

## ARTICLES

### *Abstract*

Historical pressures have given rise to a doctrine that public education must be value-neutral in its curriculum. Education is to be seen as aiming at enlightenment but not commitment. Versions of value-neutrality are refuted, including the view that the goal of rational autonomy is non-partisan. This is seen to be a normative commitment, albeit educative, from which it appears that education can aim for commitments of a certain kind. Three other basic commitments consistent with the modern notion of education are identified and defended.

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### **'Education for Commitment' — A Logical Contradiction**

Universal schooling is a massive social experiment belonging, in the main, to the last two centuries of human history. In every country which has decided on it, the only way to guarantee universal provision has been for the government to meet most of the need through public schools, though private sectors continue in many countries to provide a vigorous range of alternatives. In some western countries today, however, there is a mounting campaign of criticism of the public school. In the American state of California, laboratory of human experiments that it is, the backlash has found tangible expression in such a cutting back of the income from education tax that there is a real possibility that what will survive will be a welfare provision for the children of the poor, the unemployed and adult dropouts.

The criticisms have many origins. Wasteful spending is an obvious first target as the economics of the world's nations move into an era of instability. "Basic skills" come next, as people allegedly detect proof that "they can't spell and count like I was made to." But such complaints are probably symptoms only, hinting at a more profound disenchantment with the rosy dreams of universal enlightenment and responsible citizenship which were part of the vision of the reformers who got the experiment going. Undoubtedly much of this unease derives from causes external to the school. Accelerating change, bewildering technological incursions into our private lives, and crumbling loyalties to family and community, prompt people to look to the school for solutions, as the institution officially in the business of readying the next generation for its responsibilities. This is unfair, given the available sociological evidence that the school can do little to change dispositions rooted in experiences in the family and wider community. We must deflect many of the criticisms and expectations back on to the other social institutions and agents who, whether they like it or not, are in this business of forming commitments too.

Nevertheless, some of the criticism of the school is justified, and the mud sticks. There are shortcomings in our theory and practice, some of them at the philosophical level, which is my present concern. One of the most serious is the circumscribed view we have taken of what education involves. When western liberal-democratic societies initially laboured to create systems of public education, they were conscious, in the polemical climate of nineteenth century controversies, of the need to avoid any appearance of indoctrination on

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behalf of partisan political or religious viewpoints. As a result, they enunciated policies of "neutrality" designed to ensure that instruction would remain objective and secular. In a more recent refinement of the neutralist doctrine, the cultivation of critical awareness or rationality has been embraced as non-controversial because non-partisan.

I will argue that the neutralist doctrine is logically untenable and prejudices the success of our educational efforts if we attempt consistently to implement it. I will defend the view that the concept of education carries with it the implication that we are not only concerned with objective enlightenment but with the encouragement of commitment. I will be obliged to show that in taking this view we do not slip back into a miseducative or indoctrinative stance, but steer a safe course between it on the one side and the illusions of neutralism on the other.

### *What Is Implied By "Education"?*

By way of prologue to asking the question, "What is implied by the word 'education'?" I owe it to R.S. Peters to pay tribute to the stimulus he has provided in his quest, still not ended, for an acceptable analysis of the concept of education. The stages of his pilgrimage are familiar to all: how he began in 1962 with a neat technical analysis yielding two necessary conditions, the first asserting that "education" implies cognitive enlargement, the second that it is an activity valued by all who use the term<sup>1</sup>; how he was taken to task at the Ontario conference for neglecting uses not compatible with his analysis<sup>2</sup>, and eventually conceded that there was a spectrum of uses, amongst which lay a number exemplifying the concept he had been analysing, which, he claimed, was the one characteristic of discourse in "educated circles".<sup>3</sup>

Most recently, in an article published in 1979, Peters has agreed with several critics that "education" is an "essentially contested concept", in the sense that usage is so invariably freighted with value-loadings that a *neutral* analysis of necessary conditions linking all valid uses of the term is impossible.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he insists, some minimal conditions are incontestable, for we all know and agree on cases where it would not on any view apply, e.g. it always denotes some kind of learning and, at that, the sort of learning which leads to the general development of persons in respect of their *awareness*. Moreover, he adds, since "learning implies mastering something or coming up to some standard as the result of experience",<sup>5</sup> the cognitive aspect must be fundamental. He thus re-affirms much that he said previously, but now admits that the formal character of these features falls short of entailing the considerable substance extracted from them in earlier analyses.

It is useful to summarise the debate which has pursued Peters through the years by asking: why were there continuing objections to his analysis, even when he had conceded the point that he was departing from the neutral and descriptive stance of pure conceptual analysis, which allegedly "leaves everything as it is"?<sup>6</sup> The answer seems to be that many commentators were unhappy at the continuing exclusive emphasis on rationality. This reached its apogee in the writings of John Wilson and Robin Dearden, for whom the sacred value of rational autonomy epitomised what the educator is striving for.<sup>7</sup> Dearden admittedly sought to cover himself by cautiously remarking that autonomy was simply a *new* aim now being set alongside others,<sup>8</sup> but the general impact of his writings has been to press education into the service of rationalism, leaving it to others to argue, if they can, the cases for other aims.

The difficulty with this has been that by alleging that the cognitive condition is logically inherent in the concept of education which we in educational circles entertain, in a way that

no other aim or element is, the rationalists claim the benefit of neutrality for themselves and deny it to others. How can we escape this impasse?

I will attempt to do so by exploring yet again this complex concept, peeling the layers of meaning as one would an onion, to see if the rationalists really have got to the most nutritious and central part. We have to start with the neutralist doctrine which so thoroughly pervades discussions of formal education in the public sphere. It will take very little time to peel away this outer layer of the onion, representing the view that public education is ideologically neutral. For the very decision to run schools breaches the defences of neutrality. Schooling is an interventionist strategy, predicated on the belief that in some respects the young need to be guided in their learning by formal tutoring. Already we are committed to something.

Our sensitivity to this point has been increased in recent days by the writings of people like the "de-schoolers". Illich at least has consistency on his side when he argues that if we wish to avoid imposing our values on the individual, then we must deschool society, that is, do away with compulsory interventionism.<sup>9</sup> As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, this may well leave most individuals with less scope for choice than if we had with good conscience accepted a need to constrain their learning to a certain extent in order to enlarge their awareness of the areas of freedom (and necessity) affecting their lives.<sup>10</sup>

A different twist is given to the radical libertarian argument by Carl Bereiter in *Must We Educate?* for it appears that Bereiter is attacking not just the older and more authoritarian concept of education, but the recent and ostensibly more enlightened concept stressing critical cognition and normative openness. It is his contention, speaking with the knowledge of a trained psychologist, that the newer interest in the enhancement of the learner's cognitive powers and perspectives involves a far more fundamental restructuring of personality than the mere impartation of facts and skills. In the name of his very individualistic brand of libertarianism, Bereiter even criticises child-centered theorists who place great stress on letting children choose their own learning activities and work at their own pace. They still, says Bereiter, structure the learning environment with certain educational goals in view, to which the child has not been, and cannot yet be, a party.<sup>11</sup> This is a valid comment on the alleged value-neutrality of such approaches. Bereiter's recommendation is that we hold children to schooling no longer than is required to see them into adolescence equipped with the most basic cognitive and physical skills.

The main fallacy in Bereiter's argument is his assumption that what he himself is proposing is effectively value-neutral. On the contrary, to the extent that he advocates intervention of *any* kind, there is an implication that certain values obtain, such as the duties of adults to children, the rewards to be gained from personal interaction, the priority of technical skills over higher cognitive and social skills, and so on. There is also an assumption that, subject only to minimal intervention of this kind, children will have sufficient innate resource to appreciate the freedoms and possibilities open to them in society. This, given the complexity of the linguistic and technological carriers of culture, is decidedly implausible. Finally, Bereiter's appeal to libertarian considerations would seem rather to dictate *no* educational interventions *until* the child had matured to the point of being able to think for himself, whereas his actual proposals entail quite the opposite. Hence his disavowal of the modern concept of education rings hollow, and is a layer of the onion to be rejected as waste matter.

The next layer belongs to those who believe that value-neutrality is possible within a

programme of intervention which is much larger than Bereiter's, but is safeguarded by the determination only to impart "descriptive content," avoiding the taking of sides on questions concerned with personal and social values. This stance may give rise to two alternative versions of neutralism.

The first involves the exclusion from the curriculum of any topics regarded as controversial, especially in areas of moral and religious commitment. More than a century of schooling under this austere rubric in Australian state schools has proved that the outcome is likely to be a curriculum bleached of vision, biased towards the recitation of academic matter, and unrepresentative of wider life concerns.<sup>12</sup> We might well question whether this qualifies as a balanced education, but a more serious charge is that its ostensible neutrality is cancelled out by the likelihood that students will reasonably infer that what is omitted from the curriculum is unimportant, when in fact the very opposite is probably true, given that controversy tends to be a useful index of the importance people attach to an issue.

The second form of this neutrality doctrine allows the inclusion of material relating to controversial beliefs and values, but with care being taken to treat it as descriptive information not open to comparative evaluation. This has found popularity in many American schools, often coupled with techniques of "values clarification" aimed at helping students to bring to consciousness their own assumptions and motivations. Again, however, rational comparison and critique are discouraged in case they give the impression that the teacher or the school is passing judgment on a particular student's life-stance. Whatever these policies are, they are not normatively neutral. Implicit in them is endorsement of the status quo in social adjustment, and of value relativism in personal morality.

If we take the next step in the sequence, and advocate that students be encouraged to engage in the rational examination of the disputed belief claims and value judgments, the teacher and the school meanwhile preserving impartiality, then some would say we have formulated a third neutral option. The lesson to be learnt from recent British philosophy of education, however, is that such a move implies a commitment to the value of critical rationality which, far from being neutral, is a matter of controversy in current educational debate. Bereiter's objection is not to rationality as such but to the compulsory imposition of the particular mental cast of thought it calls for on the learner. There are, however, those who object to the intrinsic subversiveness of critical autonomy, and who want to see conscious acceptance of certain values promoted by schooling. That is enough evidence that a normative option is being proposed, not a neutral one, though one could explore further the accusation of some of the "new sociologists" in Britain that the kind of rationality promoted by the followers of Peters is relative to particular social class expectations.<sup>13</sup>

Then there are those who are quite willing to accept the desirability of promoting critical rationality, but who want to see other objectives given equal or better ranking in priority. They, too, illustrate the point that this stance is not neutral. Nevertheless it cannot reasonably be called indoctrinative, for reasons I will give in a moment. It seems that we may have here the beginning of a different kind of valid option for public education. Peeling away the waste material of the previous views, let us than look further at the view that the modern concept of education embraces *a commitment to the highest possible level of cognitive awareness*.

If indoctrination involves attempts to pre-empt the learner's commitments by doing things to him of whose consequences he is not fully aware, then it seems that Bereiter, as quoted previously, is right in cavilling at this particular pre-emptive educational commit-

ment. The counter-argument, however, is that the end-result is the fullest awareness possible to the learner, that is, a state of mind the very opposite of being indoctrinated. Thus far, then, education is for commitment; in this case, a commitment to critical rationality. This commitment has an illustrious lineage reaching back to Plato and Socrates. It is, I suggest, a highly nutritious layer of our onion, and one which we should retain. The alternative would involve surrendering a long-standing educational ideal which has helped greatly in the present day to safeguard the rights of individuals in schools prone to collectivism and short-term vocationalism. If I now identify some short-comings in a view of education which embraces *only* this commitment, it is not with a view to supplanting, but to supplementing it.

Firstly, the commitment to rationality does not of itself yield an account of *knowledge* sufficient to under-gird a full-orbed theory of curriculum selection. The most widely known attempt to provide one by transcendental deduction, that is, deduction from the formal features of rational discourse, is that of Paul Hirst, in his spelling out of what he calls the "forms of knowledge".<sup>14</sup> This account has been shown to suffer not only from internal logical difficulties,<sup>15</sup> but also from the empirical implausibility of what is leaves out. John White in *Toward a Compulsory Curriculum* felt obliged to supplement a Hirstian kind of argument with additional arguments to justify further inclusions,<sup>16</sup> and Robin Barrow has frankly rejected the transcendental move altogether and attempted to argue from a Utilitarian position.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, a commitment to rationality does not of itself yield an account of *value* sufficient to determine curriculum priorities. Transcendentalists felt that they could travel quite a distance along this road on the strength of a commitment to rationality, generating principles such as respect for persons, liberty, equality, and worthwhile activities from it. But their claims have not weathered well. It is not just that some people, as I mentioned earlier, challenge both the desirability and the universality of the kind of rationality which the London philosophers espouse. Even amongst those who broadly accept their ground rules on this point, there is doubt about how much normative substance can be extracted from them.

Critics such as Barrow and Kleinig have questioned whether mapping the features of a form of discourse does anything more than tell us what we are committed to if we choose to engage in it, but the question still to be answered is: how much importance should we attach to it in educating persons? Mary Warnock has noted how minimal in fact is the "minimum moral code" emerging from transcendental arguments,<sup>18</sup> and I have argued elsewhere that the mere fact of being willing to enter into moral discourse is an insufficient guarantee of commitment to act rationally and morally.<sup>19</sup> Reason is the servant of first-order commitments, which most men can only be persuaded to espouse by considerations of a more substantive kind.

There is truth in the transcendental deduction of certain moral values from the pre-conditions of rational discourse, and this provides educational theorists with some good nutrition, not to be thrown away. But something more substantial is needed to translate, say, a second-order respect for persons as "holders of points of view" into active good will towards them in ordinary conduct outside the seminar or conference room. Only if we allow that the concept of education widely entertained in educational circles carries more normative freight than has so far been acknowledged can we hope to move towards a deeper moral structure in our educational practice and a more adequate curriculum justification.

### *Commitment As Aim*

I submit that those holding the modern concept of education tend to think not only of an investment in enlightenment, or the increase of knowledge and awareness in the learner, but also of a moral enterprise productive of greater commitments to the common good. To bring this out in another way, we may say that the innermost layer of the onion is education not just for an informed awareness, but for commitment. But how can this concept now be distinguished from indoctrination? Is not the juxtaposition of the two terms "education" and "commitment" contradictory?

Two responses may be made to this question. The first is to point out that the concept of commitment has as one of its necessary conditions a prior belief that something is the case. Roger Trigg has advanced as the definition of commitment that it is "acting in accordance with a belief."<sup>20</sup> An act which was not dependent, however minimally, on some prior belief could not properly be said to exemplify commitment, but would fall into the category of unreflective behaviours. Therefore encouraging commitment is not a matter of conditioning reflexes but of persuading minds.

Secondly, we have already seen that the interest in rationality itself is a commitment, a disposition to act on the belief that the exercise of rational capacities is a good and distinctively human thing. We have also said that such a commitment avoids the charge of indoctrination because the state of fullest possible awareness of the status of our beliefs is the very antithesis of the state of being indoctrinated. If this commitment is admissible, then perhaps a way has been opened up to admit others as well. What criteria would they have to meet?

Clearly, one criterion is that they must not negate the commitment to rationality itself. That is, as it were, the plumb-line for measuring the rest. This does not represent a demand that a complete rational justification be available for every value we espouse, for in the present state of normative ethics that would not leave us with any. But it does mean a preparedness to invite critical discussion of the beliefs underlying the commitments espoused by the school, at an appropriate stage in the student's development. What makes this more than just a commitment to rationality as such is that the school is positively instantiating other commitments as well, not just fence-sitting or play-acting neutrality. The situation I am trying to correct is that state of *anomie* created in many schools by a retreat from commitment. Many high schools have become instructional facilities offering their academic wares with the aloofness of a cafeteria service and making only such demands on the co-operation of their students as is necessary for minimal social order and classroom management.

A second criterion that additional commitments would have to meet is that they would have to be defensible as liberating more human powers than promoting them would require us to limit. This is an ethical boundary condition set by the principle of liberty. It is invoked at the outset by our resolve to create schools, and the limits of the compulsion we exercise on learners will always be set by the question: is it truly for their own good, such that there is a reasonable expectation that when they are of an age to examine the case critically for themselves they will say "thank you, it was necessary, and I am the better for it"? It would, for example, be unallowable for the school to be so committed to competitive excellence that a majority of students would become habituated to the expectation of failure in life.

The third criterion is a pragmatic one. What is proposed must have a reasonable prospect

of occupying common ground amongst the ideological options lively in the larger community sponsoring the school. Calling this a pragmatic criterion leaves philosophical loose ends which I have attempted to tie off elsewhere,<sup>21</sup> but at the lowest level of justification it is obviously futile to predicate commitments for the public school which have little prospect of commanding general assent.

### Some Other Commitments

By way of illustration, three further commitments will now be nominated for instantiation in the life and teaching of the school, and the greatest of these is a *commitment to persons*. What we are doing, that is, is adding to the individualistic goal of autonomy more personalistic goals enhancing fraternity, of which this is the first.

The phrase "a commitment to persons" may seem to be a way of identifying, in somewhat less clear terms, the *principle* of "respect for persons" which rationalist philosophers have advocated many times. The impression will be strengthened, no doubt, when the phrase is unpacked to mean the encouragement of a disposition to act in accordance with the belief that all persons have worth in themselves. This formulation is reminiscent of one of the several ways in which Kant spelled out his categorical imperative.<sup>22</sup> Certainly I mean to subsume the ethical principle of respect for persons, but more is intended. A suppressed premise in the Kantian argument is that it is worth entering the moral realm of discourse because persons have intrinsic value. If this substantive commitment is not presupposed, then Kant's proof simply shows what a rational morality would require, *if we decided to adopt it*. Similarly Peters, using a neo-Kantian style of argument, urges respect for persons, *defined as* individuals with an assertive point of view,<sup>23</sup> but this falls short of telling us *why* we should have respect for individuals as such.

The "worth" the present formulation points to is not just the right of another person to have his interests considered, but the value of that person as a fellow-being with both dignity and the potential, by himself, to enrich my life also. Many threads of argument run to this conclusion. The poverty of an existence without human society, the enlargement of the reality we are capable of perceiving when we share experiences and dialogue, the interdependence of communities and primary groups: such points are constantly affirmed in the high religions, made the centre-piece of phenomenological analyses of the human datum, and supported, even though for very different reasons, by social determinists.

The very establishment of schools, as we said earlier, is an act affirming interpersonal goods. It is ironical that individual autonomy should have been exalted in our theories of schooling at the expense of fraternity. Formal education is a communal enterprise, presupposing interpersonal sharing and tutelage. People do not generally believe that the good things of education can be made available wholly by mail-order package or computer terminal. Yet even in these modes of instruction there is an inherently personal transaction, set only at one remove by the particular medium of communication employed. Nor is knowledge itself capable of comprehension, storage and transmission as a stock-pile of inanimate of propositions; it lives in minds and propagates through the meeting of minds, as Polanyi has effectively demonstrated.<sup>24</sup>

In a truly educative institution, teachers place themselves under an obligation of love towards their students; love, not in the sentimental sense of a possibly ephemeral glandular disturbance,<sup>25</sup> but in the sense of a duty willingly embraced to care about their growth and welfare. This is more than a rational passion primarily related to the exhilaration of seeking

the truth; it is a substantively moral passion rooted in a commitment to persons. In the concept of education, as distinct from mere instruction, it is a case of "speaking the truth in love".

The third commitment is a pair with the first, but in the service of the second, namely, a *commitment to the enjoyment and employment of knowledge*. One may exhibit rational tendency without possessing much systematic knowledge, whereas this commitment imputes both intrinsic and instrumental point to the acquisition of knowledge. Dually implied, that is, are a delight in searching out the truth of the matter, and a disposition to put it to use. In too many schools the acquisition of knowledge is a joyless investment in a future matriculation, with less regard shown for what is true than for what it is tactical to know. Too often, subject-centred methods of teaching contribute to this disembodied approach, betraying the very argument which seems to vindicate them. The argument I am referring to is the one which speaks of the intrinsic value and motivation of "forms of knowledge". The actual thrust of such methods frequently constitutes an appeal to an externally motivated instrumentalism: knowledge is not for application to problems but for the accumulation of credit.

The fourth commitment pairs with the third, but requires the arbitration of the other two to ensure that it is promoted with circumspection. It is a *commitment to community service*. Because this presses on beyond the rather negative interpretation of the principle of liberty stressing non-interference in the affairs of others, it could arouse apprehension in those sensitive to any possible erosion of their privacy and freedom to live as they please. I am obliged to supply both reasons for, and limitations on, this principle. A first reason derives from points already made about the school as an intervention in the individual's life, excused by the fact that it is believed to be able not only to contribute to the development of personal autonomy, but also to generate a communal experience valuable in its own right.

That this principle should flow outwards from the school is validated at the lowest level by a kind of retrospective *quid pro quo*. The pupil is indebted to the community for sponsoring the school which serves him, and to the other ways in which it preserves his physical being through nurturing and welfare agencies and expands his mind through language and discourse. Commitment to community service is his "reasonable service" if nothing else! But it *is* something else: greater personal fulfilment. For the original benefits of nurture are multiplied in voluntary involvements in communal life. Grounds are therefore discoverable at either of the poles — egoistic and altruistic — at which value theories tend to cluster.

A commitment to community service also helps us to relate the sphere of work to educational aims. The problem we have to deal with is that work, viewed instrumentally as bringing extrinsic rewards to the individual, seems only to require the job-specific training which it is beyond the capacity of the school to provide for all, and probably contrary to the spirit of education to provide at all. Viewed intrinsically, as something bringing a sense of fulfilment to the individual, the concept of "work" has to be separated from the many kinds of monotonous labour which are required in an industrial society. On this view, education can only point to those vocations which draw out the human capacities for thought and creation. That is very limiting.

If, however, one relates work to the notion of community service, then not only do some of the more humdrum jobs acquire more meaning and motivation, but forms of community service not specifically related to profit-making industries, and those not necessarily

resulting in financial remuneration for the worker, can be brought into the purview of the concept of work. The need for developments along these lines is all the greater at the present time when job obsolescence is outpacing the creation of new job openings, and the nightmare of Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* is looming, in which redundant workers mope amidst their luxury goods, pining for the restoration of their self-identity through a daily work-schedule.<sup>26</sup>

What now becomes of the objection that a commitment to community service could encourage the kind of busy-body activism which violates privacy: both that of the student and that of the recipient in the community at large? The question of the student's right to choose his own life-style is one I will return to in a moment. But the answer to the second problem lies in the degree to which the curriculum instantiates the first three commitments. The encouragement of rationality and a better-informed mind will increase the application of discernment and common-sense to strategies of community involvement. The commitment to persons will develop sensitivity to the individual's perception of interference as well as to his objectively discerned needs.

The school is an appropriate place to sensitise learners to trends in our collective societies towards bureaucratic interference in people's private lives, and to give them practice in weighing up the consequences of rational social intervention against the principle of individual liberty to determine one's own life-style. This much the proponents of education as enlightenment would agree. But if the school is not committed to community service, then there will be little occasion genuinely to engage in this kind of discourse, and a clear counter-tendency will emerge, by default, to find one's fulfilment solely in the pursuit of individualistic goods.

#### *How Far Does Promotion Go?*

The final issue I want to take up is the question of how far we may go in educating for commitment. I have argued that the concept of education presses beyond enlightenment to commitment, and beyond merely a commitment to rationality into other commitments of a more person-centred kind. I do not regard my list of four as exhaustive, but as illustrative of the kind of value which survives the application of the three pre-conditions laid down. The question now before us is: are there any ethical constraints on how it is to be done? The answer depends on the level of human interaction with which we are concerned.

One level is that of *the school as a corporate body*. Since we are not trying to run a cafeteria but a convivial dining room, it is necessary to address ourselves to questions of social climate and the maintenance of a community of commitment. Schools can too easily acquire a momentum of their own, where well-worn paths of procedure and policy endure while staff and students turn over. People come and go without seeing both the possibility and the need for renegotiating the agreements on which the school community operates in maintaining social order.

The four primary commitments I have sketched out provide positive prospects of consultation between the sponsoring community, staff and senior students about the values to be instantiated in the corporate life of the school, including its teaching of individual areas of study. To the extent indicated by the agreements reached, the school is a community of commitment.

At the same time, this is only a minimal range of commitments, falling far short of a total life-view for the individual, since the school must also help students to see that questions of

personal ideology are not settled but lively in the pluralistic democracy to which they belong. The school reflects this pluralistic democracy, not according to the fading liberal interpretation of non-interfering non-alignment, but according to a more positive stance of freedom to represent value systems and negotiate agreements within an atmosphere of respect for persons and tolerance of dissent. To be a dynamic instantiation of this kind of environment, a school needs to keep itself under continuous policy review as the human composition changes.

Another level is that of *the teacher as an exemplar of commitment*. The myth of neutrality in public education has inhibited good teachers from being themselves. Ideally, they should not only instantiate in their procedures the commitments which hold the school community together, but they should also be encouraged to display their own commitment to a personal view of life and knowledge, consistent with exercising professional restraint over the influence they exert on the students. Of that I will say more in a moment. What I have said so far, however, implies that the school not only teaches facts and skills through formal subject matter, but the unavoidability and desirability of commitment, through the instantiation of certain values in the school community and the individual teacher.

We *exhibit* commitment; the next question to be considered is how we *assess* commitment? Again the answer depends on the level of the curriculum process at which we are operating. Assessment for the purpose of *curriculum and teacher evaluation* does not, in principle, threaten the student, since it is for the teacher's own benefit. Nevertheless privacy rights will always forbid some of the intimate and embarrassing information teachers sometimes seek from students regarding their feelings, ambitions, home life and relationships with others.

Next there is assessment for the purpose of the *diagnosis of learning difficulties*. Hence, since it is a transaction in confidence between teacher and student, much is permitted, depending on what the student wants and will permit. Nevertheless, the enquiry is much more likely to relate to specific skills and understandings, rather than requiring a probe into personal beliefs and dispositions. In any case, the teacher is ethically bound by two conditions: (a) that what was revealed in confidence will be kept confidential; and (b) that data collected will not be recorded for the purpose of final summative assessment.

This introduces the third kind of assessment, undertaken for the purpose of *reporting achievement*. This poses the most ethical problems of the three, because of the sting in the question: "Reporting what to whom?" Again, if we are referring to reports made to *the student* for his own enlightenment, then there is a built-in regulator on what is divulged to anyone else. These reports, however, also usually count as reports to *the school* on student progress, determining future class assignment. The school can hardly base such reports on evidence of commitment to the values we have been discussing, given that the concept of education prohibits us from pre-empting or dictating personal commitment, and such reporting would apply duress to the student. Understanding and empathy may reasonably be tested. The deeper outcomes can only be hoped for.

A further ethical problem arises with respect to reporting achievement to *outside agencies*. This calls for the separation of reports on achievement levels in skills and knowledge from testimonials as to character and commitment, and it also requires that the student have the right to authorise the dissemination of either or both to outside agencies.

## Conclusion

I have covered much ground sketchily in these last comments, for my aim was not to argue out every point of order but again to illustrate the implications of a resolve to take seriously the notion of education for commitment. One thing is certain. If the "open society" is not prepared to achieve some closure on central ideals in its democratic heritage, and in particular on commitments to critical rationality and caring community, then the future for public education is bleak!

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> R.S. Peters, "Education as Initiation," reprinted in *Authority, Responsibility and Education*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 3rd ed., 1973).
- <sup>2</sup> B. Crittenden, ed., *Philosophy and Education: Proceedings of the International Seminar*, (New York, Teachers' College Press, 1966).
- <sup>3</sup> P.H. Hirst and R.S. Peters, *The Logic of Education*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 24.
- <sup>4</sup> R.S. Peters, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 80, Feb. 1979, p. 463.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465.
- <sup>6</sup> R.S. Peters, "Education and the Educated Man," in *Education and the Development of Reason* ed. R.F. Dearden, P.H. Hirst and R.S. Peters, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 16.
- <sup>7</sup> E.g., R.F. Dearden, "Autonomy and Education" *op. cit.*, pp. 440-466 and John Wilson, *Preface to the Philosophy of Education*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 58-60 and chapters 5 and 7.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
- <sup>10</sup> Brian V. Hill, "Compulsion in Education," *Journal of Christian Education*, Papers 52, Aug. 1975, pp. 39-57.
- <sup>11</sup> Carl Bereiter, *Must We Educate?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 31f.
- <sup>12</sup> The sensitive comment of E.L. French on this pathology is still relevant, in "[R.I.]: A Nonagenarian Institution in Australia," *Journal of Christian Education*, Aug. 1968, vol. 11, p. 101.
- <sup>13</sup> E.g., B.A. Kaufman, "Piaget, Marx and the Political Ideology of Schooling," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 10, 1978, esp. pp. 36f.
- <sup>14</sup> Thus Paul H. Hirst, "Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge," and later reflections, in his *Knowledge and the Curriculum*, (London, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974).
- <sup>15</sup> E.g., A.J. Watt, "Education and the Development of Reason," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 8, 1976, pp. 17-28.
- <sup>16</sup> John White, *Towards a Compulsory Curriculum*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).
- <sup>17</sup> Robin Barrow, *Common Sense and the Curriculum*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1976).
- <sup>18</sup> Mary Warnock, "The Moral Code — I", in *Moral Education*, May 1969, vol. 1, p. 13.
- <sup>19</sup> I argued against this claim made in Wilson's earlier work *Introduction to Moral Education* in Brian V. Hill, "Education for Rational Morality or Moral Rationality?" *Educational Theory*, Vol. 22, Summer 1972, pp. 286-292 but it re-appears in his *Preface to the Philosophy of Education* (previously cited).
- <sup>20</sup> Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment*, (Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 43f. My own preference is for a fuller specification which enables us more readily to relate commitment to the concepts of ideology and education: commitment, I want to say, is a disposition to act in accordance with a belief, subject to its being seen to be not in conflict with one's total orientation as a person. This is defended in the fourth chapter of my forthcoming book.
- <sup>21</sup> Chapters two and three of my forthcoming book explore this further — *Education For Commitment*.

<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, (New York, Harper and Row, 1964), p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> In, for example, Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958) and subsequent works.

<sup>25</sup> Which is actually likely to subvert the teaching relationship, as Buber, despite the frequent misreadings of his work, was prompt to point out, calling for the teacher to restrain his desire for full mutuality out of respect for integrity of the immature ego of the child. See "Dialogue Between Martin Buber and Carl R. Rogers" in *The Knowledge of Man* by Buber, trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1961, pp. 169-176.)

<sup>26</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, (Panther Science Fiction, 1969).