FOUNDING EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Education is the major means by which nations seek to socialise the young into the norms and values of adults, as well as provide them with the necessary economic and personal skills. In some centrist societies, the state is closely involved in these processes. In others, the state remains at arm's length. But in many, including Britain, the balance between state and locality, between central control and devolved powers, between politicians and schools, teachers and parents is a subject for constant debate. This is despite the fact that the educational system is very much a pluralist one, with state and private schools, Christian denominational – and more recently other religious affiliations – and secular governance. Yet the development of educational provision, in terms of the expansion of the availability of schooling, compulsion, and the age range of pupils and leaving times, has of course been established through the succession of education acts commencing in 1870 (1872 in Scotland), with repeated further major pieces of legislation in the twentieth century. In perhaps a typically British way, educational provision has often seemed both controlled and casual, both regulated and regionalised. These apparently haphazard arrangements were in some respects transferred to the British empire, where colonial governments (particularly in so-called dependent territories) often remained aloof from educational provision until they established greater authority in the twentieth century.

If all this is true of education in general, it has been equally true of the curriculum. And in curricular matters, no subject has tended to produce more controversy than history. The reason for this is readily apparent. The variety of ways in which societies view their history is perceived to be central to the formation of identities, to the creation of the 'nation', to concepts of citizenship, to notions of both personal and collective morality, and to the manner in which apparently dominant ideologies are transmitted to the young. Each generation, at least from the late nineteenth century (and in more general ways at earlier periods too), has debated how the young should be introduced to the past, how histories should be taught, and what lessons in good citizenship should be imparted. Each society invariably has a central idea of what has contributed to its current qualities or concepts of greatness. For the British this became the formation of the idea and the geographical and ethnic reality of Britain itself, as well as the dispersal of the British people – and of their language – across the globe from the sixteenth century onwards, a process that became more and more bound up with the development of empire. The great paradox of the notion of the 'island story', a phrase that achieved fresh currency in the recent past, is that the story was actually about an entire archipelago as well as connections with a congeries of countries spread across continents.

It has long been clear that, despite the attention of a number of scholars, the controversies surrounding the provision of a history curriculum required

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to be revisited. Moreover, it has also been apparent that the subject of history should not be viewed in isolation, that ideas about history are transmitted in many diverse ways as well as in association with other disciplines. Peter Yeandle has done this in a remarkably diverse, nuanced and accessible way. When in the early 1980s I turned to a consideration of the transmission of ideas about the British empire in schools, I quickly recognised that history texts were an inadequate source for a full understanding of the ways in which wider notions of citizenship, nation and empire were transmitted to the young. 'Readers' associated with the development of literacy, geographical study, perhaps even aspects of religious instruction, were also important, in the case of the readers centrally so. Moreover, teacher manuals and training methods in the developing colleges were additionally significant. It was also essential to consider the age groups at which these materials were aimed. But my efforts were preliminary and tentative given the relatively pioneering nature of the work.

Yeandle's study is much more profound and he has revealed just how inadequate it is to consider only history texts when examining these issues. He recognises the ways in which the teaching of history has indeed been a constant source of controversy, but also reveals the manner in which the terms of the debate have often been both contradictory and paradoxical. Moreover, his major contribution is to chart the significance of educational theory and ideas about child psychology derived from continental models, originally and notably German. Through the spread of such influential models, he is able to unveil aspects of what he describes as 'the crisis of national confidence' in a variety of forms. He also examines the spread of arguments about the moral aspects of history teaching, the ways of imparting these to children of various ages, and the manner in which such notions contributed to communal values and the interests of the society. These debates seem, interestingly, to have intensified during the interwar years of the twentieth century. Above all he analyses the extent to which the British 'dominant ideology' of empire permeated these debates, methodologies and teaching practices. His conclusions are judicious and carefully balanced.

Interestingly, many of these issues have a habit of reappearing, as they have been doing in recent times under the influence of the former Secretary for Education Michael Gove and his historical advisers. This is even more complex with the devolution of educational provision – and concepts of citizenship, nation and community – to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Separating English/British history (as well as geographical and literary study) from global contexts remains problematic, not least because of the need to understand human migrations (outgoing and incoming, including the formation of today's multi-ethnic, if not multi-cultural, society – phenomena which seem to contribute to all sides of these arguments), the peopling of the world and the development of linguistic maps. It is quite clear that both the controversies and the studies of them will continue, but Yeandle's is a notable contribution to these highly significant and contentious issues.

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