping to shape a sense of duty to others. He believed above all in education's potential contribution to international understanding and world peace. His answer to the question "What is education for?" helped to shape, and continues to shape, the IB Diploma Programme and the other IBO programmes, and is enshrined in the IBO's mission statement. These programmes, in their turn, have influenced the vision and sense of purpose of many international schools and of those schools within national systems that have adopted the IBO programmes.

At one level it might seem redundant to ask the question "What is education for?" Most national education systems, like the IBO, have some kind of vision statement or list of characteristics they are hoping to foster in young people. Many individual schools have mission statements. I sometimes wonder, however, whether enough thought goes into such statements: both whether we think enough about the meaning of what we are saying when we describe the aims of the education we provide and whether we think enough about the practical implications of these aims for how we devise our curriculums and run our schools.

I say this because decisions about what happens in our education systems and schools are inseparable from those about our values, about the kind of society (and world) we want ourselves to be, and about our fundamental ends and purposes as human beings. The great Anglo-American poet and critic TS Eliot made this point in his 1932 essay *On Modern Education and the Classics*, describing education as:

"a subject which cannot be discussed in a void: our questions raise other questions, social, economic, financial, political. And the bearings are on more ultimate problems even than these: to know what we want in general, we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life. The problem turns out to be a religious problem."

Although Eliot was a Christian and an Anglican, he was using "religious" here in its broadest sense. It was his contention, as early as the 1930s, that in post-traditional western societies we lacked a shared account of who we are, where we came from and where we are going, and that as a result we lacked the fundamental philosophical and religious basis from which to answer the question "What is education for?" This is why in practice, in his view, we frequently fall back on narrow utilitarian explanations of what education is for, what he called the preoccupation with "getting on", which he felt was at the heart of modern education. If this is so, it helps to explain the emphasis, at the level of national systems, on education as the means to enhance the competitiveness and prosperity of the nation, and to prepare us for "the knowledge economy" or whatever the current rhetoric might be. Also, at the level of schools, and of individual students and their parents, the emphasis is put on getting good examination results, ensuring that one is well placed for university entrance, preparing students for the job market and improving individuals' material life chances. These are legitimate and important purposes of education that may well necessitate an education that is far from narrow and

utilitarian. But they can easily crowd out the more fundamental objectives of our mission statements and as an explanation of why education is important they are incomplete.

In considering the question “what is education for?” Eliot urged us to go back to those who had considered the question from the perspective of a clearly articulated philosophy of life. There is no shortage of models. Plato and Aristotle tackled these issues two and a half millennia ago. Many philosophers and writers since then have done the same. In western societies that too infrequently re-engage with the past the better to look forward, it is instructive to remember the answers they gave to the question. In addition to Plato and Aristotle, I am thinking of people like Aquinas, Rousseau, Matthew Arnold, Newman, and, in our own century, writers with views as diverse as Eliot in England, Péguy in France and Gramsci in Italy. Their answer to the question “What is education for?” is always an answer about the kind of human beings, and the kind of society, they would like to see. The broader picture always comes first.

The broader picture of course varies. Gramsci’s is of a citizenry educated to throw off the shackles of outmoded ideologies that perpetuate an oppressive society. This is not the same as Eliot’s or Aquinas’s vision—or, since we are in Geneva and literally within a stone’s throw of Le Mur des Réformateurs, of Jean Calvin’s vision—of a community that believes that true happiness is to be found only in the love of God and of our fellow creatures, and in the following of God’s commandments, and not in the pursuit of riches, fame or power. This in its turn differs from Rousseau’s vision of a world within which individuals are free to develop according to what he sees as their intrinsic “nature” rather than being moulded by inherited customs and traditions. But what all these thinkers share, as part of a tradition stretching back through two millennia of Christianity to the Romans, Greeks and Hebrew Scriptures, is a complete absence of hesitation in talking about what men and women are here on earth to do and in distinguishing between lives that have been well led and those that fall short of what should be expected of human beings.

Traditional accounts of the purposes of education, at least in the West, are therefore shaped by a clear sense of what it is to be an educated and fully developed human being. I doubt that most of us have such a sense today, or even in some cases feel it to be legitimate to have such a sense. In our preoccupation with openness and tolerance—and these are crucial virtues and at the heart of what international education is trying to achieve—we are in danger of forgetting that, at the level of individuals, openness and tolerance are not ends in themselves but simply a precondition for making decisions about how best we are going to live our lives. We are also in danger of forgetting that these decisions involve hard moral choices and the rejection of some pictures of the world and some ways of life as inferior to others.

That is a point about moral relativism and absolutism to which I will return briefly later. But let me first give you one example of a vision of what it is to be an educated human being, in order to contrast it with our current inability sometimes to be robust about these matters. I shall take Gramsci because I have recently re-read his *Prison Letters* but also because, having quoted TS Eliot, I need to balance my credentials by also quoting someone from a different part of the political spectrum.

Some of Gramsci’s last letters from prison before his death in 1937 were to his two sons, Delio aged 12 and Giuliano aged 10. They are the letters of a loving absent father concerned at a distance to continue to play a part in his children’s education. What is most striking about these letters is not just his high expectations, but the clarity of vision about what qualities need to be demonstrated to meet these expectations. Delio is told how important it is to study history, but also to look at the

world and not to view it too anthropomorphically. Giuliano is rebuked for commenting favourably on HG Wells as an author on the basis of having read half of one of Wells's stories. Delio is asked to think hard about his response to Pushkin, taking care "to distinguish the true from the false, and the certain from the possible or the probable". He is encouraged to see the difference between good writers such as Gorky, who had just died, and the small number of "world writers" such as Tolstoy, whom one can count "on the fingers of one hand". Both children are encouraged to push themselves intellectually as far as they are able and develop habits of discipline in their work and study. They are both urged to show an interest in a whole range of human activities, especially literature; do their duty; keep their promises; face the world with calm, confidence and courage; and never give way to complaining about their lot. Gramsci is in no doubt that everyone has a responsibility to develop themselves in these ways. People who fail to achieve these things, he is clearly saying, are not fully educated. They fall short of the ideal that human beings ought to set themselves. His answer to the question "What is education for?" is unambiguously robust.

I have included this digression to suggest, first, that we may sometimes be less sure in our vision of what an educated person ought to be than some of our distinguished predecessors and, second, that our expectations may not always be high enough. I frequently have the feeling that, for a lot of the time, a lot of our students (and especially perhaps the ablest) are being insufficiently stretched. This is sometimes because we as educators, and I include myself in this, do not stretch ourselves sufficiently. The philosopher George Steiner (who used to teach here at the University of Geneva) put it recently, with a frankness that I could not possibly replicate but am able to quote:

*L'amertume, l'aigreur, la morosité du professeur médiocre est l'un des grands crimes dans notre société.*

One reason why Gramsci was such a demanding and challenging long-distance educator of his sons was because he was so demanding of himself.

I was reminded of Gramsci when I read recently the extraordinary account of an educational experiment by a young teacher of French literature, Cécile Ladjali. She was working in Drancy, one of the grimmest of Parisian *banlieues*, with students who were mostly from North African backgrounds and who had low self-esteem and negative attitudes towards education. Not only has she published a book of their impressive creative writings, but a play written by her class has been broadcast on France Culture [a programme from Radio France]. The experiment was exploratory and highly interdisciplinary. It was based on a firm and rigorous grounding in French and classical Greek literature, with difficult and demanding texts deliberately included, and on an uncompromising insistence on the highest literary standards. In her account of the experiment, *Éloge de la transmission. Le maître et l'élève*, written jointly with George Steiner who associated himself with the project, she writes:

*Je pense que le travail du professeur est de travailler contre, de confronter l'élève à l'altérité, à ce qui n'est pas lui, pour qu'ensuite il se comprenne mieux lui-même. On allait donc travailler contre et le pari allait être celui de la difficulté. Tout ce qui est excellent est très difficile. ... On allait travailler dans ce sens-là.*

Striving to be an educated person in Gramsci's, or Eliot's, or Plato's, or Cécile Ladjali's, sense of the word, is of course unashamedly elitist, in the positive sense of trying to give as many people as possible access to what the nineteenth-century English writer Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been known and thought". You may find this a very obvious thing for me to say, but it is

nonetheless worth saying given many of the contrary pressures that the wider society, at least in the western world, brings to bear on our schools.

What are these contrary pressures? They come from a variety of sources and include: a highly developed individualism, disinclined to criticize people's choices however culturally debased; a dominant egalitarianism, distrustful of what is not immediately comprehensible; a pervasive materialism, linked to an emphasis on the visual, that devalues what is not tangible; a postmodernist "anything goes" intellectual climate sceptical of traditional ideas of objective reality; and the global impact of a US mass culture that many US critics are the first to admit is often hardly conducive to the promotion of the concept of an educated person that I have been talking about.

Given these pressures it is crucial that our education systems fall over backwards to maintain standards of academic rigour, see themselves as leading society rather than following and are unafraid of being accused of elitism if by elitism is meant giving people access to "the best that has been known and thought".

So far I have made a few points, probably very obvious ones but maybe worth repeating, about the purposes of education in general. I should now like to consider these issues from the distinctive perspectives of, firstly, national education systems, and, secondly, international schools.

## National education systems

What fundamentally distinguishes national education systems from international schools is something to do with identity. One of the main purposes of education must be to help people develop a sense of identity, decide who they are or who they want to be, and to choose or construct a story of which they are part. The key issue is to what extent the educator should be morally neutral in this process, seeing himself or herself merely as a facilitator, and to what extent should he or she aim to shape the outcome and consciously set out to promote a particular sense of identity in the young people for whom he or she is responsible.

Within nation states one of the questions to which this gives rise is the extent to which the education system should be used to try to foster a national, supra-national or global sense of identity, and what kind of identities any of these might be. These are very real issues and lead to fierce debates. This is what is at the heart of the recent French debate about *laïcité* in education: about the nature of the school's role in developing a sense of French civic and republican identity; about the extent to which the school should be seen as a civic space where what is important is what students have in common, not how they differ; and in particular about whether *signes ostentatoires* of religious affiliation, such as the Islamic *foulard*, should be banned on school premises, a proposal that has received massive and eloquent support and massive and eloquent opposition.

In the week that I was preparing this lecture there was a not dissimilar controversy in the British press about England's new and controversial black chairman of a public body known as the Commission for Racial Equality, who has called for public funds to be used for educational and other purposes that promote the integration of ethnic and cultural minorities into the wider British society rather than for purposes that promote their separateness. One black action group leader has condemned not just his proposal but him as a person for being insufficiently in touch with his black and African roots. The assumption behind this response is that membership of a particular ethnic group carries

with it an identity that the individual cannot, and should not, attempt to shake off even if he or she wishes to do so; and that the state has a greater responsibility, through education and other means, to help reinforce such identities rather than to strengthen the sense of identity with the state or with the wider community.

The differences of opinion that lie at the heart of these debates can only be explained, at least at the level of ideas, by reference to the continuing clash between, on the one hand, the universalist ideals deriving from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and, on the other hand, the many counter-currents, ranging through Romanticism, communitarianism and postmodernism, that the Enlightenment has provoked over the last three hundred years. Because education is inextricably bound up with wider ideas about man and society it has been, and continues to be, affected by these movements of thought, often in quite profound ways.

On the one side there is the eighteenth-century Enlightenment project aimed essentially at displacing local and traditional moralities with a critical or rational morality intended to lay the basis for a universal civilization. In the Enlightenment's view of the world, reason, experiment and choice replace revelation, tradition and custom. What matters are not individuals as members of families, social classes, local communities or nation states, but individuals as free-floating men and women able to create their own life-project with minimal interference from others. From these roots derive our modern western individualism, our lack of commitment to the traditional and the particular, our emphasis on civic rather than cultural identity (hence a ban on the *foulard* and a stress on integration), our notion of ourselves as "citizens of the world", and our disenchantment with the nation state. The implications of this set of ideas for education have been many and varied.

On the other side lies the emphasis on community, custom and tradition, and on people as members of groups rather than as free-floating individuals. From these rather different roots derive our celebration of diversity, our differentiation of people by gender, sexuality and ethnicity, our distrust of anything that demands the subordination of communal interests to the interests of a higher entity such as the state (such as a ban on the *foulard* in schools or a promotion of integration), and our pervasive ethical relativism that recognizes and tolerates difference but which is reluctant to condemn because it has lost the Enlightenment's sense of an objective and absolute morality. Once again, the implications of this set of ideas for education have been many and varied, pulling often in quite different directions.

These ideological cross-currents have affected education in more ways than I can even begin to explore in this talk: through controversies about the balance of elements within humanities programmes; through the arguments for and against the idea of a "canon" in literary studies; through debates about the nature of citizenship education; through uncertainties as to what we mean by "moral education"; through questions about whether the state should give financial support to faith-based schools. I should like to concentrate today, however, on just one area: the role of national education systems and international schools in helping young people develop a sense of identity.

In England and France the debates in this area have been essentially about the extent to which state schools should be promoting a sense of civic identity and what kind of civic identity this should be. In France the debate over the *foulard*, as Régis Debray [French writer, philosopher and former adviser to President Francois Mitterand] has argued in a recent pamphlet, *Ce que nous voile le voile*, is inextricably linked with controversies about the relationship between France as a state and as a civic entity and the various communities within it. In England the revised national curriculum of the late 1990s for

the first time explicitly identified the development of young people's identities as one of the purposes of the national education system. In doing so it reflected a belated realization that if one emphasized diversity too much one ran the risk of losing that residual sense of common purpose essential for any effective nation state.

England's revised national curriculum talks about the development of the local, English, British, European, Commonwealth and global identities of young people. The important point about this is that it recognizes that people have multiple identities and that these can be quite compatible with each other. Although commonplace in international schools, this has been something of a revelation to some people in England, who had difficulty in understanding that one could, for example, be British, Afro-Caribbean and a global citizen simultaneously, and for whom the idea that one purpose of a national education system might be to help develop a sense of national identity was felt to be synonymous with extreme nationalism, xenophobia and even racism.

The extent to which national education systems need to increase their emphasis on preparation for national or global citizenship obviously varies from one nation state to another. There are some nation states where the overwhelming need is for an education system that promotes a greater sense of belonging to a wider global community and that diminishes a sense of blind and uncritical attachment to one's own national community. There are others where the role of the education system is above all to help change an ethnic sense of national identity into a civic one that is more inclusive of all members of the national community, and where the promotion of international understanding needs to go hand in hand with the promotion of a new attitude towards minorities. There are still other nation states where the need to shore up a sense of common purpose within the nation state itself is just as important as the need to promote global citizenship, and where the promotion of greater openness and tolerance with regard to the outside world will only come about as a result of a clearer sense of one's own identity and a stronger commitment to one's own national community. As Régis Debray puts it, in the book that I have just referred to:

*Plus je suis ouvert, plus je dois être spécifique, et plus spécifique je serai, plus ouvert je pourrai être.*

To cite another example, which puts the sometimes rather self-indulgent traumas of Britain and France into proper perspective, what Iraqi schools need at the moment, apart from basic resources and freedom from violence, are not courses in global awareness but lessons in citizenship aimed at reviving a strong, benign and civic sense of Iraqi identity in which all the different communities come together in a shared vision of a common *national* purpose.

One of the things that I am trying to say therefore, to an audience full of people who work in and with international schools, is that we must not assume that the kind of internationalism that we are promoting in *our* schools—and I know that this means many different things and begs many different questions—is necessarily a model for others to follow.

But what are the implications for international schools of what I have been saying about identity? I should like to say something briefly about this, before making a number of specific points about the curriculum implications of some of the purposes of education that I have been discussing.

## International Schools

Identity is a particularly complex issue in international schools. We have students who have strong roots in another country or region of the world but who may well have spent most or all of their lives outside it, in the country in which the school is situated. We have students with strong roots in another country who, by the time they come to our school, have lived in many different parts of the world and to whom the school, and the country in which it is situated, is but a fleeting phase in their mobile lives. We have students who have roots in two or more other countries because their parents have different identities. Some of these parents may have multiple identities themselves so that a student can end up feeling that they have a connection with Egypt and Turkey, because that is where their father's roots are, and with England and Spain, because that is where their mother's roots are, but also with the USA, because that is where they spent their early childhood, and now with Switzerland because that is where they live and go to school and where most of their friends are. We have students, such as these, whose citizenship status may tell us little about their sense of identity. We have students who may lack a sense of identity with a particular country, but have one instead with a religious or ethnic group. We have students who may have little sense of identity with anything outside their family, and maybe not even very much sense of identity with that. We may also have students, and sometimes large numbers of students, who are very much rooted within the country in which the school is situated, but by virtue of being educated in an international school may well have a different relationship to their own country from that of some of their contemporaries being educated within the national education system.

This kind of diversity is not unknown within schools inside national education systems. My local neighbourhood comprehensive secondary school when I worked at Notting Hill Gate, in west London, had over a hundred nationalities, like the International School of Geneva, but had a very much wider social mix. The same may well be true of some state schools in Geneva. Schools such as these are probably more genuinely representative of the world's diversity than international schools with students from more homogeneous social and educational backgrounds. What distinguishes state schools, however, whatever their student population, is that they must start from the basis that they are educating their students for life and future citizenship within the national community. They need to give priority to the national language or languages, and to the history, literature and culture of the nation state of which they are an embodiment. This gives them a different mission from international schools.

The mission of international schools is much more clearly focused, as a matter of priority, on the development of world citizenship, global awareness and intercultural understanding. This is not to suggest that these are unimportant in national schools—I happen to think that they are crucially important for all young people—but that they should be at the heart of an international school's curriculum in a highly distinctive way. In international schools there is no core body of historical and geographical knowledge, no literary canon, no obligatory cultural content whose transmission is a key purpose of the educational project as it has to be in a nation state. Our mission is to focus on the whole world, on the variety of cultures, on world history, and on contemporary global issues, to an extent that ought to be greater than that in national schools. In practice one of the main ways in which we do this is by the very act of living and working together in the same multicultural and multinational community. That is one of the great strengths of international schools. It provides us with a rich resource of educational opportunities, some of which we exploit and some of which we probably neglect.

What we mean by “internationalism”, “global awareness” and “world citizenship” and what this ought to involve in practice are endlessly debated. I very much welcome the IBO/ISA Self-Assessing Internationalism pilot project, in which my school is involved, as one attempt to help schools better define their purposes and reshape their practices in this area.

Within all this promotion of global awareness, however, we must not forget about that multitude of individual students I have been talking about with their diverse and multiple identities. A crucial purpose of an international school curriculum must be to help these students maintain the languages they speak when they are at home with their families, find out more about their backgrounds if they wish to do so, and construct an identity and a narrative for themselves. Two consequences follow from this. First, it is not part of our job as international educators to impose identities on people when they and their families do not want them. I have never forgotten the story told to me by a black British colleague, of Afro-Caribbean origin, of how in her London primary school she was made to read Jamaican folk tales to the rest of her class as part of the school’s policy of celebrating its rich multicultural diversity. She came from a family that had chosen to be totally assimilated to mainstream English society and was deeply embarrassed by this patronizing imposition of a culture of which she had no knowledge and that was wholly alien to her. Second, because our job as educators is to facilitate and to provide opportunities for students’ own choices, our curriculum needs to be sufficiently flexible to give students space to pursue *their* interests, and to acquire the knowledge and understanding that *they* decide they need. In the short time that I have been in contact with the three educational programmes of the IBO I have been impressed by the extent to which this flexibility is available, by comparison with the national curriculums with which I am familiar. We probably, however, need to make use of this flexibility, for the purposes I have been talking about, more than we sometimes do.

As educators, however, we are not simply facilitators. We are not morally neutral with regard to the choices that our students, as a result of the opportunities that we provide them, decide to make. They may decide that they have no particular affinity with any nation state or part of the world, but at the very least we will want them to understand and to respect those who do have deep loyalties and commitments to particular places and particular communities. The US social critic Christopher Lasch, writing as early as the late 1980s, worried about the way in which the world was increasingly being governed by a *déraciné* global elite that was equally at home in Geneva, Singapore, Los Angeles and Buenos Aires and that was at best indifferent and at worst contemptuous of the particular affinities and concerns of people who, unlike this elite, were rooted to one spot. The overwhelming majority of people in the world hardly move more than a few kilometres from where they are born. Despite mass migration, most of them stay within the same nation state. Those who are going to form part of the global elite that runs multinational companies and works for international organizations, and this includes many of our students, need to understand, empathize and sympathize with the position in which the mass of mankind finds itself, preferably, where this is possible and appropriate, by having some particular loyalties and affinities of their own. When I was recently asked to advise an Indian boarding school on its policies for university entrance, I urged them to direct their students towards Indian universities for their first degrees, so that those formative early adult years were spent within their own national community, and that only then should they consider postgraduate study elsewhere in Europe and the North America.

What we are talking about therefore is the promotion of *internationalism* rather than just *cosmopolitanism*. An internationally minded person is someone who respects people who belong to

other cultures and traditions because they have some sense of what it means to belong to a culture or tradition of their own. A cosmopolitan is someone who floats across the surface of the world having little deep connection with any part of it. Geneva's reputation as an international city was enhanced in the late 1920s, not long after the International School here was founded, by the publication of Robert de Traz's book *L'Esprit de Genève*. The main thesis of this book is that the strength of Geneva's internationalism (which he traces back to its role as a *cit  de refuge* during the Reformation, to its contribution to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and to its involvement in the establishment of the Red Cross, reinforced at the time that he was writing by the arrival of the League of Nations and its associated agencies) is due to the dialogue between nations that it has encouraged and to the persistence of highly distinctive Swiss traditions alongside an openness to the rest of the world. De Traz's idea of the *esprit de G n ve* was international: it was decidedly not cosmopolitan.

One way of developing respect for people's particular identities and for their customs and traditions is to teach them about, and encourage integration with, the host country in which the international school is situated. There is not just the opportunity to acquire another language in circumstances that are overwhelmingly favourable to success in learning it, but also the opportunity to study a society in depth at close hand and, more importantly, to experience being part of it. Although there may be good reasons for a few international schools to remain at the margins of the society of their host country, in general my view is that international schools that do not capitalize on the opportunities provided by their presence within the host country are not genuinely *inter-national*.

I shall conclude, as I said I would, with seven relatively brief points about the implications for the school curriculum of some of the points I was making earlier about the purposes of the school curriculum. Most relate equally to schools in national systems and to international schools.

## Implications for the school curriculum

### Moral or ethical implications

First, many of the purposes of education are moral or ethical. Our primary function is not to help young people decide their own values, as if they were shoppers in some values supermarket where a completely free choice were permitted. It is to transmit certain sets of values that are shared by all men and women of good will. One of the exercises that I engaged in when I headed England's national curriculum body was to get together a very large group of people, of many different backgrounds and of all faiths and none, in a body known as the National Forum on Values in Education and the Community, to see if they could agree on a statement of shared values. Having been bemused to such an extent by the prevailing relativistic rhetoric that the best we can do in our multicultural society is to agree politely to disagree, many of its members were amazed at the extent to which their fundamental values were the same. They disagreed on the source of these values and they disagreed, often passionately, on their application to a host of particular issues, such as euthanasia, abortion and many of the political issues of the moment, but they had at least found a common language on the basis of which they could begin to talk.

One of the purposes of our curriculum should be to help our students do the same. We do this mostly through how our schools are run and through daily discussions that have little to do with the formal curriculum. We probably need to be more explicit, however, about how the various components of our moral education fit together. In particular we need to develop in all subject teachers an explicit

sense of their responsibility for helping young people explore the nature of moral dilemmas wherever they encounter them in their studies or in their daily lives.

We cannot underestimate the potential importance of this aspect of the formal and informal school curriculum. I have recently read *The Righteous*, a book by the British (and Jewish) historian Martin Gilbert about all those Gentiles, all over Europe, who helped Jews escape Nazi persecution during the second world war. People who risked, and lost, their own lives to help Jews were often complete strangers to them, hiding, feeding and looking after them in some cases for years. The book is a chronicle, not a work of historical analysis, and I was left with the unanswered question: why did some people, usually a tiny minority, react with such humanity when most or many people around them were either actively anti-semitic, indifferent or lacking in the courage needed to do what was right? Why also, I asked myself, in the patterns of Gentile support for the Jews across Europe that emerge from this narrative, is it the Danes and the Albanians who stand out as peoples who, through their combined action and sense of a common moral cause, managed to save the majority of Jews living within their midst? Why, I similarly asked myself recently, did some Hutus risk their lives to save Tutsis during the Rwanda massacres of ten years ago when others, including some highly educated people, led the murder squads? The sources of moral action probably have more to do with personality, family upbringing, the nature of the wider society in which one lives and the *Zeitgeist* and cultural influences of one's times, than they have to do with the education one receives at school, but the potential of the latter to mould ideas and feelings and attitudes, to develop empathy and to shape character, should not be overlooked. It is one of the things that makes our job so tremendously important.

### Study of the past

My second point is briefer. It is simply a plea for giving due prominence in our curriculum to the study of the past. You would expect this from a historian, but I continue to be shocked by the ignorance of some of the most basic patterns in world history shown by some of the most educated people that I meet. One of the problems arises from the long-term trend in history teaching that emphasizes study in depth and the skills of historical analysis at the expense of a broad narrative overview. All these are important, but we may have got the balance wrong. People cannot begin to make sense of the modern world unless they have got what used to be called a “well-stocked mind”, that is a firm overview of the main trends in world history and a fair amount of actual knowledge. The same is true of literature. Students are apt to study Sophocles, Shakespeare and Tolstoy as disembodied texts with little sense of how they relate to each other in any patterns of literary evolution. I would not go so far as the outspoken George Steiner who has recently characterized western education as dominated above all by *l'amnésie planifiée* (planned amnesia), but the loss of memory in a present- and future-centred society is worrying.

### The media

My third point is even more specific. I used to be very critical of the idea of having something called “media studies” on the curriculum, in part because it was sometimes taught as a substitute for good literature. I have since come to feel that a systematic study, and sensitization to the influence, of the mass media that surround us in the modern world is one of the most important preparations for being the kind of educated person, and national and global citizen, that I have been talking about. The way in which the news is selected and presented, the unexamined promotion of particular values and attitudes through films and other media, the political manipulation, the influence exercised

by particular interest groups, the exclusion of minority viewpoints, the dominance of the *pensée unique* of a metropolitan or political or national establishment—all these need to be exposed. The importance of all this is even more pronounced in western liberal democracies, and in the global media that they spawn, because we tend to assume certain things about the freedom of our press that we ought in reality to question. Young people therefore need to be taught to read the mass media critically from an early age.

### Religion

My fourth point is about the study of religion. I do not find this writ large in the programmes of the IBO. Part of the avoidance of Steiner's *amnésie* is learning about how the history and culture of every part of the world has been profoundly shaped, over enormously long periods of time, by the impact of religion, and continues to be so today. Given the central role of religion in contemporary Asian, African, Latin American and Middle Eastern societies, it is part of the myopia and cultural ethnocentrism of post-Christian western societies to relegate the study of religions to the backwaters of the curriculum or to ignore it altogether. Most international schools are lay and secular places and one has to be very careful about how the study of religion is addressed, but there is plenty of excellent subtle and sensitive practice to draw on.

### Education for citizenship

My fifth point is about education for citizenship. This in recent years has been a growing preoccupation of a number of national education systems, including those of England and France, in both of which countries formal programmes have been introduced as part of nationally prescribed curriculums. The position in international schools is obviously different. We prepare students for global citizenship: what that means is a whole subject in itself that I cannot go into now. We also frequently involve students in local community service, a distinctive feature of IBO programmes that has been an important influence on the development of comparable features in some national systems. In addition, to varying degrees, we involve students in decision making within our own schools. We probably need a clearer vision of how all these aspects ought to hang together across all the phases of schooling in which we are involved.

### Interdisciplinary study and “learning how to learn”

My last two points are much more general and are linked. Two of the issues that always crop up when curriculums are being revised are the relative importance of, first, the traditional school disciplines by comparison with interdisciplinary study, and second, of the transmission of knowledge by comparison with “learning how to learn”. These are also questions about teaching —where one places oneself on these two spectrums can also determine the extent to which learning is inquiry-based or more directly teacher-led.

It is a truism among advocates of curriculum modernization that this is not a real debate as all these things are perfectly compatible with each other. In one sense this is true but it downplays the practical difficulties facing those who have to make hard choices, at national or international level, about the construction of a curriculum or a curriculum framework and, at local level, about its conversion into schemes of work.

The pressure towards the “learning how to learn” and interdisciplinary side of the spectrum comes from a variety of sources, and in particular from experience of the negative response of many pupils to the other side of the spectrum and from a sharp awareness of how some traditional curriculum

approaches can leave some pupils profoundly un-skilled in some areas. More fundamentally the pressure comes from that Enlightenment mindset that I was talking about earlier that is instinctively hostile to traditions, boundaries and particularisms. Having recently read a large pile of applications for a senior post, I have been struck by the number of candidates who have been most anxious to tell me, as in some obligatory credo, that they believe in a “holistic” interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum, as if any other credo would ensure instant consignment to the rubbish bin.

We need to move beyond such simplicities to a clearer sense of what we are trying to achieve. Inquiry-based approaches are fine, as long as the purpose is not just to produce “inquirers”, but is linked to clear objectives for knowledge acquisition and the development of highly specific areas of conceptual understanding. Interdisciplinary study is also essential, and is where some of the most exciting academic developments are currently taking place, but needs to be on the basis of a firm grounding in the different disciplines under consideration. We understand what we do about the world largely because of the traditional disciplines that, for centuries in some cases, have shaped our understanding. We remove these intellectual props at our peril.

The firm message from Cécile Ladjali’s educational experiment in Paris was that we only become creative, original, inquiring problem solvers when we have knowledgeable well-stocked minds and a sense of standards that comes from a firm grounding in tradition and existing disciplines. Think of Joyce, Beckett, Picasso, Einstein and Wittgenstein: they only became the most innovative artists and thinkers of the twentieth century because of their meticulous induction into existing traditions and disciplines, and because of the frames of reference, and intellectual confidence, that these gave them to construct something new. But the obverse of this message is also true: that knowledge by itself is insufficient and will remain inert, as it has often been, and still is, in our education systems, unless applied and constantly re-applied in stimulating exploratory contexts.

Achieving a balance between the traditional disciplines and interdisciplinary study on one side, and the transmission of knowledge and learning how to learn on the other side is one of the main challenges facing both national education systems and IBO programmes. If we are able to achieve an effective balance we may not just be closer to answering the question “what is education for?” with which I began, but to turning our answers into practice that enables us to produce a larger number of those educated persons that I have been talking about.