The Primary Review

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INTERIM REPORTS

Research Survey 1/2

AIMS AND VALUES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: ENGLAND AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell
National Foundation for Educational Research

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Primary Review Research Survey 1/2

Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell

This is one of a series of 32 interim reports from the Primary Review, an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. The Review was launched in October 2006 and will publish its final report in late 2008.

The Primary Review, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, is based at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and directed by Robin Alexander.

A briefing which summarises key issues from this report has also been published. The report and briefing are available electronically at the Primary Review website: www.primaryreview.org.uk. The website also contains Information about other reports in this series and about the Primary Review as a whole. (Note that minor amendments may be made to the electronic version of reports after the hard copies have been printed).

We want this report to contribute to the debate about English primary education, so we would welcome readers' comments on anything it contains. Please write to: evidence@primaryreview.org.uk.

The report forms part of the Review's research survey strand, which consists of thirty specially-commissioned surveys of published research and other evidence relating to the Review's ten themes. The themes and reports are listed in Appendices 1 and 3.

The theme: this survey relates to Primary Review theme 1, Purposes and Values.

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AIMS AND VALUES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: ENGLAND AND OTHER COUNTRIES

1.1 Background

This survey compares the stated aims, purposes and values of primary education in England with those of five other countries (Scotland, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and the Netherlands), drawing on historical as well as contemporary sources. It covers the period from 1965 to December 2006 and, in so doing, addresses the following questions:

- what are the aims and values of primary education; and
- how have they changed over time?

The survey defines primary education as the first phase of compulsory education, comparable with key stages 1 and 2 of the system in England – ages four/five to eleven.

1.2 Strategy and methods

The survey comprises an exploratory, predominantly descriptive, chronological review of literature on the stated purposes, values and priorities of primary education in England and Scotland (for the UK), Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden. It draws mainly on policy documents, key legislation, curriculum guidelines, policy guidance, and policy reviews and statements. Sources are placed in a historical perspective going back to the time of the publication, in 1967, of the Plowden Report in England (DES 1967).

The survey reviews policy documents which were available to the research team as part of the documentary collection kept for the Eurydice at NFER[1] and INCA projects[2], and available or accessible via the Eurydice Network or INCA databases. The review was further informed by some broader, international comparative literature and commentaries on the aims, purposes and values of primary education. A full list of references and websites consulted is attached.

1.3 The survey limitations

As this review of the aims, purposes and values of primary education in the six selected countries covers documents available in English only, the authors are unable to make all-encompassing conclusions. It is also of note that few of the policy documents analysed and reviewed limited themselves to explicit statements of the aims, purposes and goals for

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1 Eurydice at NFER is the Eurydice Unit for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the Eurydice Network. Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. Sharon O'Donnell, who assisted Maha Shuayb in the compilation of this report, is the Head of the Eurydice Unit for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2 INCA is the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive. It provides a regularly updated online source of information on curriculum, assessment and initial teacher training frameworks in 20 countries. The project is funded by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). It is managed and updated by the International Information Unit at the NFER. Sharon O'Donnell, who assisted Maha Shuayb in the compilation of this report, is the Project Leader for INCA at the NFER.

primary education. Consequently, the authors analysed a range of documentation, drawing out the key points of reference relevant to the primary phase.

2. Summary of the findings

In the last 40 years, primary education in England and the other countries of the study has witnessed considerable change and, in some cases, restructuring. Despite a large number of initiatives and system changes, the aims, purposes, values and priorities of primary education have continued, during the period, to be shaped by two main influences or theories. The first, put forward by advocates of a child-centred and progressive education[3] calls for a flexible and autonomous system of primary education (Boyce 1946; Marshall 1963; Schiller 1972; March 1970; Armstrong 1980; Rowland 1984); the second, driven more by a country's political and socio-economic goals, emphasises centralisation and standardisation.

2.1 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: 1960 to 1979

Education during the sixties fell under the influence of humanist and child-centred philosophies. In England, a child-centred ethos was strongly manifested in the Plowden Report (DES 1967) which advocated holistic and rounded education, care for children's diverse needs, and individualisation.

In Scotland, the influence of the child-centred philosophy was demonstrated in the publication of *The Primary Memorandum* (SED 1965), which set out a curriculum for the primary school designed to accommodate the interests of children of a wide range of abilities and interests.

However, attempts to implement these theories in primary education in England and Scotland, proved challenging. In England, the escalating debate between advocates of child-centeredness and those on the side of educational conservatism resulted in the publication of contradictory policy documents, including The Black Paper (DES 1978a), for example, disputing the principles of Plowden. In New Zealand and Germany attempts to shift education towards a more child-centred approach were even less successful than in England and Scotland, and the two countries continued to exercise a teacher-centred system.

Perhaps the most significant effect of the child-centred approach expressed in the aims, values and purposes of education during this period was in the changing attitudes towards ethnic minority pupils and pupils with special educational needs. This resulted in a range of legislation and policy documents in England, published during the seventies, which related specifically to the needs of bilingual, ethnic minority, or 'handicapped' children. This movement was echoed in the education systems of the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden, although the extent to which the values were applied varied between countries.

Towards the end of the period, child-centred education philosophies attracted considerable criticism, being deemed difficult to assess and a hindrance to economic growth.

2.2 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: the 1980s

During the eighties two main trends were identified in the majority of the countries surveyed: budgets allocated to education increased, and governments sought increased

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[3] While in extreme forms child-centred and progressive education have sometimes been separated, in the opinion of Dewey (Dewey 1916) the two are regarded as being necessarily related to each other.

control over education. Education began to reflect governments' political, social and economic agendas. These factors contributed to the increasing centralisation and standardisation of education, particularly in England which, by the end of the decade, was described by some critics as one of the most centralised and undemocratic education systems in the western world.

This increased governmental control over education had a significant impact on the aims, purposes and values of primary education. Whilst some countries continued with, or began to adopt, child-centred aims and values, others focused on the economic outcomes of the educational process. In the Netherlands, for example, major restructuring of primary education took place in 1985 with the implementation of the *Primary Education Act 1981*, known as *WBO* (Netherlands. Statutes 1981). This stipulated that the main goal of primary education should be to provide a child-centred education and cater for pupils' emotional, social and cognitive needs.

In contrast to the Netherlands, other countries including England, Germany and Scotland became more concerned with the potential economic impact of education. This was partly due to the economic recession following the oil crisis of the seventies. England, for example, introduced its first National Curriculum which, although this lacked explicit aims and values statements, focused clearly on raising pupils' academic achievement in literacy, numeracy and science. The National Curriculum also emphasised the role of education, from the earliest phases, in preparing the next generation for a flexible job market, whilst acknowledging education's role in ensuring the spiritual, cultural and physical development of children.

With similar regard to the role of education in preparing pupils for their contribution to society as a whole, it was during this same period that Sweden introduced the teaching of citizenship as one of the aims of primary education. In Scotland, although *The Scottish Action Plan*, published in 1983 (SED 1983), adopted child-centred values, it also focused on the economic impact of the educational process (Hartley 1987). In Germany, attempts to modernise education and implement a more child-centred ethos were abandoned during the 1980s, as neo-conservative values[4] continued to dominate the aims of the education system.

Similar to the changes in attitudes towards ethnic minority and disabled students which began in England during the seventies, in the eighties, the education systems in Sweden and New Zealand began to highlight the need to cater for these groups. In Sweden, the *Skollagen (Education Act) SFS 1985:1100* (Sweden. Statutes 1985) emphasised access to education, freedom of belief and gender equality. Whilst, in New Zealand, a comprehensive review of the curriculum recommended a more equitable curriculum, particularly for those who had previously been disadvantaged including girls, multi-ethnic groups, and students with special needs.

2.3 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: the 1990s

The aims, purposes and values of primary education during the nineties focused on the restructuring and reorganisation of primary education and the introduction of school

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[4] Neo-conservativism represented a return to a traditional point of view, in contrast to the more liberal or radical schools of thought of the 1960s. It advocated the preservation of the best in society and opposed radical changes.

inspection in some of the survey countries. Emphasis on raising standards in literacy, numeracy and science persisted, whilst the rise of the importance of citizenship education also featured in most review countries during this period.

In England, the new curriculum, published in 1999 (QCA 1999a), included, for the first time, an explicit statement of aims, values and purposes. These were dominated by the Government's desire to raise pupil performance in literacy, numeracy and science, but also reflected the aim of promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural, and physical growth, and preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. The explicit statement of values (QCA 1999b) focused on the self, relationships, society and the environment.

In Scotland, new guidelines for the curriculum for pupils aged five to fourteen, published in 1993 (SOED 1993), aimed to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and science skills, at the same time as their abilities to communicate, express feelings and ideas, think critically, solve problems, and live healthily.

Sweden, too, introduced a new curriculum for compulsory phase education in 1994 (Sweden. Ministry of Education and Science 1994). This focused on subject attainment in areas including literacy, numeracy, science, communication skills, citizenship education and history. It also included 'goals to strive towards' such as curiosity to learn, working independently and in groups, and critical thinking.

In New Zealand, the various policy documents published during the period encouraged students to become independent, lifelong learners and focused on the multicultural nature of New Zealand society. The curriculum (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 1993b) also emphasised a range of explicit values such as honesty; respect for others and the law; tolerance; caring; the rights of individuals, families and groups; non-sexism; and non-racism.

Whilst England, Scotland and Sweden were focusing on raising levels of achievement, both Germany and the Netherlands were emphasising the holistic development of the child - cognitive, social, and emotional. In Germany, the various educational reforms which were taking place emphasised a child-centred education and learning in a cross-disciplinary context. In the Netherlands similarly**,** the revised *Primary Education Act (WPO)* (Netherlands. Statutes 1998) stipulated that education should aim to develop children in a holistic manner, taking account of all facets - cognitive, social and emotional.

The majority of the surveyed countries took an increasing interest in citizenship education and either introduced it as a separate subject, or embedded it throughout the whole curriculum.

2.4 The aims and values in primary education: 2000 to 2006

In the first six years of the 21st century, the aims, purposes and values of education expressed in the surveyed countries appear to be reflecting economic and social principles, at the same time as the philosophies of personalised teaching and learning. This 'hybrid' of economically driven, learner-centred, and society-influenced aims reflects the views expressed by various theorists on education and can, consequently, sometimes appear contradictory (Brehony 2005; Alexander 2004a and b; Hartley 2005).

At the turn of the 21st century, England developed its first curriculum for primary education which incorporated a clearly defined statement of aims, values and purposes for education.

These embraced personalised learning, socio-economic and vocational philosophies. In Sweden and the Netherlands, the hybrid approach appears to be reflected in recent policy documents for primary education, which emphasise the key role of child-centred teaching and learning philosophies, at the same time as the importance of education in preparing children for their place in society, and for their contribution to an ever-changing economy.

In England, *Excellence and Enjoyment: a Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES 2003) and *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury 2003) emphasised that primary level education should be concerned with standards, but also with enjoyment and a child's individual needs. Although there are those who argue that the focus appears to remain with standards and assessment, more than with enjoyment (Alexander 2004a and b). Similarly in New Zealand, academic standards are highlighted, alongside the social, ethnic, and cognitive differences among students, and the social and economic aims of education.

In Scotland, the development of a *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive 2004b) (for all pupils from the age of three to eighteen years) focused on developing successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. It also emphasised values of wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity.

In the Netherlands and Sweden, the emphasis on child-centred education persisted in the new millennium and primary education continued to emphasise the cognitive, creative, social and emotional development of pupils.

In Germany, child-centred philosophies continued to influence the aims, purposes and values of primary education during this period, with the purpose of primary school education being defined as one of moving pupils on from play-oriented forms of learning; adapting the form and content of teaching programmes to the capabilities of individual pupils; developing pupils' social skills; and encouraging critical and independent thinking.

For the six countries reviewed, the aims, values and purposes of primary education in the last 40 years appear to have passed through distinct phases. In the first phase, the child was the main focus and this greatly influenced the aims and values of the curricula; in the second phase social and economic concerns began to come to the fore; whilst today's aims focus on raising standards of achievement, and on preparing children for life in a multicultural society and in an ever-changing economic and work environment in which they will require a wide range of skills. However, there appears to be a realisation across countries that in order to achieve excellence, academically and vocationally, education requires a degree of personalisation; emphasis on the individual, the child. Governments in the six reviewed countries have also begun to recognise what Sweden recognised many years ago; that citizenship education is vital as one of the aims of an all-round education if countries are to produce participative citizens for the future. Recent emphasis too has highlighted healthy, safe and sustainable living, and primary education's role in encouraging young children's awareness of such issues.

3. The survey

3.1 Introduction

This survey compares and contrasts the chronological development of aims and values for primary education, from the 1960s to the present day, in England, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland and Sweden, and the influences on the development and content of these aims. This is against the background of philosophical debate on the

place of aims, values and purposes in the education system, which appears to take one of two major lines.

There are those who feel that such clear manifestations of the philosophical thinking underpinning the educational process are essential to facilitate its assessment and evaluation. Standish (1999), for example, argues that aims and values help in assessing the impact and effectiveness of the educational process, and that this accords with the principles of rational planning which characterise the modern world. He claims further that, when education is provided on a large systematic scale, scepticism about providing aims could be regarded as political irresponsibility. Barrow (1999) supports this view, arguing that education systems without their own intrinsic and explicit aims risk being driven by extrinsic aims, such as ideology or industry.

Others claim that an overemphasis on aims and values can reduce education to a technical and functional process; lead to indoctrination; limit the autonomy of the educational process; and emphasise ends and outcomes rather than the child as the focus or object of the educational process. Pring (1999), for example, whilst acknowledging that education can not but have objectives and aims, argues that endless lists of competences, which can be measured using different means, shift the focus of education from the aims to the means. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, Dewey (1916) was arguing that aims confine children's cognitive development to predetermined goals, which teachers receive from superior authorities and which the latter accept from whatever is current in the community. Like Pring, however, Dewey also recognises that general aims that are sensitive to context and individual needs are important.

In England, explicit statements of aims, values and purposes were not included in the curriculum documents for primary education until the publication of the revised National Curriculum in late 1999 (QCA 1999a). These came following a period of consultation and review of the National Curriculum, which took place from 1996 to 1999, and following a review commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) of values and aims in other countries' curricula (Le Métais 1997). That said, and as also noted in Professor John White's research survey for the Primary Review (White 2008), the Education Reform Act 1988 (Great Britain Statutes 1988), which established the National Curriculum, had defined general aims for the new curriculum. These were:

- to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils in school and of society; and
- to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

These curricular aims aside, however, some general aims and values had been expressed for primary education prior to 1988.

3.2 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: 1960 to 1979

In **England** during the 1960s and 1970s, primary education saw a move towards a holistic, child-centred system, aiming to cater for the individual's diverse needs regardless of ability or social background. Advocates of this philosophy argued that education should not be only concerned with a child's academic performance, but should also cater for his social, emotional and physical development.

This child-centred philosophy was strongly manifested in the Plowden Report (DES 1967) which stated that '*at the heart of educational progress lies the child*' (p.7). The result of an

investigation initiated in 1963 by the Conservative Education Secretary of the time, who requested the Central Advisory Council for Education to 'consider primary education in all its aspects', the Plowden Report advocated individualisation, learning by discovery, independent learning, an integrated curriculum and the involvement of schools in their local communities. It further recommended that, at the same time as fitting children for a society marked by rapid and far-reaching economic and social change, primary education should:

- care for children's diverse needs, including the needs of ethnic minorities and the handicapped, as well as the gifted;
- ensure the holistic and rounded development of the individual;
- emphasise, in addition to the acquisition of the basic skills of literacy, arithmetic and reading, that there are other skills which are necessary for those who are to live happily and usefully both as children and as adults;
- highlight the importance of cooperation between school and home; and
- transmit values and attitudes.

There was a backlash against the Plowden Report from the Conservatives who claimed that the child-centred philosophy was a hindrance to economic growth, as it did not allow for the development of skills necessary for a changing economy. Despite the considerable reaction to the Plowden Report, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (DES 1978a) reported that, by 1978, only five per cent of classrooms in England were espousing the child-centred philosophy, with three-quarters of schools continuing to adopt didactic teaching methods. Nonetheless, the values expressed in the Plowden Report had a far-reaching impact on education in England, in particular by bringing the issues of providing for the needs of ethnic minority pupils and for children with special educational needs to the Government's educational agenda. Following Plowden, various reports recognised, for example, that the multicultural and multilingual society that England had become needed to be taken into account when planning the school curriculum (DES 1975; Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups 1981; Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups 1985). Others (Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People 1978) highlighted the need to develop a policy of inclusion for pupils with special needs.

The influence of this child-centred, humanitarian philosophy could also be seen in educational policy in **Scotland** with the publication, at around the same time, of *Primary Education in Scotland* (SED 1965), otherwise known as *The Primary Memorandum*. This too focused on providing a child-centred education system to accommodate children's varying interests and abilities. It advocated a curriculum which would capture the attention and interest of children of a wide range of abilities, and teaching methods suitable for mixed-ability classes which would enable children to proceed at different rates in the same class. This document had a very great influence in freeing teachers from some of the curricular and methodological restrictions which had grown up, a process which was aided by the disappearance of streaming of pupils in primary schools and of formal selection for secondary school (Eurydice 2006).

Hartley (1987) argued that the socio-economic conditions of the time in England and Scotland promoted the augmentation of this child-centred educational philosophy. He claimed that the economic expansion of the period, manifested in low unemployment rates, for example, made notions such as individual needs and choice relevant.

In the **Netherlands** also, where the education system is characterised by the two overarching principles of freedom of education[5] and equal state support for public and private schools[6] (Karsten 1994), the aims, purposes and values of primary education in the 1960s and 1970s were influenced by similar child-centred ideals to those being seen in England and Scotland. The emphasis was firmly fixed on the holistic development of the child, constructive education, widening access to education, and catering for ethnic minority pupils. A number of compensatory educational programmes targeting ethnic minority and disabled children, and children from the disadvantaged native working class were implemented (Driessen 2000). During this period educational reform in the Netherlands aimed 'to construct a 'great society', in which life was good for everyone…a society in which power, knowledge and income was equitably distributed' (Karsten 1999, p. 306).

In **New Zealand** at the time, although the aims and values of education also focused mainly on providing equal opportunities for education for all children regardless of ethnicity or gender, the highly centralised system was also criticised for over-emphasising uniformity to the extent of reducing teaching to a technical process. However, during this period, the influence of child-centred ideals could be traced in several official documents, such as the official syllabus for reading:

> We must accept the fact that each child is a unique personality whose capacities differ from those of his classmates. A uniform standard of achievement throughout an ordinary class is a mistaken aim.
>
> (McLintock 1966)

The shift to a more flexible and child-oriented form of primary education in New Zealand was, however, a slow one and criticisms of technical and functional education continued for the following 20 years.

In **Germany**, the more teacher-centred primary education of the 1960s and 1970s also focused, as in New Zealand, on equal rights to primary education, and on conformity to the extent of '*sameness*' according to some commentators (Gruber 1985). Although, at the time, the Plowden Report received extensive media coverage in Germany and was of considerable interest to professionals, it had little impact on the aims of primary education partially due to the bureaucratic and highly politicised education system. As Gruber (ibid) comments, in the 1970s, the influence of neo-conservative values on education in Germany could be seen on many levels. The neo-conservatives opposed the child-centred philosophy, advocating a 'traditional' educational philosophy according to which children need pressure to learn; teachers should be authoritarian; and schools should be primarily concerned with children's academic achievement and preparing them for the hard reality of society. Although the traditional and functional educational practices dominating the German education system were increasingly criticised by parents, teachers and educationalists for overloading

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5 This is a three-fold freedom - to establish/found schools, to organise them, and to determine the religion or other ideology on which they are based. This freedom has been laid down in the Constitution since 1848 (Netherlands. Statutes, 1848 (article 23)), but is restricted by the requirements laid down in the Compulsory Education Act (Netherlands. Statutes 1969; Netherlands. Statutes 1994), which stipulate that children must attend an education establishment full-time until the end of the year in which they reach the age of 16, or have completed at least 12 full years.

6 Any group of parents or citizens may propose the establishment of a private school, which, if certain criteria are met, then receives state funding.

children, educational reform in Germany was limited (Mitter 1980). The heavily bureaucratic system was seen to be a major obstacle facing educational reform.

Education in Germany also continued to be economically driven. Marshall (1989), for example, argued that the German educational philosophy needs to be understood from an economic viewpoint.

> Education as a response to specific needs, the needs being economic, is at the crux of the German philosophy of education and is something about which Germans are in agreement….Thus certification and achievement are increasingly important
>
> (Marshall 1989: 314)

In **Sweden**, education during this period was also perceived as an important instrument for social change and equality. The 1960 Social Democratic political programme for education, recommended that all education should be:

- free;
- directed towards the formation of independent and cooperative citizens who value the democratic way of life;
- balanced between the theoretical and practical aspects of education;
- job-oriented and available in schools and at places of work for everyone; and
- common to all citizens – in the form of a common compulsory school (*grundskola*) - for their educational development.

Interestingly, Sweden was the first of the six countries of this survey to emphasise the civic goals of education. The Social Democratic political programme (1960) also stipulated that there should be objective education on political and religious views (cited in Rusak 1977).

In 1962, nine-year compulsory comprehensive education was introduced, when the seven-year elementary school was combined with the four-year lower secondary school to form the compulsory school (*grundskola*). Similarly to New Zealand and Germany at the time, the *grundskola* was established under the fundamental principle underpinning the Swedish education system - that everyone should have access to equivalent education, regardless of his/her ethnic social background and place of residence (O'Donnell *et al*. 2007). Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of the newly elected Social Democrat Government following the 1969 elections, emphasised education for 'self-actualisation'. The aim was to enable individuals to develop their personalities and inner potential. Palme believed that these characteristics were essential components of democracy and social change. He also emphasised individualisation and schools' duty to support students with special needs to achieve their full potential. Palme also attacked the marking system at the primary stage, which he believed 'had no other function than to point out the loser' (Rusak 1977, p. 207).

In summary, in England, as in Scotland the Netherlands and Sweden, education in the sixties and seventies was marked by an increasing interest in child-centred and humanist values (Maslow 1959; Rogers 1969). The aims, values and purposes of primary education were being influenced by demands for the humanisation of education, and by philosophies encouraging the adaptation of education to the needs of the individual child, and the needs of the individual child in society. They were also influenced by principles of equity and parity of opportunity for all which, in some cases, presented a challenge to the individual, child-centred philosophy. New Zealand, for example, struggled in shifting its functional,

equal opportunity-based system to a more flexible, child-centred one, while Germany continued to adopt an economically-driven education system.

Cunningham (1988) argued that this apparent contradiction in the aims and values of primary education during the period was a manifestation of the clash between the pedagogical tradition of child-centred learning and, in England particularly, mounting political pressure for educational accountability, fuelled by concern about education and economic performance. Certainly, in subsequent years, the child-centred philosophy received considerable criticism, particularly from those who argued that it was difficult to assess its effect and influence. This represented a major problem for many governments keen to measure the effectiveness of their investment in education. In England and Scotland, for example, Conservative politicians claimed that the child-centred philosophy was a hindrance to economic growth, as it did not allow for the development of the skills necessary for a changing economy. The economic crisis of the seventies did indeed begin to shift the focus from the individual to society and to economic growth, as is evident from the discussion which follows on the values and aims of primary education during the 1980s.

3.3 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: the 1980s

The economic recession of the 1980s led many countries to reconsider and reform their education systems. Commentators argued that 'the idea of the market … ousted the idea of rational planning and central government steering' (Karsten 1999: 309). Although such reforms aimed to dismantle centralised education bureaucracies, in some countries, including England, movements towards centralisation were also taking place.

In **England**, the eighties were characterised by increased centralisation and standardisation of the education system; the major aims and goals of which were raising standards and employability.

The Conservative Government headed by Margaret Thatcher came into power in 1979 and soon introduced the *Education Act 1980* (Great Britain. Statutes 1980). This introduced more centralised control over curriculum subjects, teacher training and other aspects of education, including the composition of school governing bodies.

In the 1985 White Paper *Better Schools* (Great Britain. Parliament. HoC 1985), the Conservative Government's aims for education as a whole, including primary education, were stated as being to:

- raise standards at all levels of ability;
- promote enterprise and adaptability; and
- increase young people's chances of finding employment or creating it for themselves and others.

Better Schools also laid the foundations for the development of national objectives for the school curriculum in primary education, and for an examination and assessment system which promoted the objectives of the curriculum.

In 1988, the *Education Reform Act (ERA)* (Great Britain. Statues 1988) introduced the first statutory National Curriculum. ERA defined the general values underpinning the new curriculum as:

- promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and
- preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

These values appear to combine the main ideologies of child-centeredness, educational conservatism, and social democracy which had dominated educational debate over the two previous decades. However, critics including Brehony (2005) and Alexander (2004a and b) argued that the 1988 curriculum abandoned many of the values expressed in the Plowden Report (DES 1967), as the role of education shifted from child-centred education to an education based on the needs of society and the economy.

Similar educational developments to those in England during the eighties were also taking place in **Scotland**. The increased emphasis on regulation and standards was, for example, reflected in the *Education (Scotland) Act 1981* (Great Britain. Statutes 1981b), which gave the Secretary of State powers to prescribe standards and regulations for schools. At the same time, whilst *The Scottish Action Plan*, produced in 1983 (SED 1983), remained based on child-centred values, particularly in the primary stage, it shifted the focus from the child's personal development to an interest in his economic and social productivity (Hartley 1987).

In 1987, a consultation paper issued by the Secretary of State for Scotland, entitled *Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: a Policy for the 90s* (SED 1987), focused on the need for a clear definition of the content and objectives of the curriculum; satisfactory assessment policies; and better communication between schools and parents. In 1988, working parties of teachers and educationists began working on developing a revised curriculum for the Education Department in a series of advisory documents. The resulting 5-14 Programme[7] is currently the basis of primary education in Scotland. Its overarching aims are to:

- satisfy the needs of the individual and society; and
- promote the development of knowledge and understanding, practical skills, attitudes and values.

In the **Netherlands**, the first phase of compulsory education was restructured during the 1980s with the implementation of the Primary Education Act, known as *WBO* (Netherlands. Statutes 1981). Prior to 1985, when the 1981 Act was implemented, children aged four and five attended nursery school or kindergarten before entering elementary education at age six, where they remained until they were twelve years old. In 1985, *WBO* lowered the starting age for compulsory education from six to five years, abolished separate nursery schools and brought provision for four- and five-year-olds into primary education (*Basisschool*). (Although education is not compulsory until age five, nearly all children attend school from the age of four.)

WBO established the main goals of primary education as being to provide:

- an uninterrupted development process for pupils, which is adapted in accordance with the individual pupil's progress;
- an education geared towards emotional, intellectual and creative development; and
- the necessary knowledge and social, cultural and physical skills.

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7 http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/index.asp

The Primary Education Act (Netherlands, Statutes 1981) which, in addition, listed the subjects to be taught to pupils in primary school,[8] also highlighted the need for primary level education to acknowledge and celebrate the multicultural nature of society.

In **New Zealand**, a comprehensive review of the curriculum and of assessment was carried out during the 1980s. Similar to the situation in Scotland at the time, this recommended the development of a new, more coherent and integrated curriculum designed in consultation with all interested parties. It also called for a more equitable curriculum, especially for those who may previously have been disadvantaged such as girls, multi-ethnic groups and students with special needs. The review also proposed increased emphasis on culture and heritage to reflect the diverse ethnic groups of New Zealand.

In 1984, the then Labour Government began to move towards a market education system and, in 1988, an investigation into the administration of education (chaired by a supermarket tycoon, Brian Picot) was published. The Picot Report (New Zealand. Department of Education 1988) emphasised choice. Commenting on the report, Gordon (1992) argued that it represented an uneasy compromise between neo-liberal imperatives and traditional Labour concerns with equity and community and that, whilst it established a new structure of education committed to neo-liberal theories, it did not emphasise competition and the market which are both essential to transform education into the '*image of a private business*' (Gordon 1992: 285).

> The uncertainty and ongoing struggle allowed educational interests to maintain many of the egalitarian functions of the educational system, albeit within a new structure of education which was clearly amenable to a neo-liberal 'market' mode.'
>
> (Gordon 1992: 286)

The **Swedish** education system, too, underwent major reform in the eighties. The *Skollagen (Education Act) SFS 1985:1100* (Sweden. Statutes 1985) stipulated that all children and young people should have access to education of equal value. This remained a principle of the system from earlier years (see section 3.2) whilst the Act further emphasised values including multiculturalism, citizenship, freedom of belief and gender equality. The Act determined that education should:

- provide students with knowledge and skills;
- ensure collaboration between school and home; and
- promote students' harmonious development so that they become responsible human beings and members of society.

In **Germany**, the process of updating the Global Plan for Education, which had begun in 1977, was abandoned in 1982. Neo-conservative values (see section 3.2) continued to dominate the aims of the education system in the 1980s. A survey of primary schools throughout Germany, carried out by the Max Planck Institute in 1984, revealed that the vast majority were following a traditional, didactic approach to education, with the teacher as the centre of the learning process (cited in Gruber 1985).

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[8] These were Dutch; arithmetic and mathematics; English; sensory coordination and physical exercise; a number of factual subject areas: geography, history, science (including biology), social studies (including civics), intellectual and religious movements; expressive activities: developing the use of language, drawing, music, handicrafts, play and movement; social and life skills, such as road safety; and health education. The Act further recommended that these subjects should be taught in an interdisciplinary form where possible.

In response to the economic downturn during the 1980s, the aims and values of primary education in the majority of the countries reviewed were influenced by a particular desire to ensure that education provided children with the skills to participate economically in society. In addition to improving employability, systems' aims and goals during the period were also influenced by the developing standards agenda. As a result, child-centred ideals diminished. As Karsten (1999) comments:

> While in the 1960s and 1970s people spoke far more about pupils at schools in terms of promoting equality of opportunity, in the 1980s the emphasis began to shift towards improving pupils' performances.
>
> (Karsten 1999: 307-8)

3.4 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: the 1990s

The nineties witnessed continued restructuring and reorganisation of primary education and the introduction of school inspection in some of the surveyed countries. The rise of the importance of citizenship education also featured in most countries during this period. The influence of neo-liberalist values such as choice, competition and market-led education, which had begun to influence the aims, purposes and values of education in England during the eighties, was also reflected in some of the other countries of the review, notably New Zealand and the Netherlands, during this period.

When, in **England**, the then Department of Education and Science (DES) published *National Curriculum from Policy to Practice* (DES 1989), as the first guidance document for teachers on the introduction of the new, statutory National Curriculum, no explicit aims or values were included. The guidance was, however, based on the general values and principles of the National Curriculum which had been expressed in the Education Reform Act (Great Britain. Statutes 1988) (see section 3.3). These general values and principles were further reflected in the *School Inspections Act 1996* (Great Britain. Statutes 1996b), which determined that the role of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England should focus on assessing schools' performance in terms of quality and standards in developing children's cognitive abilities, alongside their social and personal skills, and their cultural and moral development.

There was increased emphasis on education from 1997, with the election of the first Labour Government for almost 18 years, and the new Prime Minister's declaration that his priority was to be 'education, education, education'. In this latter half of the nineties, the aims, purposes and values of primary education were dominated by the Government's desire to raise pupil performance in literacy, numeracy [9] and science, and by the 'bedding down' of the National Curriculum, which had been revised in 1995, in particular to reduce the amount of compulsory content.

Soon after the 1997 elections, the new Education Secretary, David Blunkett, published the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (Great Britain. Parliament. HoC 1997). This, whilst defining education as the '*key to creating a society which is dynamic and productive, offering opportunity and fairness for everyone*', did not make explicit references to the aims and values of primary education. It was primarily concerned with raising standards of literacy, numeracy and science. Brehony (2005) noted that the new Labour Government had adopted a neo-liberal

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[9] Amongst the conclusions of the 1992 *Three Wise Men Report* (Alexander *et al* 1992), which investigated the state of primary education in England, was a decline in standards of literacy and numeracy.

position, along with the centralised policies it had inherited from the previous Conservative Government.

In 1999, when the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published *The National Curriculum: Handbook for Primary Teachers in England Key Stages 1 and 2* (QCA 1999a), this included an explicit statement of values, aims and purposes.

> A belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual. Education is also a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends. These include valuing ourselves, our families and other relationships, the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and the environment in which we live. Education should also reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty.
>
> At the same time, education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work. In particular, we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, parents, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change, including the continued globalisation of the economy and society, with new work and leisure patterns and with the rapid expansion of communication technologies.
>
> (QCA 1999a)

The handbook defined the two broad, interrelated and interdependent **aims** of the school curriculum as being to:

- provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve; and
- promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life

It further identified the four main **purposes** of the school curriculum as being to:

- establish standards – to be used to set targets for improvement, measure progress towards targets, and monitor and compare performance between individuals, groups and schools;
- promote continuity and coherence - to facilitate the transition of pupils between schools and phases of education and provide a foundation for lifelong learning;
- promote public understanding of, and confidence in, the work of schools and in the learning and achievements resulting from compulsory education; and
- develop the school curriculum - so that it is responsive to the changing needs of pupils and the impact of economic, social and cultural change.

In addition, an explicit statement of **values** linked to the National Curriculum handbook (QCA 1999b) focused on four major factors:

- the self;
- relationships;
- society; and
- the environment.

With regard to the self, for example, the statement of values suggests that the curriculum should, amongst others, encourage pupils to understand their character and their strengths and weaknesses; develop self-respect and discipline; and take responsibility for their own lives. In respect of relationships, the values in the curriculum should encourage children to respect, care and value others; earn loyalty, trust and confidence; and work cooperatively. In relation to society, the curriculum should enable children to understand and carry out their responsibilities as citizens; respect the rule of law and religious and cultural diversity; and contribute to economic and cultural resources. The values in the curriculum regarding the environment should encourage children to accept their responsibility to maintain a sustainable environment for future generations and to understand the place of human beings within nature.

Similarly, in **Scotland** when, in 1993, the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) published new guidelines for the 5-14 Curriculum (SOED 1993), in addition to reflecting on developments in the 5-14 Curriculum since 1989 and providing an overview of the whole curriculum, this guidance stated that schools should specifically aim to help each pupil to acquire and develop:

- knowledge, skills and understanding in literacy and communication, and numeracy and mathematical thinking;
- an understanding and appreciation of themselves and other people and of the world about them;
- the capacity to make creative and practical use of a variety of media to express feelings and ideas;
- knowledge and understanding of religion and its role in shaping society and the development of personal and social issues;
- the capacity for independent thought through enquiry, problem solving, information handling and reasoning;
- an appreciation of the benefits of healthy living and physical fitness; and
- positive attitudes to learning and personal fulfilment through the achievement of personal objectives.

In **New Zealand**, when *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 1993b) was launched, this determined, in addition to seven essential learning areas and eight groups of essential skills for students to learn, the attitudes and values which should be an integral part of the school curriculum. As in England and Scotland, these values were neither specific to nor exclusive to the primary stage.

The curriculum framework addressed students' unique learning needs, and encouraged them to become independent and lifelong learners. It also focused on the multicultural nature of New Zealand society, recognising in particular the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi[10], and emphasising the importance of second languages and gender equality.

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[10] The Treaty of Waitangi is an agreement that formalises the relationship between the Maoris and the Crown. It was signed on 6th February 1840.

It determined specifically that the school curriculum should encourage positive attitudes towards all areas of learning by providing challenging learning activities which are relevant to students' experiences and appropriate to their levels of achievement.

> Attitudes consist of the feelings or dispositions towards things, ideas, or people which incline a person to certain types of action. Attitudes to learning strongly influence the process, quality, and outcomes of both learning and assessment. Teachers' expectations, the support of parents and the community, and students' motivation are all significant factors. The school curriculum will encourage positive attitudes towards all areas of learning. It will provide challenging learning activities which are relevant to students' experiences and appropriate to their levels of achievement. Schools will give students ongoing constructive feedback about their learning and progress.
>
> (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1993b)

A range of explicit values was also included in the curriculum framework document. Defined as the values which underpin New Zealand society, and which should consequently be reflected in the teaching of the curriculum, these are:

- honesty;
- reliability;
- respect for others and the law;
- tolerance;
- fairness;
- caring and compassion;
- non-sexism; and
- non-racism.

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework states specifically that:

> Values are internalised sets of beliefs or principles of behaviour held by individuals or groups. They are expressed in the ways in which people think and act. No schooling is value-free. Values are mostly learned through students' experience of the total environment, rather than through direct instruction. The content of a school's curriculum reflects what is valued by a society and a school community. Although the values held both by individuals and by various groups in society may vary greatly, those which are reflected in the New Zealand Curriculum are supported by most people in most communities.
>
> The school curriculum, through its practices and procedures, will reinforce the commonly held values of individual and collective responsibility which underpin New Zealand's democratic society… The school curriculum will help students to develop and clarify their own values and beliefs, and to respect and be sensitive to the rights of individuals, families, and groups to hold values and attitudes which are different from their own. Students will examine the context and implications of their own values and those of others, and the values on which our current social structures are based.
>
> (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1993b)

In 1994, *Education for the 21st Century* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1994) set targets for education from 1995 to 2001. Whilst adopting the same aims and values as those of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, this policy document further emphasised:

- a community of shared values;

- a sound foundation in the early years for future learning and achievement;
- high levels of achievement in essential areas and essential skills;
- success for those with special needs; and
- the full participation and achievement by Maori in all areas of education.

A number of social and economic factors contributed towards educational developments in New Zealand during the 1980s and 1990s. The labour market changed significantly - through rapid and comprehensive technological developments, the growth of the service sector, and increased trading relationships with non English-speaking countries, all of which increased demand for the education system to produce not only higher levels of skills, but also a broader range of them.

When **Sweden** introduced a new curriculum for compulsory phase education (seven- to sixteen-year-olds) in 1994 (Sweden. Ministry of Education and Science 1994), this expressed curriculum aims in two ways. The first focused on subject attainment (attainment targets) for individual subject areas including literacy, numeracy, science etc; the second determined goals to strive towards and included aspects such as developing a curiosity to learn, working independently and in groups, and critical thinking. Importantly, this framework was also underpinned by the statement that school has an important role to play in imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those **values** on which Swedish society is based. It determined these values as:

- democracy;
- the inviolability of human life;
- the individual freedom of all people;
- gender equality; and
- tolerance.

Whilst in England, Scotland, New Zealand and Sweden governments and education departments were focusing much of their attention on aims and values as expressed via curriculum framework documents for school or compulsory level education, the situation was slightly different in Germany and the Netherlands, where there was renewed focus on child-centred education.

In **Germany**, for example, the extensive pedagogical reforms which took place during the nineties emphasised child-centred education and learning in a cross-disciplinary context (Textor 2003). In addition, a 1994 agreement of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the 16 German Länder (federal states) determined the basic **function** and **objectives** of primary education as being determined by its position in the school system. These were to:

- carry children forward from more play-oriented forms of learning at pre-school level to more systematic forms of school learning;
- adapt the form and content of teaching programmes to suit the different learning requirements and capabilities of individual pupils;
- provide the foundations for the next level of learning (secondary education) and for lifelong learning;

- develop their social skills by providing students with a structured understanding of the impressions they gain from the world around them, and developing their psychomotor abilities and patterns of social behaviour;
- encourage critical and independent thinking, by educating children from different individual learning backgrounds and learning abilities in such a way as to develop the basis for independent thinking, learning and working and to provide experience of interacting with other people; and
- as a result, allow children to acquire a solid basis to help them find their way and act within their environment.

In the **Netherlands**, in 1998, a new *Primary Education Act (WPO)* (Netherlands. Statutes 1998) determined that the task of primary education was the continuous development of the children in its care, and that education should aim towards the holistic development of the child - cognitive, social, and emotional. *WPO* also introduced the concept of adaptive education; gearing education to a child's capabilities and needs, and focusing primarily on the child him or herself rather than on subject matter content or the formal structure of education.

Karsten (1999) noted that, in the Netherlands, the aims and values of education during this period were influenced by calls for a return to the basics of education; that is an emphasis is on the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and science, as had been happening in other countries at the time. However, Karsten commented further that these calls went unheeded by policy makers who favoured socio-cultural educational values, which emphasised equality.

Whilst curriculum framework documents introduced in England, Scotland, New Zealand and Sweden during the 1990s all began to refer explicitly to the aims and purposes of the school curriculum, and to the values (and, in some cases, attitudes) which the school curriculum could and should encourage in children to ensure their active participation in society and the economy, none of these framework documents referred to primary level education alone.

Many aspects of the overarching values of the self, relationships, and society, as expressed in the Primary National Curriculum handbook in England (QCA 1999a) (quoted earlier), were reflected to some degree in similar framework documents for Scotland, New Zealand, Germany and Sweden. England, however, was the only one of the surveyed countries, in the late 1990s, to specifically include elements linked to the environment and towards ensuring a sustainable future in its aims and values statements. Sweden and New Zealand, in addition to the general values statements which all countries included with regard to respecting cultural diversity, also included explicit statements regarding gender equality.

The focus for primary education policy in the Netherlands during this period highlighted the need to ensure that primary level education catered specifically for individual needs in a child-centred, holistic educational environment.

3.5 Aims, purposes and values in primary education: 2000 to 2006

During the last six years, the aims, purposes and values of primary education in the reviewed countries have continued to focus on raising standards, citizenship education and multiculturalism. There has also been increased emphasis on pupil enjoyment and participation, pupil safety, healthy eating and lifestyles, and sustainable development.

In **England**, primary education was particularly influenced by the publication, in 2003, of *Excellence and Enjoyment: a Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES 2003) (often known as 'The Primary National Strategy', or PNS) and by *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury 2003).

The key message from *Excellence and Enjoyment* was that, whilst primary level education should continue to be concerned with standards, it should also emphasise enjoyment, partnership with parents, and a child's individual needs. The goal is for every primary school to combine excellence in teaching with enjoyment of learning. Commentators have argued (Alexander 2004a and b; Hartley 2005) that use of the terms 'excellence' and 'enjoyment' reveals attempts by the Government to distance itself from the increasingly target-focused culture of education during the 1990s and early years of the 21st century, which had been much criticised by educationalists. They argue further, however, that the strategy's focus remains one of standards, assessment and excellence in achievement, albeit through personalised learning. This seems to be evidenced by statements included in the strategy confirming, for example, that the Government will:

- support innovation and offer more scope for school autonomy;
- keep a strong focus on standards;
- change local target setting arrangements;
- provide primary schools with better performance data;
- maintain high national standards at key stage 1, but trial a new approach to assessing seven-year-olds;
- make sure that the achievements of all children, and of inclusive schools, are recognised; and
- examine ways in which an overall assessment of a school might be included in performance tables.

Hartley (2005) and Alexander (2004a and b) see major contradictions between the concepts of excellence and enjoyment, with Hartley noting that the introduction of terms such as enjoyment is a manifestation of the consumer and marketing culture of education in the 21st century. Alexander argues that enjoyment sits unconvincingly with the parallel requirement, which has been a significant feature of primary education in England for the last decade, that schools should continue to focus on raising standards. Indeed, a more recent strategy document for primary education, *The Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics* (DfES 2006) continues to focus on raising pupils' literacy and numeracy standards, and on improving the quality of learning and teaching in all schools.

Although *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003) emphasises the personalisation of learning, in a speech in May 2004 (Miliband 2004), the then Minister of State for School Standards, David Miliband, stated that personalised learning does not mark a return to the theories of child-centred education, nor is it about pupils learning on their own or abandoning the National Curriculum. Miliband defined personalised learning as an educational aspiration reflecting moral purpose, excellence and equity, and as an educational strategy providing a focus for school improvement, an approach to teaching and learning using information and communications technology (ICT), and a commitment to making best practice universal. Hartley (2005) regards this approach to personalised learning as:

> personalised standardisation: a personalised pick-and-mix of pedagogy and curriculum, but only from the standard menu, which is drawn up by the Government.
>
> (Hartley 2005: 13)

The 2004 *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (HM Government 2004b) also continued the focus on raising standards of achievement. For primary education, it aimed to ensure:

- high standards in reading, writing and mathematics and maximum progress for each individual child;
- personalised support for every child whatever their needs, including those with special educational needs, gifted and talented children and children with English as an additional language;
- a richer curriculum;
- a closer relationship between parents and schools;
- extended services for parents outside school hours (through so-called 'extended schools');
- healthy and environmentally sustainable schools which teach children by example; and
- a robust approach to persistent failure in primary schools.

At the same time, in 2003, *Every Child Matters* proposed re-shaping all services provided for children in England to help achieve the following outcomes for children and young people:

- being healthy;
- maintaining safety;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution; and
- achieving economic well-being.

The targets stipulated in *Every Child Matters* were given legal force in the *Children Act 2004* (England and Wales. Statutes 2004), which called for integrating front-line delivery, common processes and strategy, and inter-agency governance.

In **Scotland**, recent documents reflecting aims and values in primary education follow on from the national debate on the future of education, which began in 2000 when the Scottish Parliament approved five national educational priorities for debate. The *National Priorities in Education*[11] were intended to define priorities in educational objectives for the whole of school education, and were organised under five headings, further subdivided into outcomes. These were:

- Achievement and attainment, with the outcomes of:
    - Increased levels of numeracy and literacy;
    - Improved examination results (or other measures of achievement).

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11 See http://www.nationalpriorities.org.uk/

- Framework for learning, with the outcomes of:
    - Continuing professional development of teachers' skills;
    - Increased self-discipline of pupils;
    - Enhanced school environments which are more conducive to teaching and learning.
- Inclusion and equality, with the outcomes of:
    - Every pupil benefits from education;
    - Every pupil benefits from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs;
    - Every pupil benefits from education, with particular regard paid to Gaelic and other lesser-used languages.
- Values and citizenship, for which the outcomes were:
    - Increased respect for self and others;
    - Increased awareness of interdependence with other members of the neighbourhood and society;
    - Increased awareness of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.
- Learning for life, with the outcomes of:
    - Pupils are equipped with the necessary foundation skills, attitudes and expectations to prosper in a changing society;
    - Increased levels of creativity and ambition in young people.

Following on from the national debate, the Scottish Executive published the policy document *Ambitious Excellent Schools: Our Agenda for Action* in 2004 (Scottish Executive 2004a), and a series of publications have followed during the ongoing development work for a new curriculum framework (*Curriculum for Excellence*) covering the whole of education from age three to age 18.

Ambitious Excellent Schools set the agenda for the education system in Scotland from late 2004 onwards. Its principal influence for primary education was that it laid the foundations for the new 3-18 curriculum, with a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy.

The document, *A Curriculum for Excellence: the Curriculum Review Group* (Scottish Executive 2004b), in particular, established clear purposes, aims and values for the new curriculum, the essence of which was a unified set of purposes and principles for the whole curriculum in Scotland, throughout the early years, primary school and secondary school. Echoing to some degree the standards agenda in England, the overarching **aim** of the *Curriculum for Excellence* programme is to improve the learning, attainment and achievement of children and young people in Scotland. There is, in addition, an emphasis on ensuring that pupils achieve on a broad front, not just in terms of examinations, by ensuring that children and young people are acquiring the full range of skills and abilities relevant to growing, living and working in the contemporary world, and that they experience the choice and opportunity to help realise their individual talents.

The four overarching **purposes** of the new 3-18 curriculum are to enable all young people to become:

- successful learners;
- confident individuals;
- responsible citizens; and
- effective contributors.

Successful learners are enthusiastic and motivated with a determination to learn. They can use literacy, communication, numeracy and technological skills, think creatively and independently, and learn independently and as part of a group. Confident individuals have a sense of well-being, self-respect, secure values and beliefs, have ambition and are self-aware, pursue a healthy, active lifestyle, and relate to others and manage themselves; whilst responsible citizens show a commitment to participate in political, economic, social and cultural life, along with respect for others and their beliefs and cultures and can evaluate environmental, scientific, technological and ethical issues. Like successful learners, effective contributors can think and create, be enterprising, apply critical thinking and solve problems.

The four **values** underpinning the new 3-18 curriculum are those which are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament and are regarded as the words which define the values for Scottish society. These are:

- wisdom;
- justice;
- compassion; and
- integrity.

In **New Zealand**, *Schooling in New Zealand: a Guide* published in 2001 (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2001b), defined the Ministry's main mission for all phases of education as:

- equipping students to play a full part in their community and the wider world through raising achievement and reducing disparity;
- ensuring high levels of access;
- ensuring participation in quality early childhood education; and
- ensuring effective transitions and pathways through school.

The Guide also highlighted the social, ethnic, and cognitive differences among students. It set a number of specific aims that target Maori and Pasifika[12] students such as:

- increasing their participation in education;
- improving the capability of schools to meet the needs of Maori pupils; and

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12 New Zealand has a significant Pasifika population with its own particular needs. *Schooling in Zealand: a Guide* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2001b) defines the term Pasifika as people living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands, or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage. The term does not refer to a single ethnicity, nationality or culture and includes both those born in New Zealand and overseas.

- supporting Maori language teaching.

When, in 2003, the Ministry of Education published its key priorities for the next three years (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2003a and b), the two main goals were to:

- build an education system that equips New Zealanders with 21st century skills; and
- reduce systematic underachievement.

In addition, *Education Priorities for New Zealand* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2003a) identified four key areas in which the education system was expected to deliver results, only the first of which relates specifically to primary level education:

- Providing all New Zealanders with strong foundations for future learning – these are the basic skills of literacy and numeracy; and the skills to be confident, motivated and healthy, and to have a strong sense of cultural identity.
- Ensuring high levels of achievement by all school leavers: in addition to school leaving qualifications, all school leavers need good skills in problem solving, creative thinking, interpreting information, reflecting on learning and knowledge and relating to others.
- Ensuring that New Zealanders engage in learning throughout their lives and develop a highly skilled workforce and consequently are motivated and self-directed lifelong learners.
- Making a strong contribution to New Zealand's knowledge base, particularly in key areas of national development; growing the knowledge base and supporting innovations. This supports tertiary education in particular.

In order to achieve these goals the action plan set out in *Education Priorities for New Zealand* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2003a) identified key areas in which the education system was expected to deliver. These focused on providing all New Zealanders with a strong foundation for future learning, quality teaching, and strengthening family and community involvement. For the earlier years of education, there was a focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy; on cultivating confidence, motivation and good health; and on having a strong sense of identity.

Maori education continues to have a strong influence on the aims and values for the system in New Zealand and, in 2005, the Ministry of Education published the *Maori Education Strategy* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2005a). This focused on three main roles of education relevant to the Maori:

- enabling the Maori to live as Maori;
- facilitating their participation as citizens of the world; and
- contributing towards good health and a high standard of living.

Simultaneously, the Ministry published *Making a Bigger Difference for All Students* (*The Schooling Strategy 2005-2010*) (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2005b), which identified three priorities for education for the next five years:

- effective teaching;
- ensuring that children's learning is nurtured by their families; and
- ensuring that evidence-based practices are used by all involved in schooling.

One of the key focuses of education in the **Netherlands** in recent years has been the change towards the adoption of a policy of inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream provision. Against this background, and a continuing emphasis on child-centred education, *Primary School: a Guide for Parents and Carers 2001-2002* (Netherlands. Ministry of Education 2001) defined the main aims of primary education as:

- acquiring knowledge;
- providing pupils with skills;
- understanding what pupils will need in modern society;
- highlighting the multicultural society of the Netherlands; and
- encouraging the intellectual, creative, social and emotional development of pupils.

For the first time, policy documents recently published in **Germany** have begun to emphasise a similar national standards agenda to that reflected, to varying degrees, in the aims and values expressed for education in England, Scotland, and New Zealand. Publications such as *The Development of National Educational Standards* (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2004) have highlighted that, since the publication of the results of recent international comparative surveys of pupil attainment, discussion in Germany has focused on the quality of schools and of teaching and learning. Although much of the focus has been on secondary education, changes are also being called for at pre-school and primary level, and education policy makers are beginning to introduce radical reforms, including the introduction of national, common educational standards in certain subjects in secondary education. Similar common standards are being developed for primary education, in particular for German and mathematics (literacy and numeracy).

Primary education in **Sweden** in the 21st century continues to emphasise the values and goals established in the 1994 curriculum (Sweden. Ministry of Education and Science 1994), and to highlight the need for inductive learning methods and child-centred education.

During the first six years of the 21st century, the aims, values, and purposes of primary education across the surveyed countries have addressed a number of economic, social, cultural, physical and political concerns. In the age of globalisation and rapidly changing economies and technologies, governments now more than ever are concerned with developing a generation equipped with the essential skills for their effective participation in a competitive economy. They are also increasingly aware of the importance, where possible, of tailoring learning to the personalised needs of the individual. The aims and values expressed in policy documents published during the period have also addressed issues of civic participation, social cohesion and identity, through an increasing emphasis on citizenship education and values of tolerance, equality and respect. They have also begun to highlight the value of healthy and sustainable living.

4. Conclusion

Over the last 40 years, the aims and values of primary education in the six surveyed countries appear to have been driven primarily by two ideas: child-centred education; and social and economic progress.

Child-centred philosophies were most strongly manifested in the aims and values of primary education in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in England, Scotland and the Netherlands, when there appeared to be great optimism in the ability of education to bring about equality

and social change. The child-centred educational philosophy and its ethos of equality and individualism had a significant impact in changing attitudes towards students with special needs, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds in most of the surveyed countries.

During the eighties and nineties, the aims and values of education continued to reflect the importance of education in bringing about social change but, in addition, there was significant emphasis on education as a tool for economic improvement. This trend was particularly apparent in England, and was also reflected in New Zealand, as the influences of child-centred educational philosophies began to diminish, and standardisation and pupil performance in literacy, numeracy and science became an increasing priority in the primary stage.

In contrast, child-centred ideals flourished in Germany and the Netherlands during the late eighties and throughout the nineties. In Germany, although education continued to be driven by vocational goals, aspects of the child-centred were incorporated into the aims and values of primary education. In the Netherlands, despite calls for a return to the basics of education; that is an emphasis on the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and science, policy makers continued to emphasise holistic education.

In recent years a hybrid view of primary education seems to be emerging. This almost contradictory hybrid of child-centred and economically and socially motivated philosophies of education seems to be encapsulated in increasing references across the surveyed countries towards the personalisation of learning. The aims and values of primary education today combine the requirement to prepare children for their economic role in society with the need to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses, so as to provide them with the necessary support to achieve targets. The techniques of child-centred education are being adapted not only to ensure the individual child's growth, but also to prepare him or her to fulfil their economic role.

At the same time, the aims and values of primary education are also clearly focusing on preparing individuals for their wider role in society. Taking Sweden's lead from the 1960s, all the countries reviewed in the survey are placing an increasing emphasis on education for citizenship in its broadest form. This does not restrict itself to participation in civic, social and political life, an understanding of rights and duties, of other cultures and of life in often multi-ethnic, multilingual societies, but also increasingly involves an awareness of a responsibility for healthy, sustainable and environmentally responsible living.

In short, the aims and values of primary education today across the six countries reviewed appear to reflect more similarities than differences. Although recognising and incorporating some elements of child-centred techniques, they are expressed primarily in terms of economic and social goals.

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Websites

Documents were retrieved from the websites of the following organisations:

England

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/

DfES Standards Site
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/

Office for Standards in Education
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/

Office of Public Sector Information: United Kingdom Legislation
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/uk.htm

Germany

Conference of the Secretaries of Cultural Affairs
http://www.kmk.org/

The German Parliament
http://www.bundestag.de/

Netherlands

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
http://www.minocw.nl/

Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
http://www.minvws.nl/

New Zealand

Ministry of Economic Development
http://www.med.govt.nz/

Ministry of Education

Scotland

A Curriculum for Excellence
http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/

Learning and Teaching Scotland
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/

Scottish Executive
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/

5-14 Curriculum
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/index.asp

Sweden

Government Offices of Sweden
http://www.sweden.gov.se/

Swedish National Agency for Education
http://www.skolverket.se/

Statistics Sweden
http://www.scb.se/

And from the Eurydice and INCA websites:

http://www.eurydice.org
(http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home)
http://www.inca.org.uk

APPENDIX 1

THE PRIMARY REVIEW PERSPECTIVES, THEMES AND SUB THEMES

The Primary Review's enquiries are framed by three broad perspectives, the third of which, primary education, breaks down into ten themes and 23 sub-themes. Each of the latter then generates a number of questions. The full framework of review perspectives, themes and questions is at www.primaryreview.org.uk

The Review Perspectives

P1 Children and childhood
P2 Culture, society and the global context
P3 Primary education

The Review Themes and Sub-themes

T1 Purposes and values
- T1a Values, beliefs and principles
- T1b Aims

T2 Learning and teaching
- T2a Children's development and learning
- T2b Teaching

T3 Curriculum and assessment
- T3a Curriculum
- T3b Assessment

T4 Quality and standards
- T4a Standards
- T4b Quality assurance and inspection

T5 Diversity and inclusion
- T5a Culture, gender, race, faith
- T5b Special educational needs

T6 Settings and professionals
- T6a Buildings and resources
- T6b Teacher supply, training, deployment & development
- T6c Other professionals
- T6d School organisation, management & leadership
- T6e School culture and ethos

T7 Parenting, caring and educating
- T7a Parents and carers
- T7b Home and school

T8 Beyond the school
- T8a Children's lives beyond the school
- T8b Schools and other agencies

T9 Structures and phases
- T9a Within-school structures, stages, classes & groups
- T9b System-level structures, phases & transitions

T10 Funding and governance
- T10a Funding
- T10b Governance

APPENDIX 2

THE EVIDENTIAL BASIS OF THE PRIMARY REVIEW

The Review has four evidential strands. These seek to balance opinion seeking with empirical data; non-interactive expressions of opinion with face-to-face discussion; official data with independent research; and material from England with that from other parts of the UK and from international sources. This enquiry, unlike some of its predecessors, looks outwards from primary schools to the wider society, and makes full though judicious use of international data and ideas from other countries.

Submissions

Following the convention in enquiries of this kind, submissions have been invited from all who wish to contribute. By June 2007, nearly 550 submissions had been received and more were arriving daily. The submissions range from brief single-issue expressions of opinion to substantial documents covering several or all of the themes and comprising both detailed evidence and recommendations for the future. A report on the submissions will be published in late 2007.

Soundings

This strand has two parts. The *Community Soundings* are a series of nine regionally based one to two day events, each comprising a sequence of meetings with representatives from schools and the communities they serve. The Community Soundings took place between January and March 2007, and entailed 87 witness sessions with groups of pupils, parents, governors, teachers, teaching assistants and heads, and with educational and community representatives from the areas in which the soundings took place. In all, there were over 700 witnesses. The *National Soundings* are a programme of more formal meetings with national organisations both inside and outside education. National Soundings A are for representatives of non-statutory national organisations, and they focus on educational policy. National Soundings B are for outstanding school practitioners; they focus on school and classroom practice. National Soundings C are variably-structured meetings with statutory and other bodies. National Soundings A and B will take place between January and March 2008. National Soundings C are outlined at 'other meetings' below.

Surveys

30 surveys of published research relating to the Review's ten themes have been commissioned from 70 academic consultants in universities in Britain and other countries. The surveys relate closely to the ten Review themes and the complete list appears in Appendix 3. Taken together, they will provide the most comprehensive review of research relating to primary education yet undertaken. They are being published in thematic groups from October 2007 onwards.

Searches

With the co-operation of DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA and OECD, the Review is re-assessing a range of official data bearing on the primary phase. This will provide the necessary demographic, financial and statistical background to the Review and an important resource for its later consideration of policy options.

Other meetings (now designated National Soundings C)

In addition to the formal evidence-gathering procedures, the Review team meets members of various national bodies for the exchange of information and ideas: government and opposition representatives; officials at DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA, GTC, NCSL and IRU; representatives of the teaching unions; and umbrella groups representing organisations involved in early years, primary education and teacher education. The first of three sessions with the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee took place in March 2007. Following the replacment of DfES by two separate departments, DCSF and DIUS, it is anticipated that there will be further meetings with this committee's successor.

APPENDIX 3

THE PRIMARY REVIEW INTERIM REPORTS

The interim reports, which are being released in stages from October 2007, include the 30 research surveys commissioned from external consultants together with reports on the Review's two main consultation exercises: the community soundings (87 witness sessions with teachers, heads, parents, children and a wide range of community representatives, held in different parts of the country during 2007) and the submissions received from large numbers of organisations and individuals in response to the invitation issued when the Review was launched in October 2006.

The list below starts with the community soundings and submissions reports written by the Review team. Then follow the 30 research surveys commissioned from the Review's consultants. They are arranged by Review theme, not by the order of their publication. Report titles may be subject to minor amendment.

Once published, each interim report, together with a briefing summarising its findings, may be downloaded from the Review website, www.primaryreview.org.uk .

REPORTS ON PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

1. *Community soundings: the Primary Review regional witness sessions* (Robin Alexander and Linda Hargreaves)

2. *Submissions received by the Primary Review*

PURPOSES AND VALUES

3. *Aims as policy in English primary education*. Research survey 1/1 (John White)

4. *Aims and values in primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 1/2 (Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell)

5. *Aims for primary education: the changing national context*. Research survey 1/3 (Stephen Machin and Sandra McNally)

6. *Aims for primary education: changing global contexts.* Research survey 1/4 (Hugh Lauder, John Lowe and Rita Chawla-Duggan)

LEARNING AND TEACHING

7. *Children's cognitive development and learning*. Research survey 2/1a (Usha Goswami and Peter Bryant)

8. *Children's social development, peer interaction and classroom*. Research survey 2/1b (Christine Howe and Neil Mercer)

9. *Teaching in primary schools*. Research survey 2/2 (Robin Alexander and Maurice Galton)

10. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: the curriculum dimension*. Research survey 2/3 (Bob McCormick and Bob Moon)

11. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: evidence from TLRP*. Research survey 2/4 (Mary James and Andrew Pollard)

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

12. *Curriculum and assessment policy: England and other countries*. Research survey 3/1 (Kathy Hall and Kamil Øzerk)

13. *The trajectory and impact of national curriculum and assessment reform*. Research survey 3/2 (Harry Torrance, Dominic Wyse, Elaine McCreery and Russell Jones)

14. *Curriculum alternatives for primary education.* Research survey 3/3 (James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter)

15. *Assessment alternatives for primary education*. Research survey 3/4 (Wynne Harlen)

QUALITY AND STANDARDS

16. *Standards and quality in English primary schools over time: the national evidence*. Research survey 4/1 (Peter Tymms and Christine Merrell)

17. *Standards in English primary education: the international evidence*. Research survey 4/2 (Chris Whetton, Graham Ruddock and Liz Twist)

18. *Quality assurance in English primary education*. Research survey 4/3 (Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

19. *Children in primary education: demography, culture, diversity and inclusion*. Research survey 5/1 (Mel Ainscow, Jean Conteh, Alan Dyson and Frances Gallanaugh)

20. *Learning needs and difficulties among children of primary school age: definition, identification, provision and issues*. Research survey 5/2 (Harry Daniels and Jill Porter)

21. *Children and their primary schools: pupils' voices*. Research survey 5/3 (Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding)

SETTINGS AND PROFESSIONALS

22. *Primary education: the physical environment*. Research survey 6/1 (Karl Wall, Julie Dockrell and Nick Peacey)

23. *Primary education: the professional environment*. Research survey 6/2 (Ian Stronach, Andy Pickard and Elizabeth Jones)

24. *Teachers and other professionals: training, induction and development*. Research survey 6/3 (Olwen McNamara, Rosemary Webb and Mark Brundrett)

25. *Teachers and other professionals: workforce management and reform.* Research survey 6/4 (Hilary Burgess)

PARENTING, CARING AND EDUCATING

26. *Parenting, caring and educating*. Research survey 7/1 (Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin)

BEYOND THE SCHOOL

27. *Children's lives outside school and their educational impact*. Research survey 8/1 (Berry Mayall)

28. *Primary schools and other agencies*. Research survey 8/2 (Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole)

STRUCTURES AND PHASES

29. *The structure and phasing of primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 9/1 (Anna Eames and Caroline Sharp)

30. *Organising learning and teaching in primary schools: structure, grouping and transition*. Research survey 9/2 (Peter Blatchford, Judith Ireson, Susan Hallam, Peter Kutnick and Andrea Creech)

FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

31. *The financing of primary education*. Research survey 10/1 (Philip Noden and Anne West)

32. *The governance, administration and control of primary education*. Research survey 10/2 (Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder).

The Primary Review is a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It is supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, based at the University of Cambridge and directed by Robin Alexander.
The Review was launched in October 2006 and aims to publish its final report in autumn 2008.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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