Requirements for a Curriculum

A discussion paper

Education Department, Tasmania 1980
REQUIREMENTS FOR A CURRICULUM

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The study group met at intervals between June 1978 and March 1980, to work out the main ideas to be included in its report — the four requirements for a curriculum, and the kinds of things that should be said about each of them. A draft paper was written and comments on it were sought from a number of teachers. By April 1980 a writing party working in the Curriculum Centre had rewritten the paper to take account of the teachers' comments, and it seemed to be ready for publication. Luckily it was given to an editor who found it hard to read — and said so.

The writers took up the challenge to make the paper readable. When they tried to make the language simple, direct and clear, a paper about an abstraction called 'curriculum' magically became a paper about teachers and children working in schools.

The paper is not a policy statement from the Education Department. It is a discussion paper for teachers, parents and administrators to use, along with other resources, as they work out curriculum ideas for the 1980s.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WAS THIS PAPER WRITTEN?

In 1977, the Tasmanian Education Department published a report, Secondary Education in Tasmania. According to this report, the secondary curriculum should include 'a core of six broad areas of activity in which the school should attempt to involve all students'. The report concluded with a number of recommendations, one of which was 'that the [Department's] Curriculum Branch give priority to the preparation of material to amplify the Committee's guidelines on a balanced curriculum in secondary schools'.

By the time the Curriculum Branch was formally asked to do something about this recommendation, the phrase 'core curriculum' had come into vogue and was being widely used in discussions about both primary and secondary school programs. The Curriculum Branch's response, therefore, was to form a Core Curriculum Study Group. This paper is the final report of that study group.

Members of the study group took only a short time to conclude that searching for a 'core' curriculum for secondary schools was likely to be fruitless. But there were other things they wanted to say about the secondary curriculum, and they believed that these would apply to other schools as well. This belief was confirmed when the writers of the 1979 report, Primary Education in Tasmania, adapted some of the study group's ideas for use in their report.

This paper, then, builds on and clarifies ideas contained in major reports published recently on both primary and secondary education in Tasmania.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR TEACHERS?

The writers realise that a curriculum is of little use unless children accept it. In this paper, however, they have looked at the curriculum from the teacher's, not the child's, point of view. The paper concentrates on what will be in teachers' minds as they are planning a school program and gauging the effects it is likely to have on children, whether the 'children' are in a kindergarten or a community college. Groups of teachers might decide to discuss the paper and its ideas
among themselves, or a teacher by herself might refer to it as she thinks about her own program.

Because the paper is as free of jargon as the writers could make it, teachers might also use it to spark off a discussion of their work with parents and others who are not teachers. In fact, it might have a special value just now, when many people in the community are quick to criticise what they think is happening in schools. Although such critics often disagree with one another on points of detail, they share a belief that schools are not doing what they should. On the other hand, most teachers believe that schools are doing their best for children, but under pressure they often find it hard to justify some of their own practices. This paper might help teachers state clearly the reasons behind what they do. Having done that, they might be in a better position to work with their critics in making schools even better.

The ideas contained in the paper are familiar. In fact, many teachers would say that they are already putting many of them into practice. Moreover, the paper does not confront teachers with a fresh set of demands for urgent action. Teachers can put it aside for the time being (or forever); they can take from it what they want, perhaps to modify their teaching in some way; or they can use it as the starting point for a fresh look at their whole program. The paper discusses the curriculum without going into detail about what to teach and how to teach it. It will therefore probably disappoint those who want to be given direction in such matters. But the writers believe firmly that decisions about details of the curriculum are best made by schools and their communities.

**IS 'CORE CURRICULUM' A USEFUL PHRASE?**

The study group began its work by considering some of the views already held about 'core curriculum' in Tasmania. The following are some of the sources that it examined, together with a brief summary of each one's main ideas about the 'core'.

The 'old' Schools Board of Tasmania Certificate

English, social studies, mathematics and science are 'basic' subjects.
"Back to the Basics" movements
Reading, writing and arithmetic, and the things that make people employable, are the essential parts of the curriculum.

Secondary Education in Tasmania, 1977
The 'core' curriculum is a set of activities centred on language, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, life problems and physical education.

Tasmanian Education: Next Decade (TEND), 1978
The key processes of communicating, thinking and valuing constitute a 'core' curriculum.

Paper for the Tasmanian High School Vice- Principals Conference, 1978
The 'core' is a 'distillation of the most important insights, general ideological commitments and value systems that stem from our culture'.

Report of the School Certificate Review Committee of the Schools Board of Tasmania, 1980
Each subject has a set of central ideas and topics which all pupils must study.

Core Curriculum for Australian Schools, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1980
The 'core' 'comprises fundamental learnings for all students', but 'it does not define all learnings in the whole curriculum'.

If these sources are any indication, those who use the phrase 'core curriculum' interpret it in so many ways that one cannot know what it means until one knows who is using it. And the meaning of the phrase differs not only from group to group and from person to person; it differs also from time to time, so that no part of the curriculum can be regarded as forever 'core'. For instance, one part may be uppermost in teachers' minds for a time, as they think about a particular child, while another may be uppermost as they try to solve a particular teaching problem.

The paper itself illustrates how hard it is to settle on a permanent 'core'. On page 11, the writers mention the kinds of activities the curriculum should provide, as if these might be the 'core'. On page 22, they mention some of the
things children should learn by the time they leave school, as if these might be the 'core'. On page 25, they mention some purposes that all teachers might share, as if these might be the 'core'. Each of these possible 'cores' differs from the others because each has been obtained by looking at the curriculum from a different angle. Which one of them, then, if any, can be called the 'core'? And anyhow, what is said about children on page 5 is just as central to the curriculum as any of them.

DOES THE CURRICULUM NEED A 'CORE'?  

The study group saw quite early that none of the potential 'cores' mentioned above could be discussed without frequent reference to the others. Each of them is so important that to emphasise any one at the expense of the others would throw the curriculum out of balance. The writers therefore gave up trying to settle on any one of them as the 'core', and decided instead to examine them all. While they were doing this, their thinking became clearer, and they found to their surprise that what they had to say about the curriculum was common sense, and that it could be put in plain words.

FOUR MAJOR REQUIREMENTS  

The study group concluded that the curriculum must:

- spring from a concern for children;
- help each child learn, and go on learning, as much as he can about himself, the world and the people in it;
- contain a strong thread of usefulness; and
- highlight some purposes to which all teachers can subscribe.

The order in which these requirements appear is not meant to imply that any one of them is more important than the others. If the curriculum fails to meet any one of the requirements, it is inadequate.
A CONCERN FOR CHILDREN

CHILDREN HAVE THE FINAL SAY ABOUT WHAT THEY LEARN

When the study group decided to look at the curriculum from the teacher's point of view, it was aware of the pitfalls of writing about the curriculum as if children do not exist. The group therefore begins by declaring that, whatever teachers may believe they are teaching (or offering if 'teaching' seems too directive a word), children learn only what they choose to learn and let the rest pass by. By choosing what to learn and what to ignore, each child thus creates his own curriculum.

Children will choose to learn whatever catches their interest, excites their curiosity, arouses their feelings, saves them from hunger or other threats, sets them thinking, strikes a familiar chord, or shines with what they see to be good. They may choose to learn something simply because it happens to be taught by a teacher they like, or because it wins approval from others, or because it gives them a hope of success.

If a teacher accepts that children thus create their own curriculum, she is also accepting that they will influence some of her curriculum decisions. For instance, although she may herself decide whether to let children pursue an interest of their own, or to direct them instead to an activity that she has chosen for them, she knows that she must make such decisions with particular children in mind. She cannot decide without asking herself how ready each child is to begin learning whatever it is that she has chosen for him, or that he has chosen for himself; nor can she decide without asking herself how her decision will affect other children. To make such decisions she needs to know her children well.

LEARNING IS AFFECTED BY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE

The school must do all it can to see to it that a child's relationships with other people are right. When the relationships between the people in a classroom are warm, friendly and businesslike, a child tends to learn better than when they are not. Good relationships with others can also boost a child's self-esteem and self-confidence, making him feel
that he can create solutions to his own problems and shape the course of his own life.

But not all children come to feel that they are valuable. Now as always, many children enter school (and leave it) with low opinions of both themselves and their schooling. Knowing this, teachers should take care that at least they do not lower children's self-esteem. They should show children that they accept them as they are, and they should avoid the temptation to fit them too readily into an approved mould. Beyond this, if a teacher gains a child's confidence so that the child can talk easily with her and share curriculum decisions with her, there is a good chance that he will value what he is learning, and come to like school.

Other children - those he plays with outside school and those he works with closely in school - do much to determine how a child regards himself and how he reacts to school. Teachers are in a good position to observe the effects various children are having on one another, and to use their influence when necessary. But they must do this wisely and sensitively.

The greatest influence on a child, however, comes not from his teachers or from other children but from his parents. Teachers cannot do much to affect what parents make a child think about himself, but they can influence what parents make a child feel about school. To do this, teachers must see to it that they and parents communicate easily with one another. Parents can wholeheartedly encourage their child to like school only if they understand and accept what the school is doing for him and know what it means to him. If parents understand clearly what the school is trying to do through its program, more of them might want to contribute to it and help to improve it.

CHILDREN DIFFER

Even when children's ages are the same, they differ from one another in experience and in their ability to deal with ideas, people and their surroundings. To complicate things further, no child always acts as if he were 'the same all through'. He may do one thing with skill and confidence, and yet be awkward and diffident when doing another. He may operate at the limit of his potential at times, but at other
times he may act as if that potential did not exist. He may have a liking for one kind of activity, and antipathy towards another. The quality of his thought and action thus varies according to what he is doing, when he is doing it, and how he feels about doing it.

The writers admit that much more could be said about the way children grow and learn. Since these topics are referred to frequently in the rest of this paper, however, there is no need to deal with them here.

LEARNING DEPENDS ON ADEQUATE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The study group debated for some time whether providing for children's physical development should be regarded as a fifth requirement of the curriculum, to be given equal status with the other four. Eventually the group concluded that it is of a different order from the others and yet that it is important enough to be given special treatment.

A school cannot provide adequately for children's physical development simply by scheduling one or two physical education lessons each week and organising a sports program. Rather, the school must see to it that as much importance is attached to monitoring and improving children's health and fitness as is attached to developing their strength and agility. For instance, children must eat and sleep properly; they must have their sight and hearing tested; they must develop small muscle co-ordination of the kind needed for writing, knitting or handling tools and machinery. Some few children will also wish to develop the highly refined skills needed to, say, play international hockey or repair a watch.

Some people think that schools do not need to concern themselves with what a child eats or with how well he sees and hears. But there is mounting evidence that matters like these are important. For instance, it can be shown that even slight impairments of vision or hearing can slow the process by which a child acquires language, and this in turn can lead to general problems in schooling. Such impairments often go undetected, and even when they are detected they are often ignored by teachers and parents.

It can be inferred from what has been said that schools by themselves cannot do all that is needed for children's phy-
sical development. They must rely on the co-operation of parents and various community health and welfare agencies.

LEARNING CAN GIVE PLEASURE

Most children, for most of the time, can enjoy learning, and the curriculum should encourage them to do so. Pleasure is a powerful motive for learning. A child finds pleasure in satisfying his curiosity, solving a problem or mastering a skill. Because of the pleasure that these activities give him, he wants to repeat them again and again. And his pleasure is even greater when it is shared with others, as when he has a chance to display his own talents, or when he is praised for doing something which is excellent for him.

Helping children enjoy learning will bring out the best in them, and bringing out their best is what a concern for children is about.
The curriculum must help each child learn as much as he can about himself, the world, and the people in it. It must therefore offer him a range of things to do and a variety of ways of doing them. It should not allow him to specialise until he has first widened his experience.

In this section of the paper, the study group has posed and discussed some questions that teachers must ask themselves as they plan how to give each child the range and variety of activities that suit him. These questions, and a discussion of each, appear under three headings:

A range of things to do
A variety of ways of doing them
Fitting the range and variety to each child

A RANGE OF THINGS TO DO

Why offer a range of things to do?

- There are already many fields of knowledge, and the number is growing; moreover, the knowledge within each field is expanding rapidly and becoming more closely linked with that in others. The curriculum must reflect the extent and variety of this knowledge.

- Each child and each teacher has different needs, capacities and interests. The curriculum must take account of these differences and help children and teachers make the most of them.

- Our society is becoming increasingly complex, and offers people a wide selection of values, lifestyles and even nationalities from which to choose. The curriculum must help children deal with this complexity and make wise choices.

- A child's intellectual growth is linked with his physical, emotional and social growth. The curriculum must help him grow in all these ways.

Who selects the range for each child?

People still argue about whether the curriculum should be 'child-centred' or 'subject-centred'. At one extreme are
those who believe that school programs can be pre-planned, and that all children can be made to go through a fixed set of subjects in lockstep. At the other extreme are those who believe that each child must find his own path to learning, and that subjects, because they tend to determine that path for him, hinder him. People can so commit themselves to either one of these beliefs that they hear nothing good of the other.

Teachers make a mistake when they commit themselves totally to one of these beliefs or the other. The truth is that there is no one 'right' approach that will always work for every child, even though various community and professional pressure groups sometimes act as if there is one. It is also true that an approach is not 'right' just because it is fashionable; educational 'bandwagons' come and go. Teachers must therefore not feel guilty for quietly going their own way and choosing whatever approach they think is best for their children. After all, the best approach is any one that, used with sensitivity and skill, helps a child to learn.

How can the range be organised for teaching?

Most schools divide their programs into parts of one kind or another. The usual way of making this division is according to subjects. Some of these subjects are what have come to be called 'disciplines', like history or chemistry; others are combinations of disciplines, like general science or social science; others again are clusters of topics, like physical education or technology.

Some teachers think that dividing the curriculum into subjects needlessly separates the different things a child learns. Teachers who think this have tried other ways of organising their programs - like bringing several disciplines together in one teaching unit, or building the curriculum around major themes to which several subjects can contribute, or taking things a child shows interest in and building a curriculum around them.

If someone wants to know what makes up a school's curriculum, he is likely to be handed a list of the subjects the school offers. Quite a few educational writers, however, realising that there are several ways of organising a curriculum, shy away from using the usual subject names. Trying to make
their view of the curriculum look fresh and untainted by current practice, they refer instead to ‘activities’, which sometimes do and sometimes do not refer to the old ‘subjects’. For instance, one frequently comes across proposals that all children should study a range of things like mathematics, language, physical and biological sciences, the study of society, expressive and creative arts, crafts, moral education, and consideration of life problems. The study group can only agree that schools should teach these things. Who could disagree?

Curriculum reformers hope that teachers generally will feel challenged by a curriculum like the one above, and be moved to look for ways to improve their teaching. More often than not, however, teachers who favour the teaching of 'subjects' will feel uneasy at the absence of their subject's name, and vaguely threatened. When they feel this way, they will be more likely to look for ways to defend their subject teaching than for ways to improve it. They will become more pre-occupied than ever with ordering their subject-matter, prescribing standards and devising ways by which children who do not shape up can be pushed out.

For these teachers, subjects are reassuring; they represent what they know and feel comfortable with; they stand for stability. There is nothing wrong with this so long as a teacher thinks of the child she is teaching and of the rest of his curriculum as well as of her subject, and then teaches the subject so that it fits the child rather than the other way round.

Although many teachers have succeeded either in blurring the boundaries between subjects or even in doing without them at all, most teachers want to retain them — for many reasons. Some are attracted by the subject-oriented books and kits they can buy for their children to use; others like subjects because they themselves were taught them; still others look on subject syllabuses as the best way to make sure that children are not asked to learn the same things year after year.

But subjects or not, the study group finds it encouraging that many teachers are giving time and energy to rethinking their own programs. As they do so, it does not really matter whether they look for alternatives to subjects or for ways of teaching their own subjects better. What matters is that
they are forever looking for ways to improve children's learning.

Do some school subjects help children's learning more than others do?

Many teachers think that some subjects, the ones that have recently come to be called 'disciplines', provide a particularly effective way of helping children understand the world. Some of these disciplines are history, chemistry, biology, mathematics and literary criticism. What sets them apart from most other subjects is, first, that they are relatively old, which means that the ideas and methods peculiar to their own areas of knowledge have been long established and widely accepted; and second, that they are each relatively limited in scope, which means that each has evolved its own logical, coherent, orderly approach to its own area of knowledge. Many teachers see these characteristics as good reasons why children should study the 'disciplines' as separate subjects. They also think that the 'disciplines', among them, contain important elements of our culture.

Some other teachers, while agreeing on the importance of what the disciplines offer, do not agree that they should be studied as separate subjects. They teach history, mathematics or art as each arises while children are studying a theme, for instance, or pursuing one of their interests. They argue that, when the substance of the disciplines comes up in this way, children find it more interesting and easier to learn than when it is taught formally, because children will be learning it when they want to know about it and can see some point in it.

But whether children study the disciplines formally or otherwise, the study group thinks that they should encounter the ideas contained within them, and that these ideas should be presented so that they are both interesting and coherent.

What about certificates?

It is generally accepted that the main function of schools is to help children learn. Secondary schools, however, for a variety of reasons, also award certificates, and they want to do this fairly. Some teachers think that helping children grow calls for one kind of teaching, and giving them certificates calls for another. If this is so, then teachers must
ask themselves how they can do both at once.

What about the sequence for learning?

A teacher must present materials and activities to a child when he is ready for them and can relate them to what he already knows or can do. Her problem in doing this is not only to identify the right time for each child; it is also, particularly if she is a high school teacher, to decide where his learning should begin and how it should proceed. The logical sequence of subject matter as she has come to understand it after long study might not be the best sequence for him to follow in studying it. Even the logical beginning of it might not be the best place for him to begin. As if that were not enough, the beginning point and the sequence that work for one child in her class might not work for his friend.

Teachers of some subjects believe that a child must learn certain underpinning ideas or skills before he is allowed to try anything else. But there is always a risk, when teaching is tackled in this way, that what a child is asked to do at the outset might be harder than what he will have to do later. For instance, young children just beginning a study are less likely to be able to engage in formal reasoning than they will be when they are older. Yet it is the underpinning ideas that are the most likely to require formal reasoning for their mastery. Hence ten-year-olds seldom learn a foreign language by first learning its grammar. They learn the language simply by using it. This does not mean that learning the grammar is useless: it just means that, if it must be learned, it would be better if it were learned later.

What about skills and drills?

There is not much point in teaching children specific skills and information — like multiplication tables or special rules and conventions — just in case they might need them later on. Teachers should introduce such things to children at the time that they are most likely to need them, and will therefore want to learn them.

Deciding when the time is right, however, is never clear-cut or easy. Take the learning of multiplication tables, for instance. Some children learn their tables after they under-
stand the principles underlying the process of multiplication. Other children, who have an urgent need to solve problems that require multiplication, cannot afford to wait to learn the principles; they need either memorised tables or an electronic calculator to help them. Still others need to learn the tables by rote before they are able to understand the basic principles.

A VARIETY OF WAYS OF DOING THINGS

In what ways can children learn?

The ways in which children learn are as much a part of the curriculum as are the things that they learn. To satisfy themselves that children have the chance to learn in a variety of ways, teachers should ask themselves and their colleagues questions like those that follow:

1. Does the curriculum provide activities which range from the formal and planned to the informal and spontaneous?
2. Are children given the chance to learn at first hand from objects and experiences, as well as at second hand by reading books and listening to teachers?
3. Are children put in contact with things at times simply so that they know such things exist, and at other times so that they can study them in depth?
4. Are children given the chance to work alone and also in groups of different sizes?
5. Are children as well as teachers given the chance to think of activities and to plan the way they will be carried out?
6. Are there times when children have the chance to discuss openly the values of others, and are there other times when teachers teach and endorse certain values?
7. Does the curriculum deal with ideas that fit comfortably with those a child already has, as
well as with others that challenge and even contradict what he already knows?

Are children given a chance to communicate with a variety of audiences by way of many media, as well as with a limited audience by way of a single medium?

How many children should learn together?

A teacher should not make the mistake of thinking that the children in her class can be grouped in only one way. She should see them instead as a collection of different children who will be grouped and regrouped in many ways. If she sees her class in this way, it does not matter whether a child is working from time to time as a member of the whole class, as a member of groups of twelve, eight or three, or on his own; he will receive the attention he needs. Whatever the size of a group, she will see to it that each child is working to some purpose, and that the size and composition of the group serve that purpose well.

Are there better ways of teaching?

The study group has said that teaching can be approached in a variety of ways. As much as the group would like to give teachers authoritative advice on the 'best' way or even the 'right' way to teach certain children certain things, there is not enough evidence for it to do so. All that anyone writing about education can say is that he 'believes' some approaches are better than others.

Researchers are continually uncovering more information about how children learn, and their research needs to continue. What is needed just as much, however, is for someone to discover and show how the findings of the researchers can be used to improve teaching.

Sometimes the findings suggest that teaching can be improved by better methods or by more sophisticated technology. But new methods and more advanced technology lead to only slight advances in teaching. The understanding and artistry of the skilful teacher will remain a school's most precious resource.
FITTING THE RANGE AND VARIETY TO EACH CHILD

How much time should the school allow for each subject and activity?

For years now, schools have been allotting each subject and activity its own 'proper' amount of time. But how do schools decide what amount of time is 'proper' for each one? The answer is that they rarely even ask questions about it. They usually just go on allotting each the amount of time custom has decreed for it.

This measuring out the curriculum in units of time seems a fair way of giving equal opportunity to each child: if each child can study a subject or take part in an activity for its 'proper' time, all children will thus have been given the same chance to learn. But by allotting time in this way, schools are not giving thought to what each child knows already or wants to know, or to how much time he needs to learn it. There is room for change here.

For instance, what if, except for those working towards a high degree of excellence, children judged to be good at reading were not taught any more about how to read? If this were to happen, a child's giving up a study would be a sign of his success rather than of his failure, as it is now. Or what if a child has already learned outside the school something that the school is about to teach him? Should the school then insist that he study it again? School is, after all, only a part of a child's life. Because this is so, it should complement and build upon what children are learning elsewhere. If schools do that, there is a good chance that each child's brief time in school will be well spent.

How does the school's allotment of time match the child's needs?

Teachers need to keep track of the amount of time a child spends at superficially sampling what the school offers. They should not let him thus sample for too long. It is probably better that he learns to do a few things well, and one or two things very well, than that he learns to do many things with mediocrity. It follows, then, that there will be times when a child concentrates on only one or two studies. But when a child intends to widen his experience, he will find himself studying a dozen or so things.
There is a vast difference between the amount of time allotted to any school activity and the amount of time a child will give it his close attention. A child is so often distracted by his teacher and others that he uses only a small part of the time allotted him for study. If it also happens that he is not interested, he might find ways of shutting himself off entirely from what his teacher has in mind for him. But even if he is interested and not overly distracted, it is unlikely that he will be able to concentrate fully throughout the school day. He will from time to time go off at tangents, think about something else, or day-dream.

School children have other problems related to time. One is that school timetables rarely take account of the time each child actually needs for learning something. And although teachers acknowledge the problems implied by the truism that children learn at different rates, they sometimes arrive at wrong solutions to them. For instance, they sometimes isolate children who learn slowly and give them different, less demanding things to learn, instead of giving them what they really need - more time and less pressure. Or they let children who learn quickly waste time practising what they can already do well.

What should the child learn about himself?

The curriculum should help a child discover how he acts in different situations, and how he can harness his abilities and get things done. It should also help him discover what kind of person he is, and what he does well. Helping a child make discoveries like these can be chancy, frustrating and sometimes painful - for the child and for those around him. And some children, with all the help in the world, may never make such discoveries. Teachers therefore need to be sensitive and understanding towards each child, and they need also to be patient - for a child cannot hurry the process of finding himself any more than he can hurry his growth in other ways.

But why should the curriculum help a child make discoveries about himself? It is not just so that he can fit into his niche in the adult world. It is also to help him realise that he can make that world better for others and for himself, and to give him the confidence to try.
What about talented children?

A child who has special talents should be given the chance to develop them to excellence. He should not develop his special talents to the exclusion of everything else, however, nor should his school program be allowed to determine those of other children.

What about children who are struggling?

There are some children who do all right at learning what they need for the life they choose, and grow up to become solid citizens; but they have to struggle to keep up with their schoolwork. Teachers are usually quick to respond to the difficulties these children have, and give them a great deal of their time, but they often feel powerless to help them. They would probably feel less so if they had more time to give each child, and more help in recognising and dealing with children's difficulties and in discovering their causes.

It is easy for teachers to assume that, because a child has difficulty, he lacks ability. This assumption is right sometimes but not always. For instance, a child might be clumsy or sick or hard of hearing or under-nourished or bored or unloved or embarrassed - any one of which might cause him to act as if he lacks ability when really he has loads of it. He might have a learning difficulty brought about by colour blindness. He might have a gap in his learning because he missed school at just the time that some important skill was being taught, or because he did not have enough time to consolidate what he was learning, or because he misunderstood some new piece of learning. He might even feel that he is being picked on by his teacher or his class-mates.

Teachers must be on the lookout for such impediments, and must help children overcome them, whether they are caused by things that happen in school or elsewhere.

Helping children overcome impediments sometimes calls for teachers to do things other than teaching. For instance, schools may find that buying some children breakfasts is as necessary as buying them books. But usually a child who has difficulty needs special teaching of some kind - to help him learn to speak clearly, say, rather than to make him persevere with writing. Very occasionally it may even be worthwhile for a teacher to try just once more to help a child learn something that has eluded him before.
Measures like these are needed so that children who might otherwise be left out of things, or passed over, can take part in the school program with dignity and satisfaction, as other children do. These measures are likely to be most effective when teachers build on what such children can do, and go on from there.
A THREAD OF USEFULNESS

The writers had trouble in agreeing on the heading for this section of the paper. They tried at various times 'essential learnings', 'the core', 'basic competencies', and 'enabling capabilities' (!), and rejected each of them. They were looking for something less pretentious than these, and finally settled on the metaphor above. Even then there were some who thought that 'a thread' should be 'a good strong rope'.

Adults talk a good deal about whether a curriculum is 'relevant', but children are seldom confused about this matter. They think that a curriculum is 'relevant' when it lets them do things that interest them, helps them solve problems, satisfies their need to achieve, or opens up a future of the kind that they want. For instance, 'successful pupils' find much of today's curriculum relevant because it meets the last two conditions admirably. As well as satisfying their need to achieve, it prepares them, at the right rate and in the right way, for another stage of education, and thence for a job.

But all children, not just 'successful' ones, are entitled to expect that schooling will open the way to the world beyond the school. This is the 'real' world of work, money, travel, entertainment, politics, propaganda and technology. It is a world where birth, ageing and death must be faced; where one must make something of one's life and get on with the people in it. It is the world of the adult; and once the child has entered it, and is on his own, he will feel cheated if he finds that the school has not done all it could to prepare him for it.

The best way to make sure that children will have a chance to lead satisfying lives as adults is to allow them a full childhood. Teachers must remember that what a child does and says reflects the world as seen by a child, and that his seeing the world in his own special way is a necessary part of his growing up. Teachers should not therefore expect children to act as if they were adults already. It is easy for teachers in primary schools to see the truth of this. It is not so easy, however, for teachers in secondary schools to keep in mind that even a brash sixteen-year-old is less grown up than he would like people to believe. Children need time to grow up, and the chance to learn from their mistakes.
Teachers should protect them from being pushed too quickly into things they are not ready for.

As soon as children enter school, they begin learning a number of useful things like reading, writing and arithmetic, which they will find themselves using and refining for the rest of their lives. The school is clearly responsible for teaching these things. In fact, if children do not learn these things before they leave school, they will probably not learn them at all. There are other sorts of 'useful' things, however, that children learn, often incidentally, both inside and outside school. For instance: they pick up bits of information about an astonishing variety of things; they learn how to get on with other people; they acquire attitudes which will shape their characters. Rather than leave the learning of 'useful' things like these to chance, teachers should try to anticipate the ones each child needs to know, and make sure that he has learned them.

It is hard to specify the useful things that children should have learned by the time they leave school. But most people would agree that children, after years of costly schooling, should have learned enough to make their way in the adult world and to accept adult responsibilities. To some people this boils down to being able to find and hold a job. Particularly when money is short, and school leavers have trouble getting work, such people claim that schools have failed to give children the things they need to make them employable. These people are likely to recommend that schools should emphasise vocational training. This implies that preparing children for a job is the most important thing schools do.

The study group believes that this is a mistaken view of schooling. It is just as important for schools to see to it that children can, for instance, obey street signs, use a telephone effectively, mend a fuse, dress appropriately — as well as do many other things that are useful in everyday life, and not just in getting a job.

But schools can try to take on too much. They cannot do everything that needs to be done for children. Questions like those that follow might help schools decide what they can or cannot do.

Does the school have to use its own teachers to
teach things like first aid, household repairs, and deportment, or can it get help from other people in the community?

- Are some of the things now thought to have a future use really going to be useful to children ten years from now? For instance, what kind of future is there for typewriting or panel-beating?

- What parts of the school program could be cut out because they overlap or even duplicate other parts?

- What new things cry out to be added to the school program?

Important as it is for schools to ask themselves questions like these, however, the central question remains: what are the useful things that children should learn? The study group has listed some of the things it thinks all children should be able to do by the time they leave school. Some of these things children learn to do almost as soon as they begin school, and then go on refining them; some they pick up on their way through; some they may learn only in their last few months at school.

When children leave school, they should be able to:

- obtain information
- speak effectively with another person
- communicate well enough in writing to be able to write letters and fill in forms
- behave appropriately in everyday social situations
- give a good account of themselves in an interview
- perform arithmetic calculations of the kind used in everyday life
- distinguish between right and wrong, and choose what is right
- manage the general running and maintenance of a household
- find their way about
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- interpret advertisements and propaganda
- exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens
- show tolerance when it is appropriate
- make good use of their leisure time

This list as it stands leaves several things unsaid. First, it does not include everything a child should learn. For instance, it says nothing of the fund of practical, everyday knowledge that children should amass. The writers could have made their list longer, but they decided it was already long enough to suggest the kinds of things they had in mind (and to start some arguments).

Second, the list contains only general abilities and skills, mainly because the study group found that it is hard enough to get agreement on these, let alone on specific ones. Anyhow, deciding the specific things that children should learn can be done best in the school, with the help of children and members of the community.

Third, the list contains no mention of the level of performance that children should be expected to attain for each of the activities. The best the study group could do here was to conclude, rather imprecisely, that the vast majority of children, say 95 per cent, can probably learn to do the things listed and others like them, at least at a simple level.

In fact, many children will be able to attain this level of performance without pushing themselves at all, and the school will have to look for other ways to challenge them. But there are some handicapped children who will not be able to learn, even at a simple level, the things listed. Striving to do so may be at best a waste of their time and effort; at worst it may imperil whatever self-esteem they may have. They would be better off working at things they can achieve, and from which they might get satisfaction.

Teachers believe that everything they offer is 'useful' in one way or another, and they would like children to agree with them about this. Many children would not agree, and with reason. In our community, after all, the school keeps
children out of the mainstream of life most of the time. As a special place set apart for children, the school is supposed to simulate that mainstream and prepare children for it. There is sometimes a wide gap, however, between the simulation and the reality. When such a gap exists, children are quick to sense it. They can recognise, for instance, the artificiality of the business letter they have been asked to write, or the contrived nature of the problem they have been asked to solve. They then often think, wrongly, that learning how to write a business letter is itself 'irrelevant', that learning how to solve problems is itself 'useless'. They fail to see that the fault does not lie in what they have been asked to learn; the fault lies in the artificial setting in which their learning occurs.

Teachers try hard nowadays to make their teaching 'relevant', to keep it in touch with life; and it is probably true that the 'gaps between the simulation and the reality' are not so wide or so frequent now as they were once. Yet to children schools still look like schools, and it is likely they always will, despite the continuing efforts of teachers to make what happens in schools resemble, and sometimes duplicate, what happens in 'real' life. For all this, however, most children manage to learn what they need to know for life in the mainstream.
FINDING SOME COMMON PURPOSES

So far this paper has stressed differences. Teachers, who are themselves different from one another, must keep in mind that they teach different things for different reasons to different children. And these children have different needs and different rates of growth; they learn in different ways; they come from different communities ... and so on. But at the same time that teachers are taking into account all these differences, they need also to have in mind some common purposes. The paper will now turn to these.

Most teachers would say that they do have in mind common purposes. But they habitually express them in vague, abstract phrases which over the years have been reduced to platitudes - 'the full development of the child', for instance, or 'the pursuit of excellence'. Like all platitudes, these can be virtuously accepted and then, with a yawn, ignored. They do nothing to show teachers what they might expect a child to learn, or how they might teach him.

What, then, rather than phrases like these, can teachers use that will at once identify their common purposes and prompt them to ask how these purposes can be realised? The study group thinks that a few words, if they are carefully chosen, can do these things.

Three such words are 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing'. They come from the TEND report, where they were called 'a central core of processes' and 'broad and basic elements in a core curriculum'. Although disagreeing with the report's use of 'core', the study group decided to adopt the three words because:

- they represent important human activities that all teachers want children to handle well;
- they translate easily into things that children do as they try to understand the world and affect what happens in it;
- they are common to any subject matter: children 'communicate', 'think' and 'value' whether they are, for instance, studying chemistry, or learning
how to read, or looking at the effects of the seasons on people's lives - or whatever; and they are terse and evocative.

With these words at hand, there was no need for the study group to look for others.

But 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing' are used rather differently in this paper from the way they are used in the TEND report. For this reason, the study group at first tried to define the words in a way that would have meaning for teachers. It failed. The words proved too abstract for precise definitions of the sort that teachers would need if they were to make use of them.

Instead of defining the words, then, the group drew up lists of examples to show what the words mean in this paper. Making up the lists proved how artificial it is to set each of the three apart from the others when they are in fact closely linked and interdependent. There are times when it may be useful to think of 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing' as if they are separate - such as when writing a paper like this or when planning a lesson. But teachers will find it hard to treat them separately when they are working with children.

'Communicating'

'Communicating' can take place in many ways, ranging from the formal and the planned, to the informal and the spontaneous.

'Communicating' is central to the following activities:

- writing a letter to a friend
- listening to someone reading a poem
- using algebraic symbols to represent unknown quantities
- writing a computer program
- drawing a sketch map to show where the post office is
- taking shorthand
- reading a graph
painting a picture
making a documentary film
playing a musical instrument
'reading' Braille
recording traffic flow at a dangerous crossing
winking, nodding, shrugging or raising an eyebrow
dancing Swan Lake or a folk dance
bowing respectfully or mockingly
giving a prepared talk
exchanging opinions, and hearing the other point of view
keeping a diary
tapping out a secret code
writing a tune
watching television
talking to an old person
combinations of these, and others that might have been included

'Thinking'

'Thinking' refers to all those intellectual activities by which people make sense of their experiences, past, present and future.

'Thinking' is central to the following activities:

exploring the unknown
recalling past experiences
anticipating a response and predicting a result
searching for, producing and organising information
preparing plans of action
following an argument through to its conclusion
perceiving similarities and differences
clarifying one's own values and those of others
translating information into another form
interpreting a message
conceiving a symphony, a story, a sculpture or a painting
raising questions and seeking answers to them
auditing a set of accounts
seeing with the mind's eye
inventing a new machine or a tool
explaining how and why things happen
deciding whether to use veneer or solid timber, screws or dowels
planning the furnishings for a room
engaging in flights of fancy
distinguishing between fact and opinion
planning how to influence an 'official' decision
evaluating how well time was spent
combinations of these, and others that might have been included

'Valuing'

'Valuing' implies accepting or rejecting something when the accepting or the rejecting is influenced by feeling as well as by thought.

'Valuing' is central to the following activities:
  putting up with the tedium of attending to details
  committing oneself to concepts of excellence
  believing that people have a right to their own opinions
  respecting life in all its forms
  deciding on what counts for success
  seeking to collaborate with others to achieve agreed ends
reconciling, respecting, and living with conflicting values
choosing to operate alone or in a group
showing one's own feelings and responding to the feelings of others
appreciating virtues like integrity and tolerance
accepting responsibility and making decisions
responding readily or reluctantly to instructions and orders
being a 'good Samaritan'
making friends and making enemies
choosing a life-style
deciding whether it is better to cheat or to lose
deciding to smoke or not to smoke
combinations of these, and others that might have been included

PUTTING COMMON PURPOSES TO WORK

The study group suggests that words like 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing' can help teachers remind themselves of some important things that children can learn while they are studying any subject matter at all. To use the words as reminders, a teacher might ask herself questions with the three words in them. She might ask herself, for instance, can a child learn to 'communicate', 'think' or 'value' as he:
carries out this experiment in chemistry?
conducts this survey at a supermarket?
reads Treasure Island?
sells buttons for a charity?
plays football?
does research for this project about sheep stations?
models in clay?
works with a group to present a play?
makes a dovetail joint?

learns differential calculus?

And if so, what communicating? What thinking? What valuing?

Depending on the circumstances, she might then follow up with one or two questions like these:

- What does this child need to do next to increase his power to 'communicate', 'think' or 'value'?
- What chances does this situation give me to help this child or group of children do these things?
- What criteria should we, as a school staff, use to decide whether children now do these things better?
- As we design this set of materials, can we do anything to direct it towards helping children, or a single child, do these things?
- On a visit to ..., what chances will these children have to do these things?
- I have observed this child doing all sorts of things during this week. As a result of all this activity, how much better can he now do these things?

And so on. There is no end to the list of possible questions.

Questions like these can be asked by any teacher—whether she takes craft, music or mathematics; whether she teaches in a kindergarten or a secondary school; whether she sees herself as 'progressive' or 'traditional'. For however different from one another teachers may be, they all want their children to learn how to 'communicate', to 'think' and to 'value'. They all share these purposes. And because they share them they should be able to talk to one another about them, and to support and build on one another's teaching.

Using key words like 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing' can also help teachers see to it that each child has his own curriculum. Consider, for instance, a child who visits a museum with his class. During the visit he will do the same
things and see the same exhibits as the other children, but he will not react in the same way. He will talk about the visit in his own way; he will give his own explanations for what he has seen; he will form his own opinions. If his teacher should decide to ask him and his classmates to 'communicate' about the visit, she can arrange for each of them to write, draw, talk, mime or whatever in a way that matches what she knows about him. And she can make similar arrangements for 'thinking' and 'valuing'.

Early in the paper, the study group expressed a hope that every child might become able to 'shape the course of his own life'. Better than any other reminders of common purposes that the study group considered, 'communicating', 'thinking' and 'valuing' suggest activities which, if a child learns to do them, might give him the power to make his own judgments, act independently, and so become his own man.
CONCLUSION

A curriculum that meets the requirements put forward in this paper will give children access to the knowledge, arts, skills, customs and values that make up their culture. But this paper will probably disappoint some people in at least one way. Although in the beginning it seemed to promise that it would clarify people's thinking about the 'core' curriculum, it has not even spelled out what the 'core' is. In fact, the conclusion of the study group was that the term 'core curriculum' is not helpful, and that discussion of the curriculum might be carried on better without it.

It might seem that the study group has written as if all children live in a bright, cosy world rather than one which contains want, intolerance, dishonesty, inequality and inhumanity. But schools cannot hide these things from children. Even if they could, to do so would be to deny everything this paper says. Children need to know about such things - even meet them face to face - and use their powers to fight them, just as much as they need to know about the world's brighter qualities.