The School in Society: The report of the committee set up to investigate the role of the school in society

Tasmania. Department of Education, 1968 (Chair: P. W. Hughes)

Overview of the document

78 page report of the committee appointed to investigate the role of school in society. The committee was established to "formulate guide-lines for the educational programmes of schools in the state for the period of compulsory attendance, age six to sixteen years".

Keywords

Role of schools; aims of education; democratic society; mass society; individuality; citizenship; self-cultivation; vocational competence; individual difference; class; socio-economic status; IQ; personality; core study; general education; continuous and sequential common curriculum.

Terms of Reference

The Committee was asked to produce a report covering the following aspects:

a) The aims of education.
b) Generally accepted findings on children and learning related to the functions of schools in society.
c) A set of educational objectives to use as a guide to curriculum development, as an indicator for class and school organisation and as a valuable reference for teaching and evaluation.
d) The role to be played by the schools in a democratic society.

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Summary of Contents

FOREWORD

➢ Half page foreword by W.A. Neilson, Minister for Education.

- ➤ Begins by briefly noting the objectives of the Hughes Committee, that "the education of our children is the foundation on which the future of our society rests" and suggests that this report "will do much to ensure that this foundation is a firm one". Notes that the Report contains many recommendations, some of which will be difficult to implement, and thanks the Committee for their work. (p. 6)

SECTION I - INTRODUCTION
- ➤ Two page introduction which overviews factors leading to the present re-appraisal of the role of school.
- ➤ Argues that "In one sense, education is subject to continuous re-appraisal".
- ➤ Outlines the specific elements that have led to this review, including alteration of the statutory conditions (extension of period of compulsory schooling), new knowledge about content and methods of teaching, and new societal demands and "new understanding of the process of human development". (p. 9)
- ➤ Notes that the expansion of secondary education means schools have to meet demands of increasingly diverse student population.
- ➤ Discusses the impact of new knowledge, "most evident in mathematics and the sciences" and new understandings of the learning process. (p. 9)
- ➤ States that "The changing social situation is most evident in vocational requirements. In a society where the vocational needs are in a state of continual flux, it is of little value for the schools to give highly specific preparation." (p. 9)

SECTION II – SOCIETY AND STUDENTS
Aspects of Technological Society
- ➤ Outlines the following aspects of technological society:
  - o Mass Society: "The theme we develop is that we live in a society of change, that technology is the chief initiator and agent of this change, and that changes are constantly accelerating so that the future becomes increasingly unpredictable." (p. 11)
  - o General Social Trends: Contrasts "communal" and "mass society" and elaborates the "mass society" argument in relation to production, schooling and media. Argues that "The problem, which is of tremendous significance to the school, thus becomes how to fashion a way of life such that security, identity and individuality can be retained in an increasingly organised society". (p. 12)
  - o The Increase in Knowledge: Discusses the difficulties associated with increases in knowledge including the problem of trying to classify and order knowledge, select appropriate knowledge to be taught and finding inter-disciplinary approaches to learning.
  - o Vocational Considerations: Notes changes in the nature of work, including the increasing demand for skilled labour, and the need for workers to be "flexible" and to re-train but that education will not (as yet) be shaped to meet economic demands. Argues that present vocational programs are "archaic" and that: "…education must provide a basis upon which skills can be developed, rather than teach the skills themselves". (p. 13)
  - o The Economic and Material Environment: Discusses the consequences of increasing affluence and notes that with the increase in material advantages, there are limited opportunities for reflection and to take time with decisions. Notes that: "Secondary education is no longer the prerogative of the

intellectual and social elite" and that expenditure on education must be "effective" and made according to a "formulated strategy". (p. 14)

➢ Mass Media and Mass Persuasion: Raises concern about the mass media and the pressure towards conformity and asserts the importance of being able to "criticise, analyse, select and judge", which requires "a set of standards and some principles in using them" (pp. 14-15). Concludes with a statement on the dilemma of finding a way to express oneself as an individual while also conforming to society.

➢ Immediate Social Influences on the Individual: Begins with the statement: "A major theme of our discussion so far is that the individual may develop a sense of inadequacy and impotence leading to unquestioning conformity and loss of self-identity". Notes the decreasing importance of the role of the community and religion on individual learning and concludes that as schools equip young people with the capacity for inquiry, it is important to look at the role of the school in society. (p. 15)

Learning and the Learner

➢ Notes that this section is concerned with learning and begins from the premise that:
  o "individuals are different and each is unique;
  o a whole personality does not have separate and divisible physical, emotional, intellectual and social components;
  o development is a continuous process but neither its rate nor its range is constant; and
  o both heredity and environment contribute to total personality." (p. 17)

➢ Makes the following observations on learning:
  o A View of Personality: States that "personality results from the interaction of inherited characteristics with the environment" and notes that schools "must make it possible for the child to live with his inheritance" and to do this "teachers must be aware of the social values that make the inheritance a burden for one child and a blessing for another". (pp. 17-18)
  o Stages of Learning: Cites Piaget and notes that his description of mental development has important implications for teaching, notably that "appropriate matching between the individual's mental organisation and his intellectual environment if suitable development is to occur". (p. 18)
  o A Theory of Learning: argues that the "field theory" approach "with its wider view of human personality, and its wider area of concern" makes an important contribution to "a theory of instruction". (p. 18)
  o Effect of Theory on Practice: Discusses how Locke's notion of the blank slate has had enduring influence. Notes that faculty psychology has been influential but the idea of "mental discipline" persists, despite evidence that improvement in one activity will only effect changes in another area if there are common elements.
  o Important Environmental Factors: Discusses the importance of language and the Plowden Report and argues that children should be provided with rich experiences as early as possible (at nursery school or pre-school). Also discusses IQ, how socio-economic status affects achievement, the importance of social environment and the school itself and concludes by reiterating that home and school are the most important environmental factors.
  o Variations Between Individuals: Notes that individual difference is "an educational fact of life and suitable provision must be made for it". (p. 20)

- o Extremes and Individual Differences: Discusses handicapped children noting that: "The present policy in Tasmania is that, where possible, each child should be placed where he has the maximum opportunity to develop his abilities and acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. In general this is interpreted to mean that children will be sent to an ordinary school unless the degree of handicap makes a special school essential." (p. 20)
- o Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes on the Outcomes of Schooling: States "Although the school is rightly concerned with the whole person, it is difficult to draw up a 'whole person' curriculum without dividing it into parts, and setting goals for achievement in each year, each subject, each lesson." Argues that in order to clarify these and devise assessment, "it is useful to think of cognitive, affective and psycho-motor goals". (p. 21)

SECTION III – THE SCHOOL
The Relation of the School to Society
- ➢ Refers to previous section and concludes that the school is concerned with "both the development of individuals as individuals and the preparation of individuals to share in and contribute to society" (p. 23). Notes that as the school is not the only educative agency in society, the role of the school must be clear.

The Features of the Present System
- ➢ Outlines the provision of education in state schools including pre-schools (3-5 year age range), primary schooling (over 6 years), secondary schooling (3-6 years – although a significant number are exempted before completing 3 years), special schools and high schools (both 3 and 4 year courses). Notes that two high schools provide fifth and sixth year courses as do two matriculation colleges.
- ➢ Discusses the following features of the present system:
  - o School Buildings: Notes the general inadequacy of a number of school buildings.
  - o School Enrolments: Overviews enrolment statistics and notes stabilising numbers of primary school students, an increase in demand for secondary education and rising retention.
  - o Teachers: Notes increasing number of teachers in excess of increases in enrolments, high turnover of staff in schools, and overviews changes in teacher training.
  - o Curriculum and Certificates:
    - i. Primary schools: Notes that development and maintenance of primary school curriculum is carried out by Curriculum Branch of the Education Department in conjunction with the Primary School Council. Syllabus revision occurs at approximately 5 year intervals.
    - ii. Secondary schools: Notes that development, maintenance and examination at secondary school level are concerns of three separate bodies: the University of Tasmania (responsible for courses leading to Matriculation Certificate); the Schools Board of Tasmania (responsible for courses covering first four years of secondary schooling and examination of fourth year); and the Education Department (provides courses "leading to the certificate of its own Secondary Schools Board available only to pupils in departmental secondary schools and awarded in the third year of secondary schooling). Notes that these three bodies have largely worked in isolation from each other, which

has resulted in "a lack of integration and co-ordination between the courses offered" (p. 27), but that a revision is underway whereby all areas fall under one body – the newly constituted Schools Board of Tasmania.

- o Administration, Services, Special Schools: Discusses the administration of the Department and the provision of special education.
- o Provision of Registered Schools: Notes that in addition to government schools, religious schools account for approximately 20 percent of the school population and discusses organisational arrangements for independent schools.

The Effect of Technology on the Materials and Methods of Education

- ➤ Notes the rapid development of educational technology since WWII and discusses the use of learning media.
- ➤ Argues that this raises issues for the school, both in teaching and making use of new equipment and media and also in a commercial sense as schools become a valuable market. Argues that this commercial interest makes it important for the school to be clear about its function so that intelligent choices about technology can be made. Notes that technology has had an important influence on trends in educational research, especially in terms of computers for complex technical analysis.

The Aims of the School Already Stated

- ➤ Discusses two documents which contain statements of the aims of Tasmanian education: The Report of the Committee on Educational Extension (1943) and The Report of the Committee on Educational Aims in the Primary School (1946).
- ➤ Notes that "The 1943 Report was a statement of future intent" in the context of expanding secondary education. (p. 30)
- ➤ Advises that "The 1946 report on the aims of the primary school states many of the aims that we endorse" (p. 31). In referring to the 1946 document, notes general terms that education should prepare the child for life and develop the child's capacities to the fullest possible extent. In dealing with knowledge, cites the following from the 1946 report: "It is not the acquisition of knowledge, but the attitude towards knowledge and experience that matters" but notes that the earlier report, "does not lay the emphasis we would consider necessary on the intellectual skills essential for dealing with knowledge and experience". (p. 31)
- ➤ Overviews the 1946 report and concludes: "In short, the report remains an acceptable statement of the philosophy of primary education but the work that has been done since its publication on the formulation of educational objectives, changes in society itself, and a shift in emphasis in schooling from teaching to learning, make it desirable that the ideas of 1946 should be re-stated". (p. 31)

Other Factors Shaping School Aims

- ➤ Overviews a number of other influences on education including political issues, the Education Department as the controlling authority, teachers who implement the aims of the school in classrooms, tradition and new social problems.
- ➤ Notes in particular that secondary schools are under the greatest pressure "to shape its goals to the immediate demands of society". (p. 32)
- ➤ Notes the place of certification and how the extension of secondary schooling means that "the school has to serve society as a selection agency" (p. 32). Argues that "A society that uses success as a criterion expects its schools to compete with one another

in a variety of ways, and this leads to the fostering of those students who can succeed in competition, often at the expense of those who cannot". (p. 33)

SECTION IV – MAIN POINTS FROM THE EVIDENCE RECEIVED BY THE COMMITTEE
- Refers to submissions received by the Committee and draws attention to "a number of items we consider important, either because of the frequency with which they are mentioned or the weight we give to the opinions of the bodies making particular submissions, or both". Notes that this is not to say that the Committee agrees with all of the points raised. (p. 34)
- Religious, Moral and Social Education: States that "It was often said that the school should play a positive part in the moral and ethical development of its pupils, but there was little agreement on the way this should be done" (p. 34). Notes that the following concerns were raised: the "decay of social values" and the need for schools to take positive action in this area; the need for more involvement of the community in schools; the need for more effective development of communication skills; and the obstacle that schools operating on "a somewhat limited middle-class view of society" (p. 34) presents for some students.
- Personal Development: States that "Another recurring theme concerned the difficulty the individual has in finding his place in society because he is unable to find himself. The solution offered here is the deliberate use of the arts for all pupils as a means of self-expression and self-discovery" (p. 35). Notes that the need for appropriate physical development was also stressed.
- School Subjects and General Education: States that "Teachers representing most of the traditional disciplines put forward cases showing the importance of their own subjects, many taking the view that a particular subject provided the foundation for a liberal education on which all else could be built…While subject teachers accepted the concept of general education, they often see this as being achieved through an exploitation of the emotional and social possibilities inherent in their own subject. However, less committed groups saw as essential the continuation of general education in the form of a variety of subjects throughout the four years of secondary education." (p. 35)
- Homework: Notes that submissions frequently saw homework as unnecessary or pointless.
- Sequence and Continuity in the Curriculum: Notes that a common theme was the need for more attention to be paid to sequence and continuity of learning throughout the whole period of schooling: "Attention was drawn to the need for planning the curriculum to cover the whole period of schooling, and for gearing teaching to this overall plan." (p. 35)
- Equality of Opportunity: Notes differences between types of schooling, the range of subjects available to city and country children and the middle-class milieu of the school and the difficulty this poses for some children.

SECTION V – THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL
- Aims and Objectives: Notes that aims of education are general statements of purpose, that education is a complex process, and that while "economics, efficiency and politics are not irrelevant to education…the basic consideration is the achievement of the purposes set for the school by society". Concludes that the aims and objectives of education are concerned with "what *should* happen, and with logical and experiment judgement [of] what *can* happen". (p. 37)

- ➢ Purposes of Education for Society and the Individual: Refers again to the two statements of purpose in the 1943 and 1946 Tasmanian reports, and notes that the "combination of concern for the individual and for society is typical of most such statements" (p. 37). Advances the "whole child" approach which regards the education of the individual as more than intellectual development and identifies three "constituent elements" by which "the school can assist all individuals towards a good life in a good society": citizenship, vocational competence and self-cultivation.
- ➢ The Functioning of the School: Argues that the school achieves these purposes because it is not just a preparation ground for society, but rather, "an actual society where children may live and learn as children and may come to understand themselves, to share with others, to grow as they interact with others and their environment and to structure their experiences and make them part of themselves". Argues that therefore while the structuring of the learning experiences should be suited to particular purposes and appropriate stages of growth, "attention must be paid to the emotional setting in which these events occur" (p. 39). Argues that:
  - o "First, the schools can and should provide a continuous and sequential common education at both primary and secondary levels". (p. 39)
  - o "Second, if our analysis of society is correct, the needs of self-cultivation, of vocational competence and of citizenship call for a curriculum that is made up of general studies. This is not to imply general education in the sense of an overall survey, but an education emphasising general ideas, knowledge and skills". (p. 40)

SECTION VI – RECOMMENDATIONS
- ➢ Outlines 55 recommendations ordered into four sections. Major recommendations are noted below.

Organisation of Schools and Related Matters
Organisation of Schools
- ➢ Organisation of Schools: No major changes in organisational structure are recommended but it does make recommendations for change in the following areas under Recommendation 1:
  - o more opportunities for children aged between 4-6 to attend school;
  - o matriculation colleges to be extended and developed to cater for wider variety of students;
  - o investigation of provisions of secondary education in rural areas; and
  - o establishment of adequate hostel facilities.
- ➢ Curriculum: Makes the following recommendations:
  - o Recommendation 2: "Primary education and the first four years of secondary education should be general in nature, with the same fields of study for all students." (p. 42)
  - o Recommendation 3: "Education following the first four years of secondary education should have the dual functions of providing preparatory courses for tertiary education, and of providing an increasingly wide variety of other courses for students wishing to study beyond the normal period of compulsory education." (p. 42)
  - o Recommendation 4: "The procedures for designing the curriculum should continue to involve classroom teachers and subject specialists, but this work should be increasingly coordinated through the Curriculum Branch of the

Education Department to produce a curriculum following the principles outlined in Recommendation 16." (p. 42)
- ➤ Certificates: Makes the following recommendations:
    - o Recommendation 5: The School Board's proposals concerning certificates should be endorsed.
    - o Recommendation 6: Statements certifying completion of 4 years secondary schooling should be issued. This statement should not be limited to academic achievement but should include interests, activities and aptitudes. The possibility of combining this statement with the School Certificate should be investigated. (p. 42)
- ➤ Assessment: Makes the following recommendations:
    - o Recommendation 7: (a) "Certificates and syllabuses at the matriculation level should be controlled by the Schools Board." (b) "The Schools Board should progressively develop towards internal methods of assessment for the award of certificates at the Higher School Certificate level." (p. 43)
    - o Recommendation 8: "An investigation of methods of selecting students for tertiary entrance should be carried out." (p. 43)
    - o Recommendation 9: "At all levels, evaluation techniques which seek to assess student potential and general developed abilities as well as mastery of particular subject content should be progressively developed." (p. 43)
    - o Recommendation 10: "Measurement techniques in schools at all levels should not be restricted to formal written tests and much greater use should be made of oral methods, of observational techniques and of assignments." (p. 43)
- ➤ School and Community: Makes several recommendations in relation to strengthening school and community bonds.
- ➤ Teaching of Specific Skills: Makes the following recommendation:
    - o Recommendation 14: Schools should teach suitable skills such as driving and first aid.
- ➤ Size of Schools: Makes the following recommendation:
    - o Recommendation 15: The influence of size of schools student learning should be investigated.

The Programme of the School
- ➤ Basic Requirements: Makes the following recommendation:
    - o Recommendation 16: "Basic requirements of a programme of general studies beginning in the earliest years of schooling and continuing until the end of at least four years of secondary schooling are:
        - a) a sequential development of ideas attuned to each child's stages of development;
        - b) continuity of progress from step to step in both knowledge, skills and attributes and the methods by which the child is introduced to them;
        - c) integration of the contributions that different disciplines and experiences can make to identifying and solving the problems of the individual in society;
        - d) a scope of experience wide enough to provide for learning that will: enable the student to continue to meet requirements of everyday living; assist in the understanding and interpretation of the environment and give meaning to the life of the individual in it; and open to the student avenues for self-cultivation and give him pleasure and a sense of achievement in exploring them;

e) study leading to deepening understanding of principles and general ideas; and

f) stimulation, challenge and interest for students over the who range of abilities." (p. 43)

➢ Intellectual Development: Makes the following two recommendations:
  o Recommendation 17: "The programme should use intellectual development as its principle means, and extend this by experiences that encourage aesthetic, physical, social, moral and spiritual development." (p. 44)
  o Recommendation 18: "The programme should provide for all of the aspects of intellectual development outlined in paragraph 72 of this report, and thus should demand more than the simple remembering of knowledge." (p. 44)

➢ Scope of Study: Describes five areas that should be included in "the scope of study" under Recommendation 19, including:
  o The capacity to deal with spoken and written English, as well as other forms of communication such as music, mathematics, other languages and visual arts.
  o Study of the natural environment.
  o Study of the social environment.
  o Study and practice of the activities for self-cultivation, such as drama, writing, science, history, music, art, woodwork and sewing.
  o Awareness of the philosophies and ideas on which their own and other cultures are based. (p. 44)

➢ Fields of Study: Under Recommendation 20 describes how the program outlined in the preceding four recommendations should be translated into a set of fields of study. Proposes that the core studies for all pupils throughout the period of compulsory schooling should be:
  o Arts and Crafts
  o English
  o Mathematics
  o Natural Science
  o Physical Education
  o Religious Education
  o Social Sciences

➢ Outlines how traditional areas of study should be reviewed under Recommendation 21.

➢ Additional Subject Fields: Under Recommendations 22 and 23 overviews the ways in which subjects and primary and secondary levels can be integrated, with secondary levels providing extended opportunities for learning in addition to the core outlined. Recommends that technical subjects and home arts subjects should be available to both boys and girls, that all students should have some experiences of both these subjects in their secondary schooling and that foreign languages should be available to all students at secondary level.

➢ Short Courses in Secondary Schools: Recommends that short courses should be available in secondary schools so that schools can offer breadth of subject choice (Recommendation 24) and that these courses should be recognised in the certificates (Recommendation 25).

➢ Study in Depth: As a complement to the previous recommendation, proposes that provision should be made for study in depth for pupils in their third and fourth year in both the core and additional subject areas (Recommendation 26).

➢ Need for Curriculum Review: Makes the following recommendation:

- o Recommendation 27: All curricula at all levels should be reviewed as soon as possible in order to begin the implementation of the above recommendations, and also to take account of the following:
  - English should be the focus and more attention should be given to oral communication.
  - More opportunities should be provided for students to deal with problems of social and personal relationships (this should be achieved through existing subjects).
  - As mass media is increasing the range of experience of children there should be attention given to developing ability to evaluate their output.
  - The overall content of material studies should be reduced "so that the full possibilities of the content that is studied can be realised".
  - Syllabuses should contain common core of concepts to be developed at different levels.
  - Syllabuses should provide statements of end points.
  - During the first four years of study, university entrance considerations should not affect the implementation of a program of general studies. (p. 46)
- ➢ Social Concerns: Makes the following recommendation:
  - o Recommendation 28: "The School should accept responsibility for consideration of the moral issues involved in human relationships and social issues. Specific instruction in such things as sex education and the dangers of drugs and alcohol, should not be regarded as separate fields of study, but should be included in relevant sections of the whole program." (p. 46)
- ➢ National Curriculum Projects: Makes the following recommendations:
  - o Recommendation 29 advocates the development of national curriculum projects due to inadequate resources at a state level.
  - o Recommendations 30 and 31 suggest that teachers should be involved in curriculum development and that innovation and experimentation should be encouraged but introduced only after "careful experimental trials". (p. 47)

Teachers and Teaching
- ➢ Makes ten recommendations in relation to teachers and teaching.

The Provision of Facilities
- ➢ Makes a further 13 recommendations in relation to the provision of facilities.