

## Responsibility of the educator

W E K Anderson

"Any candid observer of the phenomena of modern society will readily admit that bores must be classed among the enemies of the human race; and a little consideration will probably lead him to the further admission, that no species of that extensive genus of noxious creature is more objectionable than the educational bore."<sup>1</sup>

T H Huxley, who was right about most things, was right about that. Only rarely does education become a topic of some general interest, but this may be one of those rare moments because two irresistible forces are impelling us into an era of change and compelling the educators to rethink their responsibilities.

### Two forces

The first force, now inescapable, is demographic. The generation hoping to enter higher education in 1995 is dramatically smaller (23% smaller) than the generation to which those who graduated last summer belong. The second force is the need for educated people. In *The Age of Unreason* Charles Handy points to the McKinsey forecast that by the year 2000 70% of all jobs will require educated people to do them, compared with the 30% of jobs for which that was true at the end of the second world war, and to the calculation by the Henley Centre for Forecasting that already we have passed the 50% mark.<sup>2</sup> No force on earth short of the kind of cataclysm that would return the world to the technology of the caveman can reverse this trend. Half the new jobs—that is, 35% of all jobs—will require people with higher education.

Faced with the awesome responsibility of providing a larger educated workforce from a smaller population the British educator has a harder task than some. Europe as a whole educates 20% of all its young people beyond school; Britain educates 14%.<sup>2</sup> This is a problem for the nation. It is also an opportunity and a challenge for the educator, who ultimately cannot shirk the responsibility of providing the education that the nation needs. It is the impact on education as a whole of the new cohort of students in higher education that I wish to consider.

For the universities, which have already grown and changed dramatically in the past 30 years, this means another sea change. They already produce more than six times as many graduates as in 1939. We now need to double or more than double the number of people in some form of higher education. Whether this education is based mainly in the universities and polytechnics or in other institutions, it immediately raises the spectre of lower standards all round.

If any of the expansion of numbers is to be in the universities it follows that the *minimum* standard of entry and the *minimum* standard of some degrees will have to be lower. I believe that that does not matter. Already the standards of entry and degrees in universities vary across Britain, and in the United States the variation is greater. Whereas 24% of British managers are graduates, 85% of American managers are<sup>3</sup>—but not all of those have graduated from Harvard or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or would be fit to graduate from any British university. America

simply has a wider range in the standard of courses offered within existing institutions.

It will be a positive advantage if many degree courses, as well as courses at a lower level, are broader than any available in Britain at present. Recently when reading the résumés of young American graduates I was struck by how many things they knew something about. A history major from Princeton with more than

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a smattering of economics, a foreign language and literature, some geology, and some knowledge of Chinese and Russian foreign policy has already taken some important first steps in an increasingly complex and international world and seems well equipped to go on learning. For the vast numbers who want to be educated beyond school but are not potential specialists a broad course is both within their capabilities and likely to be of more use. It goes without saying that some of it should be concerned with information technology and practically useful skills.

### Standards

Our standards are high. Indeed in a study at Aachen recently it was calculated that the standards achieved at A level put 18 year olds physics students two years ahead of their German counterparts. It is not my contention that we ought to lower these standards. Instead we have to acknowledge that these are not the appropriate standards for all of the larger student body we have in view and have to accept lesser standards for some. There is no reason why potential Nobel prize winners should not be educated exactly as they are at present, even if in the same institutions (but not following the same classes) there are students who are at present excluded from higher education. For the protection of standards we have to free ourselves from the egalitarian notion that all higher education is equal.

For the schools, too, the task of equipping for higher education more than twice as many pupils as we do now is a daunting challenge. Inevitably it means coming off the gold standard of A levels. This was the real motive behind the government's speedy rejection a few months ago of the Higginson report (which proposed five quasi A levels instead of three)<sup>4</sup> and its promotion instead of the new half A levels to be called AS levels. Higginson merely shuffled the A level cards: the same players would have been dealt a hand, though it would have contained five cards instead of three. AS levels brings in a new pack of cards and a whole new school of players. A levels, designed to test the suitability of an elite for university education as we have understood it, cannot survive as the only qualifications for higher education once we double the numbers.

AS levels, higher national diplomas, and a whole portfolio of certificates in different subjects will be gladly accepted. Now may be the time to take one further step and acknowledge what those of us who are old enough to have pupils making their way in the world already know: that the correlation between the greatest analytical intelligence and the greatest worldly success is depressingly low. At present we make too little attempt to encourage physical and practical intelligence and intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence and no attempt to evaluate them. Competence in a range of skills, rather than only in analytical thinking, may be the proper route to many of the more general courses which higher education will have to provide. There is no need to level down. We can keep to the highest standards at the top provided that we also accept diversity—of entrance qualifications, courses, and standards.

#### Relationship between teacher and pupil

So far we have assumed a traditional relationship between educator and pupil. Charles Handy cites a recent Confederation of British Industry conference at which it was concluded that by 1995 there would be four million telecommuters in Britain<sup>5</sup>, and asks whether this pattern should not be reflected in schools. Even if

some educational provision moves in the direction of the Open University in attempting to teach geographically scattered students I believe there is a fundamental reason why schools must continue to exist in something like their present form. This is that the responsibility of the educator is not simply to inform but also to motivate and inspire. Educational experts, Ian Hay once complained, have one thing in common: "All their schemes of education are founded on the same amazing fallacy—namely that a British schoolboy is a person who desires to be instructed."<sup>6</sup> The university student, it is to be hoped, has that desire; the school pupil is often still waiting for the spark from heaven to fall. It is most likely to be called down by meeting the right teacher, face to face, day by day.

Teachers are better able to motivate and inspire when they teach small groups which allow them to spend time with each student and time to think about them. But small groups mean more teachers, and more teachers, or even more teaching assistants, mean more money. A rich society absolutely dependent on brains for its prosperity cannot afford not to consider education an essential purpose. What is more problematic, however, is how a population requiring graduates for a larger and larger proportion of careers can at the same time increase the numbers entering teaching.

At school level part of the answer must be to abolish the closed shop that makes it difficult for anyone to take up teaching, even in later life, without an additional year of training. Teaching is a practical skill, the qualifications for which are knowledge of your subject, enthusiasm for communicating it, and some skill at doing so. Universities have always accepted this and expected no further training in teaching for lecturers and tutors. So do most independent schools. I think we could afford to let teachers learn on the job, as people do in so many other walks of life. The present system is a disincentive, particularly to those who have made some money and been attracted late to teaching as a socially useful and fulfilling job.

#### Responsibilities of the educator

So far I have discussed the responsibility of today's educator in a society urgently requiring many more educated people. But the educator has responsibilities beyond the immediate needs of the society to which he belongs, responsibilities to his individual pupils. I should like to suggest three.

Firstly, the educator must teach pupils how to teach themselves. The modern tendency is to load everything on to the educator. "Would it not be a good idea, headmaster, to teach all boys and girls Japanese... Chinese... statistics... economics... self defence... how to change a plug and fill in an income tax form?" The answer is no. A school's aim is not to teach everything that can be taught but to teach its pupils how to read and communicate, how to set about learning languages, how to seek out the information and skills that they find they need, how to go on learning. Beyond that educators should not tamper too assiduously with their pupils' natural ignorance. If they have taught them how to learn they have taught them what they most need to know.

The second of the three personal responsibilities lies in religion and morality. Schools founded and run by the churches or by religious bodies, educating pupils whose parents have chosen that school for them, have a duty to teach religion; other schools have not. They may teach about religion, which is a fundamental human activity, but they will not teach confessional religion. On the other hand, morality becomes a part of their responsibility whether they like it or not. Teachers are the adults whom the young know best after their parents; what teachers say and how they behave have



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considerable influence. Morality is on no syllabus, and we have little idea how to teach it. As Socrates wryly pointed out, if morality could be taught good men would always have good sons—a state of affairs as far from universal in his day as in ours.

None the less, educators are moral educators not only in the example which they, unconsciously, give their pupils, but in at least one intellectual lesson which they teach. True learning and honesty are inseparable, so educators cannot avoid teaching honesty. Here their responsibilities to their pupils and their subject are identical: to encourage a respect for the facts and a habit of thinking and judging, of weighing different theories and opinions—in science, history and the humanities—and of choosing honestly among them. In a world where tens of millions of pounds can be transferred across the world by a touch on the keyboard, and decisions made on the telephone without time for lengthy consideration, the habit of honesty becomes priceless.

### Habitual vision of greatness

The third responsibility of the educator to his pupils is to give them, in Alfred North Whitehead's fine phrase, "the habitual vision of greatness".<sup>7</sup> Since this is unfashionable in a society primarily concerned with the present and the immediate future, with wealth and instant gratification, it requires a brief explanation. "Youth," says Plato, "is the time when the character is being moulded and easily takes any impress one may wish to stamp on it. Then shall we simply allow our children to listen to any stories that anyone happens to make up and so receive into their minds ideas often the very opposite of those we shall think they ought to have when they are grown up?"<sup>8</sup> That question may well make us uneasy 2500 years later. Modern children spend more hours in front of a television set each year than they do in school. A high proportion of what our children see on screen are visions of selfishness and crue'—above all visions of triviality—rather than "the vision of greatness."

I do not suggest that we can stop that. Triviality has long been a cause of concern to educators: the great Dr Arnold complained that "exciting books of amusement

like *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*" were drawing his Victorian Rugbeians away from the study of "real literature."<sup>9</sup> Even if we could I am not sure that we should restrict access to triviality, for education is not concerned with the censorship of ideas but with informed choice—the choice between good and bad, convincing and unconvincing, important and unimportant. But so that people have that choice it is a clear responsibility of the educator to introduce them to the best that has been thought, said, composed, painted, and written.

The "habitual vision of greatness" is intensely pleasurable to those who have a glimpse of it. It is also useful. In the three dimensional technological world we inhabit the habitual vision of greatness helps us to make sense of why things are as they are and to see how they might one day be.

Education in the next decades will rightly be principally concerned with teaching young people how to solve new problems, with no answers at the back of the book, because that is what will be most immediately needed in the technological, instant, international world into which we have already moved. All educated people will be pioneers, reaching forever into new territories. Pioneering enthusiasm leaves little time for the remembrance of things past. The pressure for courses that are materially useful will be intense—from parents, from students, and from the commercial interests that are becoming the paymasters of higher education. It will more than ever be a major responsibility of the educator to remind us all of "the best that is known and thought in the world"<sup>10</sup> if the brave new world is going to be at all the sort of place that most of us will be happy to inhabit.

- 1 Huxley TH. *Collected essays*. London: Macmillan, 1893-5:iii,404.
- 2 Handy C. *The age of unreason*. London: Century, 1989:26-7.
- 3 Handy C. *The age of unreason*. London: Century, 1989:85.
- 4 Higginson GR, et al. *Advancing A levels*. London: HMSO, 1988.
- 5 Handy C. *The age of unreason*. London: Century, 1989:123.
- 6 Hay I. *The lighter side of school life*. London and Edinburgh: TN Foulis, 1914:129.
- 7 Whitehead AN. *The aims of education*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1929:106.
- 8 Livingstone R. *Education for a world adrift*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943:73.
- 9 Stanley AP. *Life and correspondence of Thomas Arnold*. London: Ward Lock, 1890:355. (Letter of 6 July 1839.)
- 10 Arnold M. *Essays in criticism, first series*. London: Macmillan, 1894:16.

## ANY QUESTIONS

*What is the importance of the presence in serum of antibodies to *Toxocara canis* in schoolchildren? Does this imply dormant infection or immunity, and what steps are advised to reduce the risk of illness developing?*

The importance of antibodies to *Toxocara canis* will to some extent depend on the type of antibody; non-specific antibody reactions may indicate the presence of several other helminths as well as that of *T canis*. Specific antibody—generally found on enzyme linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA)—indicates exposure to this helminth. Some studies with the ELISA test have shown evidence of past infection in 2-3% of the general population, and a figure of 14% was obtained in one study of children in urban Bedfordshire.<sup>1</sup>

Humans acquire the infection by contact with contaminated soil, especially by contact with infected puppies, hence the high prevalence of antibodies in young children. The prevalence of antibodies in the general public is around 3%, whereas in dog breeders the figure was found to be 16% in one study.<sup>2</sup> The presence of specific antibody is usually taken as evidence of past infection and not necessarily of immunity—for instance, the serious ocular effects of *T canis* may occasionally occur in subjects who have had raised antibody titres for prolonged periods.

The only measures that can be taken to prevent illness developing in individual people are to take care in handling dogs, particularly puppies, and avoid contaminated soil. Specific treatment is unsatisfactory. There are some recent good reviews.—HILLAS SMITH, *consultant physician, Harrow*

- 1 Cowper SG. Helminth parasites of dogs and cats, and toxoplasmosis antibodies in cats in Swansea, south Wales. *Ann Trop Med Parasitol* 1978;72:455.
- 2 Hewitt M. Pet animal infestations and human skin diseases. *Br J Dermatol* 1971;85:215.
- 3 Cook GC. Canine-associated zoonoses: an unacceptable hazard to human health. *Q J Med* 1989;70:5-26.

*A manic depressive patient in her 40s has been satisfactorily treated with haloperidol. Recently, however, she has developed hypertension when given haloperidol. Her blood pressure settled when the drug was stopped. What might be the cause of this hypertension, and how should her manic episodes be treated?*

The normal effect of haloperidol is to lower blood pressure by virtue of its action on the  $\alpha$  adrenergic receptors. This effect is less than that seen with several other neuroleptics. There is no obvious mechanism by which the blood pressure could be raised. Possibly it was raised as part of a general clinical state of agitation. This might in itself be a side effect of the haloperidol or a symptom of the underlying manic depressive illness. Alternatively, it might be an idiosyncratic response in this particular patient, but it is difficult to understand the mechanism.

Several alternative treatment strategies are available for the manic episodes. An alternative neuroleptic could be prescribed, such as chlorpromazine. The side effect most likely to restrict the dose prescribed is that of postural hypotension. Lithium can also be used to control manic episodes, but the drawback to this drug is that it takes seven to 10 days before becoming effective and in some patients it might be as long as 14 days. Consequently it is common practice to prescribe a neuroleptic during the first week or 10 days to effect behavioural control.—D A W JOHNSON, *consultant psychiatrist, Manchester*