The School Curriculum and Liberal Education

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Liberal Education as the Main Task of the School

In the development of public systems of education, the intention was that everyone should have access to schooling; however, the democratic idea did not extend to giving everyone the opportunity of becoming familiar with the main forms of understanding that make up the critical, reflective level of culture and illuminate the key social institutions. Schooling in this sense - which belongs to the tradition of liberal education - was thought to be the preserve of a minority. (Of course, even the elite schools often fell far short of the ideals of liberal education). Despite all the changes that have occurred, the dualism (or the idea of different curricula for different groups) still persists in various forms. In the past, liberal education presupposed both social responsibility and leisure. With the developments in technology, most members of a democracy now possess adequate leisure as well as all having an equal responsibility as citizens.

As institutions, schools contribute to various broadly educational and non-educational objectives which could probably be achieved as effectively by other agencies. Thus, the school community, as Durkheim emphasized,[1] mediates in the child's experience between the close personal moral relationships of the family and the impersonal morality of the national society. This purpose could be served by various associations of children under the supervision of adults. Whatever other worthy things schools may do, their distinctive role must be identified in relation to significant kinds of learning that depend on sustained and systematic effort under the guidance of appropriately qualified teachers. Some such learning may be too specialised for the usual institution of the school (for example, ballet dancing); what is appropriate may take place

elsewhere (for example, through private tutoring) and may be continued beyond the stage of schooling through the learner's own initiative. It is an important objective of good teaching to help students to become self-educators. In its historical ideal, the school as a distinct institution for inducting the young into the life of a literate culture has centred its efforts on the skills of literacy and numeracy and on the main systematic modes of understanding that make up the critical, reflective level of culture and illuminate the key social institutions. Although there have been significant changes of interpretation, this ideal is embodied in the long tradition of liberal education within Western culture.[2] The ideal should not be confused with what schools have often in fact done in the name of liberal education: the expounding of static masses of content in isolated subjects to be memorized for reproduction at public examinations.

The broad objective of liberal education is the development of the common and distinctively human capacities to be exercised in all aspects of life, in contrast to technical training for some specific task. In the course of schooling, liberal education requires a program that combines a broad study of the humanities, arts and sciences along with depth in some areas. Any systematic effort to explain or interpret features of human life or the world can be an object of liberal education. What is required is that the main emphases should be on what such systematic inquiry enables us to understand about being human or the physical world we live in, how to use its methods and to recognize their powers and limits, how it connects with other ways of explaining or interpreting, and the human values on which it throws light or to which it is subject. A key feature of the curriculum as a whole is the acquisition of a balanced range of intellectual perspectives.

The prestige that mathematics, the physical sciences and technology now enjoy depends mainly on their usefulness as prerequisites for entering many important occupations and as contributors to our high material standard of living. However, they form an important part of liberal education when approached in the way I have just indicated. In this context there is a crucial respect in which they are limited. They do not deal with any of the questions about what makes for a worthwhile human life, about the ideals and standards by which we should live individually and socially. In the present century the achievements of science and technology have been stupendous, from the harnessing of nuclear energy to in vitro

fertilisation. But in themselves they give no guiding values on their use. This is where the study of language and literature, the arts, history, philosophy and the other subjects that make up what are called the humanities have a distinctive and fundamental role in the development of a liberally educated person.[3]

Liberal education at school provides a broad introduction to those major aspects of literate culture in which human beings have most significantly expressed their intellectual, imaginative and emotional capacities. This experience enriches the students' personal lives by making them aware of the varied dimensions of public reflective culture beyond the narrow limits of each one's own immediate experience and background, and by equipping them to participate with critical appreciation and enjoyment. The experience also provides them with the intellectual skills and a sense of the values and historical perspectives that form the basis for acting intelligently and responsibly as citizens of a democratic society. Such an education is liberal in two related senses: as being appropriate for free and responsible citizens, and as setting people free from a limited awareness of what is of human worth and thus enlarging the quality and scope of choice.

In the history of Western education, the liberal humanist tradition - in its diverse forms - has probably exercised the most pervasive theoretical influence. It was first developed as a reflective theory in the Athenian society of the fourth century B.C. In this context liberal education was linked with being free in the two related senses to which I referred above. It focused on developing the characteristics of human nature that were thought to constitute the excellence of human life. The theory directly linked the practice of education to the achievement or maintenance of what was believed to be of most worth in human culture.

With many variations of detail in cultural ideals and educational practice, this broad approach has been reflected in Roman education, the schools of early Christian Europe, the Renaissance Humanism, the Enlightenment, the more recent interpretations of liberal (or general) education as expressed by such writers as Newman, Mill and Arnold in the nineteenth century, and T.S. Eliot, John Anderson, Northrop Frye, Daniel Bell, H.S. Broudy, R.S. Peters and Raymond Williams in the twentieth.

The basic conditions for a liberal education can be realized in a variety of curriculum forms. Whatever the form, the essential objectives are that students would (a) gain a sound understanding of central concepts, theories, and findings along with methods of inquiry and verification in each of the main areas of systematic knowledge (in the physical sciences, social sciences, humanities, arts); (b) recognize the similarities and differences among these areas in their purposes and methods; (c) link the specialized knowledge to relevant 'commonsense' or everyday knowledge; (d) apply the content and methods of the main areas of systematic knowledge to both theoretical and practical activities so that they are better understood, interpreted, evaluated, appreciated and justified. As long as these objectives are being pursued, the intellectual disciplines on which the curriculum draws can be studied (in a variety of ways) as separate subjects or in some integrated pattern. The latter can range from a loose association of subjects to the study of complex themes that require the careful co-ordination of several disciplinary perspectives.

An example of a sophisticated plan for the organisation of the secondary school curriculum as a whole is the one proposed by H.S. Broudy *et al.* in *Democracy and Education in American Secondary Education.*[4] The authors speak of the broad task of general (or liberal) education as the building of cognitive and evaluative maps. These will be developed from Symbolic Skills (Language, Mathematics - which are skills related to all areas of the curriculum); Basic Concepts (from General Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics); Developmental Studies (of the Cosmos, Social Institutions, Culture); Value Exemplars (from Art, Literature, Philosophy, Religion); Social Problems (a sample of large-scale issues that require the application of a wide range of knowledge and skills in their analyses and the formulation of appropriate responses).

An example of how an aspect of the curriculum might be organized is *Man: a Course of Studies* (MACOS), a program designed under the supervision of Jerome Bruner.[5] It reflects his key principles: in content, the focus is on the 'structural' concepts of each discipline; in method, it is to promote learning by discovery on the basis of the minimum necessary information. The course addresses three basic recurring questions: What is human about human beings? How did they get that way? How can they be made more so? These questions are considered in relation to five major humanizing forces (tool making, language,

social organization, the management of the prolonged human childhood, the human urge to explain).

The content and methods are drawn from Anthropology, Ethology, Linguistics and History (together with Prehistory and Archaeology). Materials used in teaching include films, stories, pictures, artefacts and readings. The study of the key questions and the humanizing forces makes particular use of several basic comparisons and contrasts: human beings and higher primates; developed human beings and their prehistoric ancestors; human beings in civilized societies and in primitive societies; adults and children.

The examples I have given are open to various criticisms. However, they illustrate imaginative ways in which the building blocks of a liberal education (the systematic intellectual disciplines) can be assembled into a school curriculum. What needs to be emphasized is that advocacy of liberal education as the distinctive work of schools does not require a curriculum of isolated academic subjects. As already noted, the ideal is completely at odds with the practice in which students, with little if any understanding, memorize large quantities of content and are mechanically trained in the application of methods in response to appropriate cues.

The efforts to integrate areas of systematic knowledge in a curriculum must take care to reflect as accurately as possible the similarities and differences in the various kinds of knowledge and the methods of verification on which they are founded. Liberal education as such has no preconceived notion about the unity or discreteness of the traditions of reasoned inquiry on which it draws. The needs and interests of students and our society (and conditions in the contemporary world) provide themes for integration. From an epistemological point of view, the crucial condition is that in any form of integration the nature of distinct kinds of knowledge, methods of inquiry, and criteria of verification should be respected to the extent that they exist. It is also important to take account of social factors that have influenced various features of the disciplines of intellectual inquiry and the arts in their historical development. In many cases, the range of topics explored has been limited by interests of class, gender and race. Inquiry in various fields has also often been influenced by unquestioned commitment to a political ideology or to religious beliefs. The effort to address these issues within the traditions of the intellectual disciplines and the arts needs to be reflected in

contemporary curricula of liberal education.[6] At its meeting in Hobart in 1989, the Australian Education Council (comprising the Ministers of Education for the Commonwealth, States and Territories) issued a ' Declaration on Schooling' .[7] Among its items are ten agreed national goals for schooling. Apart from some too general references to the development of skills, the goals that refer directly to curriculum (in particular the sixth) either express, or are consistent with, the characteristics of a liberal education.

Work was undertaken on the development of national curriculum statements that reflect the goals of the Hobart declaration. The statements cover eight subjects: Arts, English, Technology, Science, Health, Languages Other Than English, Mathematics, Studies of Society and Environment. Each subject contains a number of 'strands' to be studied throughout primary and secondary schooling. For each statement there is a corresponding 'profile'. The latter sets out the achievement that can be expected in each strand at eight levels of schooling. The statements and profiles are intended as guidelines for the detailed development of curricula within the states and individual schools. Despite various defects, the range of subjects, the nature of content in each, and the general objectives provide a blueprint for a program of studies that can come within the definition of a liberal education.

Given that liberal education is the main work of the school, it follows that until the end of 'universal' schooling, all students should engage in a basically common curriculum. The degree of commonality varies, of course, with the specific way in which a school shapes the liberal education curriculum. For example, it may take the form of a core of common studies together with electives or a common framework within which there can be choice of particular studies. The strictly common curriculum is also likely to become less extensive in the later stages of schooling. Within each area of a common curriculum there is, of course, scope for variations of detail to accommodate differences in the abilities, background knowledge, and motivation of students.

The last point relates to one of the main justifications for vocational programs in school as an alternative to a curriculum of liberal education (even when the latter is not narrowly interpreted in terms of academic subjects). It is claimed that a substantial number of people are not capable of the breadth of knowledge, abstract thought and

reflective understanding required by liberal education. They need one that is directly related to practical interests and has immediate relevance for gaining entry to the work force.

Some years ago, G. H. Bantock proposed a more subtle version of this dualist view.[8] The case he makes is set in the context of a criticism of the notion of a common culture. If 'culture' refers to the body of intellectual and imaginative work of high quality, it cannot form the content of a common curriculum, Bantock argues, because it requires a level of abstract thought and rational consciousness that is beyond the capacity of about forty per cent of those who would be regarded as educationally normal. The culture of this group (the 'less able') is characterized by concrete experience, oral communication, visual imagery. Hence, what is needed are two kinds of curriculum: one based on 'high' culture and one that reflects and encourages the values of a 'folk' culture that is appropriate for our times.

Bantock's position on contemporary folk culture is somewhat obscure. He recognizes that the tradition of folk culture has been radically affected by the development of the industrial economy and the mass media. The alternative curriculum he advocates is not an attempt to recover a folk culture that has largely disappeared. Nor does it seem to be intended to reflect the state of current media-driven popular culture. Bantock draws attention to features of our popular culture (particularly as shaped by radio and television) that have continuity with the preindustrial folk culture: oral communication, concrete imagery, repetition and narrative as the dominant rhetorical form. His alternative curriculum will build on these features of popular culture but it seems that he intends it to develop a new, vigorous folk culture that transcends the deficiencies of media culture and effectively relates the modes of work in industrial society to the rest of life.

While Bantock's curriculum for the less able includes vocational interests, he is firmly set against making them the dominant focus. The nature of work in technological society restricts the role that the school can play in preparing students (especially the less able) for work. Also, because of the sharp division in contemporary life between work and leisure, the shaping of a new folk culture cannot be closely tied to the world of work - a contrast with the folk culture of preindustrial society. The greatly increased leisure, which has come as a result of technological advances in the industrial economy, is absorbed to a considerable extent by the seductive fantasy world

purveyed by the mass media. It fills in the spare time and offers a distraction from the dullness of work. In these circumstances, the curriculum that is to promote a new folk culture must focus on the real world of relationships in which people live.

As the basis for the development of a suitable curriculum for less able (or 'non-academic') students, Bantock identifies four important areas of interest that relate to their level of consciousness: the affective life (with consequences for moral conduct); the physical life; the domestic life; the environmental challenge of the machine. To build a suitable curriculum related to these areas, Bantock stresses the importance of attending to the level of abstraction at which most people can be expected to function. As we have seen, he takes the view that their capacity for rational generalization is limited; for the most part their mental activities are closely tied to concrete experience.

In Chapter 7 of *Education In An Industrial Age*, Bantock sketches the kind of content that would satisfy this condition for each of the four areas.[9] Here I shall give a brief indication of what he has in mind.

Affective. An emphasis on oral language (making use of radio and television); stories whose theme is either homely or concerned with the marvellous or horrific, treated in narrative form with strong emphasis on emotional reactions; in writing, an emphasis on free verse poetry rather than prose; a central place for dance, music, mime and drama. All these activities should be closely linked with their manifestation in popular culture. However, students are to be encouraged to respond critically to the images in which human values are presented as in advertising, television programs and films.

Domestic. This covers the whole range of activities associated with domestic life: cooking and the choice of a healthy diet, learning to buy sensibly, sex education, the aesthetic aspects of decorating and the choice of furniture.

Machines. The objective is to gain some understanding of, and practical skill in using and repairing, the main machines that affect our everyday life (cars, washing machines, radio and television sets, to name but some). This area is regarded by Bantock as being for boys. While he sees the domestic as predominantly for girls, he does encourage some work in the area by boys. (It is fair to note that his book was published in 1963).

Physical. This area includes the broad range of games and physical education (linked with dance and drama), camping, hiking, and rock climbing. Bantock suggests that some informal geography and map-reading could be introduced in several of these activities.

In relation to the last point, it should be noted that the proposed curriculum does not include any formal study of history, geography, foreign languages or commercial subjects. Some provision is made, however, for incidental historical study in the context of learning about domestic life and machines.

Bantock's position raises a wide range of issues for criticism and discussion. In the present context, I shall restrict my comments to those that seem most closely related to the case for a common curriculum of liberal education to the end of universal schooling.

1. While the details of Bantock's distinction between the more and less able might be challenged, only a naive egalitarian would try to ignore the significant range of abilities that affect educational achievement. However, if we are referring to the broad group of normal students, it does not follow that those classified as 'less able' are incapable of attaining any worthwhile liberal education. Equally, the pedagogical methods can be adapted so that students who are less able (or less motivated) can achieve, to a reasonable extent, the main objectives of a liberal education.

2. Bantock correctly identifies the obstacles to using the school as an effective agent of vocational education. He rejects it as an option for the 'less able'. However, the obstacles apply regardless of the abilities and interests of students in the years of universal schooling. Even if the school were a suitable place in which to offer the full curriculum in vocational education, this would not resolve the problem of how 'less able' students are to reach at least a minimally satisfactory level of educational achievement.

3. Bantock's interpretation of liberal education is excessively narrow. It consists in the direct study of the intellectual disciplines in order to promote competence in abstract rational modes of thought. While liberal education includes an understanding of the diverse forms of rational inquiry and some skill in their use, it is not intended to produce practitioners in the various disciplines. The study of history, for example, as part of a liberal education requires attention to the ways in which explanations, interpretations, narratives of the human past are constructed. But this is done in order to develop a more critical

understanding of what we claim to know about the past, not to make proficient historians.

Closely connected with this more modest concern with rational modes of understanding, liberal education is also directed to the development of imagination, the emotions, commitment to moral ideals, appreciation of aesthetic values. With some adjustments, the first three areas of interest contained in Bantock's curriculum for the less able are, or should be, part of an adequate liberal education. In any case, it is curious to suggest that the education of the emotions, for example, is more appropriate for less able than more able students. An effective liberal education until the end of Year 10 need not occupy the whole of learning associated with the school. What Bantock includes under physical education, and aspects of the other areas of interest, could appropriately come within the scope of additional learning at school. But they should be for all students, not only the less able. (Parts of moral education, especially the application of principles to action, belong to the further kinds of learning to which the school contributes).

Jane Roland Martin has criticized the usual liberal education curriculum for not giving attention to what Bantock refers to as domestic life.[10] As Martin points out, the main objectives of general (or liberal) education has been to fit new members of society for their roles as citizens, workers, individuals, and carriers of the cultural heritage. She argues for the need to include education for family life, with particular emphasis on understanding of, and commitment to the values of ' care, concern, connection'.[11] In relation to Martin's argument, I would claim that these topics are a clearly justifiable part of liberal education without any need to appeal to changes that have occurred in contemporary family life (for example increase in home violence and the breakdown of marriages). Martin rightly argues that the ethics of care should cross the divide between the private and the public domains. However, while the distinction is one that is commonly too sharply drawn in liberal theory, there are important differences of emphasis to be observed. Otherwise, the delicate balance between social cohesion and tolerance in a pluralist society will be upset.[12]

4. The strength of Bantock's attack on the idea of a common culture depends on an extreme interpretation of what it involves: every member of the society sharing, at a high level of abstract rational reflection, in the same broad range of intellectual, artistic and other practices. The argument for a substantial core of common culture is based on an appeal to the conditions of life that affect every member of

> a contemporary democratic, pluralist society with an industrial economy shaped by scientific technology in which beliefs and tastes are subject to powerful mass media of communication and entertainment. Liberal education, as earlier described, provides the range of understanding and skills that all members of such a society need if they are to respond adequately to its legitimate demands and critically resist the influences that undermine a worthwhile human life. It may not be sufficient, but it is necessary.
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> If everyone engages in liberal education during the course of universal schooling, this means that, in a broad sense, everyone follows a common curriculum. But, as I have stressed, the common objectives of a liberal education can be achieved at various levels through a variety of curricula and pedagogical methods. Any program should include the core of beliefs, values and attitudes on which the survival of a democratic, pluralist society depends.[13] Beyond that, the various curricula of liberal education will engender, at different levels of sophistication, overlapping networks of shared meanings. In this sense we may speak of liberal education for all as fostering a common culture - one that is characterized by considerable internal variation. (Of course, 'high', 'folk', 'mass' and other types of culture that may be distinguished are not monolithic either).

What is to be done for those in middle adolescence who come within the broad group of the normally educable but who are unwilling, for whatever reason, to engage in any serious form of liberal education? There is no single satisfactory answer. If they have strong interests (for example in sport, pop music, a particular kind of job), these might provide the basis for developing some aspects of a liberal education (for example the historical dimension; selective parts of literature, art, science, mathematics related to their interests; moral issues that affect the areas of interest). For those who resist being at school at all, it would be preferable for our society to offer suitable alternatives (for example, as assistants in community work). In the absence of such alternatives, schools will continue to be adolescent day- care centres for some proportion of those who attend. As long as schools are expected to accept this role, it is essential that some members of their staff should be appropriately prepared for the task.

The Approach to Liberal Education at Different Levels of Schooling

The divisions of schooling tend to be too sharply drawn. In liberal education, as I have broadly described it, there is significant continuity from the early primary school to the end of undergraduate studies. The placement of the divisions is also somewhat arbitrary. For example, the sixth and seventh years might be in a common sector, or the senior level might begin at Year 10. The total number of years given to primary and secondary schooling, like the length of the school year, reflects custom as well as soundly tested experience.

The 'Compulsory Years of Schooling Project' (sponsored by the Commonwealth Schools Council) recommended changes to the present broad division into primary and secondary schooling.[14] It proposes three stages: childhood (to about Year 5), adolescence (Years 6 - 9), young adult (Year 10 and beyond). It sees the third stage as including various alternatives to continuing in full-time normal schooling. (The National Curriculum Statements, to which I referred earlier, identified four stages. The accompanying profiles of achievement have eight levels - the last three referring to Year 10). What is more important than the change of labels is the emphasis that the Project places on the need for more continuity in the transition from primary to secondary schooling and on the recognition of important differences in the character of education beyond Year 9 or 10 and the provision of worthwhile alternatives to full-time schooling at this stage.

Whatever adjustments might be made in the future, broad differences in the curriculum of liberal education can be characterized, within the present scheme of things, in the following way. In the primary school the emphasis is on acquiring the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, on gaining an introduction to systematic knowledge about the physical and social world (drawn from disciplines but organized in relation to broad themes and closely linked to children's commonsense experience), and learning to engage in theorizing activities (such as classifying, conjecturing likely solutions to problems, exercising sympathetic imagination) usually in the context of practical interests. Content is presented in a predominantly descriptive way. The mode of storytelling, with its clear structure of beginning, middle and end and attention to concrete detail and images, plays a crucial and pervasive role.

In the second phase of 'universal schooling', to the end of Year 10, more direct attention is given to the organization of knowledge by disciplines or groups of disciplines, and the different modes of theorizing (explaining, interpreting, evaluating) as they are used within the disciplines. However, practical activities still form a significant context for undertaking theoretical work. Integrated studies should clearly identify the role of the contributing disciplines and stay within the scope of their methods and evidence. A mode of integration to be strongly encouraged is the systematic study of a second language and its cultural setting.

Although the details of content may vary substantially, the curriculum of liberal studies should include work in at least these areas: English (language and literature), mathematics, humanities and social studies, physical and biological sciences, the expressive arts. Each student's program should be characterized by breadth and balance in scope and by a cumulative sequence of studies. The selection of content should be guided by the objective of helping students grasp the major concepts, principles and theories in relation to the aims of each field of systematic inquiry. Together with a general emphasis on methods of learning, this treatment of content should equip students by the end of Year 10 to pursue their own informal study of, say, history, literature, or science.

Skills of literacy, especially the ability to read analytically and express oneself with precision, are to be developed in relation to the distinctive content and modes of expression in each major area of the curriculum. By the end of Year 10, students should have acquired a range of these skills to levels at which they can at least perform competently in the main contexts of adult life. The same criteria also apply to the skills of numeracy. Despite the role of mathematics in technology, the economy and other areas of our society, this instrumental criterion is much less demanding for numeracy than for literacy. But, of course, there are other grounds on which the study of mathematics beyond the basic skills can be justified.

Throughout the years of universal schooling, moral education is one of the fundamental objectives. However, unlike mathematics for example, it is an aspect of education to which the family and other agencies contribute significantly. Schools need to be clear about their distinctive contribution in this area. In a pluralist society, public schools must be particularly careful to respect legitimate diversity in

moral beliefs and practices. Still, all schools in our society have the responsibility to uphold and encourage commitment to the basic moral values on which any social order depends together with those that are distinctive of a liberal democracy (such as: personal freedom, recognition of the dignity and worth of each human being as a moral agent, tolerance of diverse ways of thinking and acting within the constraints of the essential moral values, commitment to non-violent means of persuasion). They must also, of course, support the moral values that characterize a serious engagement in liberal education: for example, respect for the truth, intellectual honesty and humility. In part, this moral education occurs in the day-to-day life of a school as an institution. Within the curriculum, it has a place in many contexts, such as literature, history, social studies and physical education. As an aspect of liberal education, the distinctive objectives are to develop understanding of what the moral domain is about and why we should act in certain ways, and to learn how to apply moral values in making informed and effective judgements.

The style of approach in secondary schooling moves from one of narrative to one that focuses more on analysis, generalization, argument. However, prominence should be given to the history of the immense human effort that has fashioned each of the major modes of systematic thought, and to the most important historical background in the study of the arts and of contemporary institutions and movements.[15]

Liberal Studies in the Senior Secondary School

It is obvious that what is to be done in the name of liberal education in the senior secondary school depends largely on how we interpret the characteristics of liberal education in the years of universal secondary schooling and in institutions of higher education. As noted earlier, there is also a substantial continuity in the program of liberal education from one level to another.

Whatever other purposes the curriculum in Years 11 and 12 might serve, one clear justification for these two additional years of secondary schooling is to provide the further knowledge and skills regarded as a desirable, if not necessary, basis for programs of both liberal and professional or other applied studies in higher education. These institutions could begin from the level achieved at Year 10,

which I have suggested should be adequate for the general conduct of life. They might then be content with a generally lower level of attainment at graduation, or add an additional year or more to undergraduate programs. But I shall assume here that without taking the latter step they are justified in trying to maintain the standards of quality to which universities in this country have aspired over past generations. Given a substantial increase in the relative number of students entering higher education, the nature and quality of what is done in Years 11 and 12 is now even more crucial to the work of universities

If the curriculum of liberal education in these years does effectively equip students for university studies, it will also be appropriate for other purposes: advanced vocational programs in other tertiary institutions, entry to other modes of occupational training that require a higher level of education than is normally adequate, or for those who simply wish to gain a more thorough liberal education in preparation for the diverse roles of adult life.

Because of its intermediate position, liberal education in Years 11 and 12 thus shares characteristics of both the preceding and following levels. The curriculum is still to be balanced in scope, requiring some work in each of the three general areas of humanities, sciences and arts. However, there is now provision for a degree of specialization. Liberal education at the tertiary level should also include conditions of breadth, but the program as a whole is likely to be more narrowly focused and will have more intensive specialization that in the senior secondary school.

The curriculum in Years 11 and 12 reinforces the study of the significant structural features of the disciplines undertaken earlier and gives attention to developing details of content and skills. The process continues on a larger scale and at a more advanced level in tertiary programs of liberal education. As part of its distinctive work, the latter should include systematic reflection on the relative scope and limits of particular disciplined modes of inquiry. In the secondary school this can be done to some extent through carefully designed units on complex moral and social issues, where account has to be taken of a range of factual and value questions and of how they fit together in argument.

In Years 11 and 12, skills in reading, writing and discussing are further developed in closer relationship to the rhetoric or style of argument in individual disciplines. In the humanities particularly, there needs to be practice in applying the general skills of reading to a text with relatively technical content (grasping its structure, its principal concepts and key assumptions). There also needs to be training in how to write on topics within the contexts of a discipline (finding sources, taking notes, organizing an argument). At the tertiary level, these skills are worked on more intensively. Here students are expected to study a number of the master works in the various fields of disciplined inquiry and aesthetic effort, both for the content and for the models of procedure and technique that they offer.

In schematic terms, liberal education is directed not only to *knowing*, including the capacity to think feelingly and with imagination, but also to *making (for example* in arts and crafts) and doing (for example acting morally, performing social roles efficiently). But the first of these, the engagement in theorizing activities, is the fundamental object of liberal education. In primary school, these activities are formally set in the context of making and doing. In the course of universal secondary schooling, although the connections with making and doing are still significant for the curriculum, attention is increasingly given to the theorizing activities in themselves.

By Years 11 and 12 these activities become the predominant focus of the curriculum. The first objective is to develop intellectual skills and knowledge for understanding significant aspects of the physical and human world, rather than to serve particular practical interests in making or doing something. These interests may provide a point of departure or application, but they are strictly ancillary to the main purposes of the curriculum. The distinctive educational role of the school at Years 11 and 12 is thus more narrowly defined than in the phases of universal schooling. In liberal education at the tertiary level, the emphasis is almost wholly on the mastery of intellectual skills and knowledge in the various systematic forms of theorizing activities.

Theory and practice are related in complex ways. A program of general studies need not exclude theoretical work in the context of a practical activity, either one that is immediately linked - theory of music and performance, for example - or one to which an intellectual discipline is applied, like botany and gardening. But in liberal, as

distinct from vocational, education the main objective is to understand the practice, not to improve its technical efficiency. Given this purpose, the role of scientific technology in contemporary culture and society can be a subject of liberal education.

A final general feature of liberal education in the senior secondary school is the place of historical studies. In reference to at least some of the major institutions, movements and ideas of the contemporary world, the sketchy maps of the past required by Year 10 need to be substantially filled out.

Although there should be some scope for specialized study at Years 11 and 12, the 'general' character of liberal education is still predominant at this stage. Thus, there is justification for setting conditions on the choice of subjects to ensure that students include a balanced range of the major modes of thought in their course of studies. Such a program has to be achieved in relation to several sets of ingredients. Perhaps the most important of these is that it should include learning in each of the major kinds of understanding at which different fields of inquiry aim: in particular, explanation or prediction by means of empirically-based causal laws and generalizations; the interpretation of events in relation to human motives and intentions; evaluation and prescription. It is also important to recognize that if intellectual skills such as identifying and solving problems, thinking critically and imaginatively are to be developed effectively, their acquisition must go hand in hand with learning the significant content (factual information, concepts, principles, theories) that distinguishes the field of systematic inquiry. What one learns is not an abstract general problem-solving or other skill that can be applied in any situation, but how to solve certain kinds of problems or to think imaginatively in certain contexts.

If we assume that by the end of Year 10 an adequate level of competence for general adult life has been acquired in a broad and balanced curriculum, I believe the framework for Years 11 and 12 might have the following features: (a) English language, and logic in the use of ordinary language; (b) some units in at least four or five broad areas: mathematics, natural sciences, humanities, social sciences and arts; (c) within subjects, attention to special conditions for literacy, the inclusion of work on mathematics wherever relevant, and on historical background and ethical issues. These latter also give students experience in relating different modes of understanding.

Liberal Education and Preparation for Work

In relation to the employment system, a liberal education can contribute in two main ways. First, it develops the range of general intellectual skills that enables a person to adapt intelligently in changing circumstances and to be relatively more easily trained for new tasks. These skills include reading and listening with critical understanding, expressing oneself clearly and logically in speech and writing, applying mathematics in the interpretation and description of quantitative relationships, knowing how to learn for oneself in the main areas of disciplined inquiry. Of course, if the tasks of a job require no theoretical understanding or other intellectual effort, liberal education in this respect has no relevance. However, neither would there be any point in requiring people to spend several years in a school practising such tasks.

Second, work in human life can, and I think should, form a basic theme in the curriculum, to be examined from the perspective of several disciplined modes of understanding. This study can be undertaken in various ways through the course of primary and secondary schooling. The broad objective is the development of the concepts, knowledge and skills necessary for a critical interpretation and understanding of this system. It would include among its elements: the historical background since the industrial revolution; the role of private enterprise and government; trade unions; conflict between management and labour; the industrial arbitration system; a comparison of capitalism and socialism; advertising and the stimulation of artificial wants; problems such as poverty, inflation, unemployment, and the depletion of energy resources; changing patterns in work through advances in science and technology and other causes. The study would need to include historical, political, economic and moral aspects. But it might also examine how work is interpreted in literature and the arts.

I shall not attempt to discuss any details of curriculum design or procedures for teaching and learning. The following comments refer to two examples of a school program on the theme of work. In the Humanities Project, one of the eight general topics is 'People and Work'.[16] The materials are intended for early secondary school years, but to some extent could also be used in the final years of the primary school. The focus of attention in the whole project is on controversial value issues. The materials are intended to inform and provoke

discussion and ensure that the broad spectrum of views on each issue is represented. Whether teachers adopted the specific aims of the project or not, they would find in 'People and Work' a rich variety of materials. These are drawn from a number of disciplines, from literature and films, painting, cartoons, folk songs and newspaper excerpts. They are classified for use in relation to eight broad categories of the topic: for example, the meaning of work for the worker; social stratification and the meaning of work; the relationship between work and other human activities.

In the two-year program for the Victorian Certificate of Education, the first half of the four–semester study design for Australian Studies (used in the first full cycle, 1991-92) was on the theme of work in society. Although the focus on work took up a disproportionate part of this course in Australian Studies, the content illustrates the kind of themes related to work that are appropriate within a curriculum of liberal education. There were four main dimensions: characteristics of work in contemporary Australian society and the various ways in which work is interpreted; how geography and the population affect the pattern of work in Australia, the changes that are occurring, and what social differences are reflected in work; how wealth is generated and distributed and the role of government and various other agencies in these processes; characteristics of Australia as a technological society: the effects on the political order, industry, living standards, environment etc.

A good case can be made for treating the study of work as a distinct part of a common core curriculum during the course of secondary schooling. Ernest Boyer argues for such a study, in which the place of work in society would be systematically examined from historical, comparative, social, cultural and economic perspectives.[17] Boyer also includes another related common study: Technology (which examines it historical dimensions, the links with science, ethical and social issues). In addition, he proposes that, in Years 9-12, students should do a minimum of thirty hours of voluntary work each year, either within or outside the school. I should note that there is no compelling reason for placing the study of work in the final two years. Years 9 and 10, when virtually all adolescents are still at school, would be preferable.

In addition to the study of the employment system within the curriculum of liberal education, schools should also help students to prepare for work through appropriate vocational guidance.

I shall not comment in detail on this aspect, except for two notes. First, schools should provide information and encouragement in relation to a much wider variety of jobs. Second, in helping students to make a realistic assessment of their capacities and interests, schools should try to prevent decisions from being too specific. Future vocational choice should only relate to a broad area of interest, not a particular job. As Dewey emphasized, the dominant vocation for children and adolescents is intellectual and moral growth. The school is the special setting in which they engage in this occupation. If this stage is determined by a specific future occupation, it is bound to be unduly narrow and to restrict a person's flexibility in later vocational choice.

In regard to the problem of underemployment or the constructive use of leisure, liberal education has an indispensable role to play. If it is engaged in effectively, a person gains access to the broad range of conceptual schemes and methods of thought for critically understanding and interpreting the cultural and social milieu in which one lives. By systematically studying the best human achievements in the main modes of culture, one gains an appreciation of the criteria of value that distinguish worthwhile human activities. To the extent that it succeeds, liberal education develops the skills by which people come to take charge of their own learning and know how to think for themselves. In these ways, a liberal education equips a person for an awareness of the possibilities and the intellectual resources to find work in leisure. Among other things, it is just possible that if we took seriously the project of liberal education for everyone, television addiction would cease to be the great consumer of leisure - and what people did watch would be viewed with a much more critical and discerning eye.

Apart from the objectives of self-cultivation and the worthwhile use of leisure, liberal education also provides the essential framework of understanding for intelligently fulfilling the responsibilities of a citizen - a vocation to which everyone in a democracy is called.[18] This is, of course, one of the fundamental reasons why everyone in our society should have an adequate opportunity for liberal education.

There is a further, related way in which liberal education for all can play a crucial role. Our political economy is under severe stress from fragmenting forces of various kinds. But our commitment to cultural and moral pluralism also puts strain on the coherence of the society as

a whole. Now, although the curriculum of liberal education admits many variations, it does constitute a common curriculum in the range of its content and in the skills, values and attitudes that it seeks to develop. Such an education provides the common framework of meaning for the diverse aspects of each individual's own life and for relating individuals and sub-groups to one another. Even in the later years of secondary schooling, where some specialization is appropriate, all students should be engaged in at least a common core of significant learning. Over the course of schooling, individual differences of ability are better accommodated by allowing differences of pace and depth; interests, by allowing choice of detail within a common framework. It is surely a failure in the design of the curriculum if students can choose a program that allows them to emerge from the secondary school without any systematic study, historical and contemporary, of the social and economic order that has such a profound influence on the shaping of their lives.

NOTES

1. E. Durkheim, *Moral Education*, trans. EX Wilson & H. Schnurer, New York: The Free Press, 1973, Chs. 5,6.
2. For an account of liberal education in classical Greece and Rome, see H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb, London: Sheed & Ward, 1956. There is an interesting discussion of the debate over liberal education in England during the nineteenth century in Ralph White, ' The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate: An Essay in the History of Liberal Education' , *British Journal of Educational Studies, XXXIV(1)*, Feb. 1986, pp. 38-65. See, also, S. Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: an essay in history and culture*, London: Faber & Faber, 1976.
3. On this point iris Murdoch makes the following claim:
   ' Words are the most subtle symbols which we possess and our human fabric depends on them ... there is only one culture, of which science, so interesting and so dangerous, is now an important part. But the most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations ... this is why it is and always will be more important to know about Shakespeare than to know about any scientist.'
   As a novelist and philosopher, Iris Murdoch may be guilty of some exaggeration, but what she says is, I believe, substantially correct. I. Murdoch, The *Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, p.34.

4. H.S. Broudy, B.O. Smith, J.R. Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964.
5. For a description of the program see J. Bruner, *Towards a Theory of Instruction*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1968, Ch.4. A criticism of MACOS for what is seen as a lack of attention to the affective dimensions is contained in R.M. Jones, *Fantasy and Feeling in Education*, Harmondsworth, Mx.: Penguin Books, 1972.
6. Jane Roland Martin, who has made several important contributions to the discussion of liberal education in the school curriculum, has recently taken what seems to be a potentially dangerous direction. If epistemological issues are inextricably linked with gender, ethnicity and social class (as she now seems to be claiming), the door is open to a radical kind of pluralism in curricula and school institutions. Distinct provision will need to be made for 'Western white male high culture', 'Western white female high culture', 'Afro-American female working-class culture' and so on. See 'Curriculum and the Mirror of Knowledge' , R. Barrow & P. White (eds)., *Beyond Liberal Education*, London: Routledge, 1993.
7. The Hobart Declaration on Schooling (meeting of Australian Education Council, April 1989) included the following among ' the agreed national goals for schooling' .
   To develop in students: the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing; skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills; skills of analysis and problem solving; skills of information processing and computing; an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills; a knowledge and appreciation of Australia's historical and geographic context; a knowledge of languages other than English; an appreciation and understanding of, and confidence to participate in, the creative arts; an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment; a capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.
8. G.H. Bantock, *Education in an Industrial Society*, London: Faber & Faber, 1963.
9. Ibid., p. 210 seq.
10. Jane R. Martin, ' Filling the Gap: The Goals of American Education Revised' , *International Review of Education*, 36(2), 1990, pp.145-57. Martin argues that general education needs to be expanded to include ' care, concern, connection' (related to the objective of educating for family life). They would not form a separate subject, but would be incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum.
11. Ibid, pp.152-55.
12. I have discussed related issues in ' Conflicting Traditions and Education in a Democracy: Can Liberalism Provide Defensible Common Values?' *Curriculum Inquiry*, 24(3), Fall 1994, pp.293-326.
13. See ibid. pp.315-20 for an outline of the basic moral values on which any society depends and those required in a liberal pluralist society. I have also discussed the range of values in *Cultural Pluralism and Common Curriculum*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1982.

14. Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Five *to Fifteen: Reviewing the 'Compulsory' Years of Schooling*, Project Paper No.8, Canberra: AGPS, Oct. 1993.
15. N. Postman, *Technopoly. The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993. In Chapter 11 Postman stresses the importance of the historical and philosophical aspects in the study of the various disciplines of knowledge.
16. L. Stenhouse (director), *The Humanities Project*, Schools Council (Nuffield Humanities Project, London: Heinemann, 1970. Note, especially, the booklets: *Introduction* and *People and Work.*
17. E.L. Boyer, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, New York: Harper and Row, 1983, pp.111-1 15.
18. Special emphasis is given to this aspect of education in Report of Civics Expert Group, *Civics and Citizenship Education*, Canberra: AGPS, 1994.