

Liberal Education and Liberalism in Modern Society

John Raven
30 Great King St.,
Edinburgh EH3 6QH
Scotland

++ 44 131 556 2912

e-mail: jraven@ednet.co.uk

This article has now been published as: Raven, J. (2005). Liberal Education and Liberalism in Modern Society. *The Good Society (Journal of the Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society [PEGS])* 14(3), 29-37.

Preparation of this article was prompted by what I regarded as somewhat inadequate discussions of both Liberalism and Liberal Education published in *The Good Society* Vol. 13, No. 3. My main complaints were, I suppose, that the articles failed to adequately discuss the goals of education, let alone liberal education, what lies at the heart of liberalism, the nature of the huge deficits in civic competence (and in particular the inadequacy of widely shared beliefs about how society works and the role of the citizen within it) which are undermining our society, the deficits in public management arrangements which typically result in public provision failing to deliver the benefits which most people want from it (and most often delivering its opposite – the most important being the sustainability of our society), the competencies that are required to develop societal management arrangements which will overcome these deficits, or how these competencies are to be nurtured in educational institutions. By and large, subject-oriented (viz. *content*-oriented) views of education dominated the discussions and the conventional wisdom's great lies and myths about education – such as the myth that current forms of education significantly enhance occupational competence – seemed to be accepted without question.

How to justify such a sweeping criticism and to provide at least some insights into an alternative perspective?

The problem that I have is that any attempt to summarise our work in this area¹ tends to result in an article that comes across as both dogmatic and crazy. This is not only because so many common assumptions, myths, and preoccupations have to be challenged before one can make much progress. It is also because new thinking in any one area (such as in relation to educational goals) has implications for thoughtways and practices in the other areas (such as assessment and public management). At the heart of the societal problem we face lies the need to think in more systemic terms about how society works, how societal (even individual) behaviour is determined, and how these things are to be influenced. In essence, it is necessary to map the complex interactions and feedback loops between different components of both our educational

and societal management systems in a manner analogous to the ways in which the interacting forces which control the movements of the planets were mapped or, more precisely, in the manner in which the interactions and feedback loops that control the functioning and evolution of an ecological habitat can, with great difficulty, be mapped².

So the best I can do is offer a few provocative remarks which just might whet some readers' appetites sufficiently to motivate them to refer back to the publications on which they are based. The article will follow a, somewhat discursive, cyclical, path moving from discussions of education to public management and back again, largely taking the same course as the evolution of our research.

Cycle Number I.

So let us start where we began - with education. Over the years, my colleagues and I have reviewed the writings of educational philosophers, studies of the effects that the development of different patterns of competence (including within that concept such things as perceptions of society, how it works, and one's own role within it³) have on people's lives, the organisations they work for, and the societies in which they live⁴. For the purposes of this article, it is most convenient to hint at the conclusions emerging from this work by very briefly summarising - and thus necessarily overstating - some results from our surveys of the opinions of parents, teachers, and children.

The overwhelming majority of those we interviewed thought that the main goals of education are "To develop the confidence and initiative required to introduce change", to nurture, and give people recognition for, the diverse, often idiosyncratic, talents they possess, and, while recognising that mastering the formal knowledge on which they are based is a waste of time, to help people acquire the credentials that appear to control entry to jobs.

Interestingly, as the chapter by Page and Shapiro in Elkin and Soltan's edited book⁵, might lead one to expect, the other research reported in the books mentioned in endnote no. 1 to all intents and purposes supports our interviewees' opinions.

Let me unpack this a bit. One of the things revealed by our reviews of the literature on the state of the planet⁶ is that, contrary to the views expressed by Lawler in the previously mentioned collection of articles, our species is set on a disaster course that will lead to its extinction, carrying the planet as we know it with it. To avoid this fate we will have to radically change our way of life. While it is unlikely that most of those we interviewed had change of this magnitude in mind when they said that one of the main goals of education was to nurture "the confidence and initiative required to introduce change" it therefore seems urgent to answer to the question "What are the competencies required to bring about radical change and how are they to be nurtured?". In point of fact, although it may be true that few of our respondents had such radical change in mind, it has since emerged that about 40% of the population of Great Britain knows that, for our species to survive, it will be necessary to get rid of our motor cars, our planes, our chemical-intensive agriculture, our centralised production and distribution networks, our so-called defence systems, and our banking and insurance arrangements⁷. What does an economy society without all these

activities and sources of employment look like? And, bearing in mind that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are now dying each year because we in the West have not made these changes, what arrangements can be made to enable our fellow-citizens in the West to survive the transition?

Yet, somewhat paradoxically, while very many people can see the need for such change, most still seem somehow to believe that, with a little tinkering, we can go on living pretty much as we do now. Such, indeed, is the message embedded in many inter-governmental reports such as the “Bruntland Report”⁸ which seem incapable of shedding conventional notions of “development”. Unfortunately, our own research leads us to a very different conclusion. As far as we can see, for our species to survive, our way of life will have to differ from our current way of life by as much as life in an agricultural society differed from that in a hunter-gatherer society. And just as no one in a hunter-gatherer society could envisage what an agricultural society would look like, so no one in our society can envisage what a sustainable society will look like. There can be no blueprint.

So, just what are the competencies which the educational system needs to nurture if people are to contribute in one way or another to the evolution of an as yet undiscernable way of life? And how are they to be nurtured?

In the course of this article I will suggest some components of an answer to this question.

But first I would like to say something about the second set of educational objectives endorsed by our interviewees, namely the nurturance of diversity. Activities designed to nurture the idiosyncratic, high-level, competencies of each child must, after all, lie at the heart of any concept of liberal education worth the name. Although one might not suspect it from looking at the so-called “educational” system as we know it, or at the paraphernalia of the educational and psychological testing movement, there is, in fact, ample evidence (some of which I will review later) which shows that, given appropriate environments, people have the capacity to develop a huge variety of very different qualities and that these diverse talents are needed by organisations and society⁹. As Spearman¹⁰, the father of *g*, put it: “Every normal man, woman, and child is a genius at something. The problem is to identify at what.”.

But what we actually encounter in our “educational” system is a system which renders most of these talents invisible¹¹. Instead, it arranges people in a single hierarchy, entrappingly codenamed “ability”. Although there is a sense in which the scientific “existence” of something which might be called “general cognitive ability” has now been placed beyond reasonable doubt¹², its predictive power has been wildly over-exaggerated. Furthermore, while its pre-eminence has been reinforced by rendering other abilities invisible¹³, the main reason for its pre-eminence and the main reason why the development of measures of other qualities has been neglected is that it performs an extremely important sociological function. That function is to legitimise the allocation of “the rich man to his castle and the poor man to his gate”¹⁴ as the hymn “All Things Bright and Beautiful” used to put it before the verse was eliminated for political correctness. The sociological effect of creating a deeply divided society legitimised by this single-factor concept of ‘ability’ is to terrify everyone into doing all sorts of things they don’t want to do - such as working directly or indirectly for a

war machine or producing or marketing junk foods, junk toys, and junk research, or presenting themselves as other than they are. They do these things in order to avoid the fate of those deemed to lack this ‘ability’. (In passing we may note that, while the net result of this process - viz. most of us committing a numerous unethical acts every day - is of great concern in itself, it raises serious questions about the focus of individualistic moral philosophy and “moral education” in particular. It suggests that that a major objective of moral education must be to nurture the tendency to get together with others to understand and influence the wider social forces which, as is now obvious, overwhelmingly determine behaviour¹⁵).

But, once we challenge the notion of a single-factor concept of “ability”, it is not only some versions of “liberal” morality that begin to fall apart. So, too, do most images of a just society based on a “meritocracy” - for how can differential access to the good things in life be justified if people not only have very different talents to contribute but also, as we will see in more detail later, need to contribute in those very ways if our species is to survive?

At this point, although we have already said a great deal about it, we may focus for a moment on the third major concern of our interviewees: their concern to gain credentials which will buy entry to jobs. And again it turns out that they know more than many people give them credit for ... for most of them already know that mastering the content on which those credentials are based is a waste of time. The knowledge they are required to master and regurgitate is out-of-date when it is taught, does not relate to their personal or occupational problems, and forgotten by the time it is needed^{16, 17}. Yet, precisely because these credentials seemingly¹⁸ play such a vital role in allocating position and status, it is the acquisition of them that comes to dominate schools.

It is vitally important to understand what is being said here, not least because it does not seem to have been understood by the authors of the three articles that prompted me to pen this response. For example, Blitz, in common with many academic authors, asserts that there is a major conflict between the qualities that the employment system requires the educational system to nurture and those which anyone genuinely interested in education would set about nurturing. In reality there is little such conflict. What there is (and it is an even more difficult problem to tackle than any real conflict between vocational and educational goals) is a stark conflict between genuinely educational goals and the *sociological* functions that the so-called educational system performs for society. Widespread failure to understand the difference, and mis-representation of the problem by authorities like Blitz, only enhances the power of these sociological forces. In this context it may be useful to refer to another chapter (this time by Steiner) in Elkin and Soltan’s book. What Steiner shows is that the level of credentials demanded for entry to most occupations has inflated out of all recognition whilst there has been little change in the competencies actually required to do the jobs ... and, further, that the competencies that are really needed are not represented in the credentials.

Cycle Number II.

Having briefly cantered over some issues pertinent to a discussion of liberal education and liberal public management, let me now return first to the question of how to

nurture diversity on the one hand and the confidence and initiative to introduce change on the other ... and then again take the discussion forward by reviewing the problems which such work poses many people's concept of liberal government (or societal management).

I will begin by summarising some observations we made in the course of research we conducted (in both elementary and secondary schools) into the effectiveness of, and barriers to, inter-disciplinary, enquiry-oriented, group-based, project work conducted in the environments around schools.

In one of the elementary schools we studied¹⁹, we found the pupils engaged in a project designed to get something done about the pollution in the local river. The project, its organization, its effects, and the problems it posed for evaluation all merit detailed discussion, but only the briefest account can be given here. Interested readers should refer to one of the sources cited. Some pupils decided that the first thing to do was to measure the pollution in the river. Some of them then set about collecting samples of the river water and trying to analyze it. This took them to the not-so-local university where they worked with members of the university staff. Note that these pupils were developing the *competencies* of the scientist: The ability to identify problems, the ability to invent ways of investigating them, the ability to obtain help, the ability to familiarize themselves with a new field, and the ability to find ways of summarizing information. Other pupils decided that more progress in documenting the pollution was to be made by recording the dead fish and plants along the river bank. Still others argued that all this was beside the point: The river was clearly polluted and the problem was to get something done about it. Some then set about drawing pictures of the dead fish and plants with a view to releasing community action. The objective was not to depict what was seen *accurately*, but to represent what had been seen in a way that would evoke emotions that would lead to action. While the "scientists" mentioned above sought to describe the results of their work in what might be termed a classic academic format, other pupils again argued that that was irrelevant and set about generating slogans, prose, and poetry that would evoke emotions that would lead to outrage and action. The *criteria* for what constituted effective reading and writing thus differed markedly from those which dominate most classrooms and they varied from pupil to pupil. Still other pupils argued that, if anything was to be done about the river, it was necessary to get the environmental standards officer to do his job. (It turned out that he knew all about the pollution but had done nothing about it.) This led some pupils to set up domino-like chains to influence politicians and public servants. This in turn led the factory that was causing the problem to get at the pupils' parents saying that, unless this teacher and her class was stopped, they would all lose their jobs. Unabashed, some pupils set about examining the economic basis for the factory's claims.

Note that this teacher was not so much concerned with enhancing pupils' specialist *knowledge* in each of these areas (though, even if it had been, documenting that knowledge would have posed insuperable problems for evaluators steeped in classical measurement theory because the knowledge to be documented was largely idiosyncratic and tacit) but to nurture a wide range of *different competencies* in her pupils. These competencies were not limited to substantive areas of investigation but also included the ability to contribute to group processes, including such things as the ability to put people at ease, the ability to de-fuse the intolerance which develops

between people who contribute in very different ways to a group process (e.g., the intolerance of the “artists” for the “scientists”), the ability to publicize the observations of the quiet “ideas person”, and the ability to “sell” the benefits of the unusual educational process to parents. The teacher in fact devoted considerable attention to highlighting the different types of contribution which different children were making to the group process. As a result, they stopped thinking of each other in terms of “smart vs. dumb” and instead noted what each was good at. In this way, the normal process of differentiation between pupils within schools was turned on its side. When this process appeared not to be working, the teacher would initiate discussions of what individual pupils tended to do spontaneously outside school and how those motivations could be tapped to elicit behaviour which would make a contribution to the group process.

In an American context, it is important to emphasize that the work just described, while superficially similar to the work reported in the hundreds of accounts of project-based education that are to be found in the literature²⁰, was in fact dramatically different to most of them because the notion of *what was to be learnt* was different. Pupils were to learn to lead, to invent, to put people at ease, to create political turbulence, etc. The objective was not that they should “learn” in the sense of acquiring stocks of standard, formal, low-level, verbal *knowledge*. The ability to build up idiosyncratic combinations of up-to-date specialist knowledge - yes - but that was different. The dozens of projects of this sort studied by Grannis²¹ and ourselves thus went far beyond those described in the widely publicized work of Gardner and his colleagues²². The teachers we are talking about here were not dealing with six or seven “intelligences” or areas of skilled performance but with the ability to carry out one or another of a huge range of necessary, and mutually supportive, activities. It is true that all of these demand and reveal some form of intelligence and related abilities of the kind indicated by such terms as “the ability to observe” and “the ability to reason”. But they also demand a wide range of additional components of competence - the ability to learn from the effects of one’s actions and modify one’s behaviour accordingly, the ability to persist, the ability to get help, and so on. It is also vitally important to note that none of these components of competence can be meaningfully developed or assessed generically - across all kinds of potentially valued activity - but only in the context of the specific activity being undertaken. Thus one person will display a great deal of creativity while creating classroom disruption, another while putting people at ease, and another while finding ways to undertake a scientific study.

There are many things to be learnt from reflecting on this example. Not only do we see how the objective of nurturing diverse competencies can be operationalised, we also see that “the confidence and initiative required to introduce change” is not an *individual* characteristic but an emergent property of a group and dependent on many people with different talents contributing in different ways.

Beyond that, one can glimpse some of the barriers which prevent such educational activities being more widely implemented. This work was dependent on an extraordinary teacher who had built up the necessary understandings and competencies over perhaps 20 years. One cannot expect other teachers to do these things without (among other things) a much better framework for thinking about multiple talents and how they are to be nurtured - and without tools to help them to

design and monitor some 30 individualised competency-oriented developmental programmes all going on at once.

One also sees how such work is driven out of schools by centrally decreed national curricula prescribing content which all children are supposed to master and by an assessment system which, to all intents and purposes, measures all children against a common yardstick. And, if the pupils are unable to get formal recognition for their talents, how are their teachers to get credit for having nurtured them?

So we see endless tasks that have been neglected by educationalists and researchers. In reality, these sins of omission amount to grossly unethical collective behaviour. Not only do they deprive most children of the opportunity to develop and get recognition for their talents - talents that are urgently needed by society - the talents teachers fail to nurture are the very talents that are required to introduce the changes that are necessary if our species is to survive. So teachers themselves lack the “confidence and initiative” required to introduce societally urgent change. Put bluntly, they emerge as (collectively) behaving in a grossly incompetent and unethical manner – although they are not, of course, alone in this.

But next let us now look at some teachers who were trying to do something similar but were less successful.

Very many - usually inexperienced - teachers announce, *pace* Blitz, that they are going to encourage their pupils to think. They then set about posing them open-ended questions and prompting them to ask questions themselves. The next morning they are greeted by parents saying things like “I don’t want you to encourage my son to ask any more questions. He asks too many fuxxing questions already. Your job is to have him sit still, do as he’s told, learn what he is supposed to learn, and pass his examinations. Furthermore, I don’t want you doing these things with my neighbour’s kid either. If you do, he will do better in life than mine.”

It is not possible here to develop an appropriate response to this problem in any detail. But one way to ameliorate it would be to create a variety of distinctively different educational programmes, document all the intended and unintended, desirable and undesirable, short- and long-term, personal and social, consequences of each (“all” because what is good in some ways may be bad in others, “short- and long-term” because what is good in the short-term may be bad in the long-term, “personal and social” because what is good for the individual may be bad for society) and to feed that information outward to the public so that they can make informed choices between them.

Now. What have we here? Here we have a statement that it is the job of the public servant to create variety and experimentation, to arrange for comprehensive (as distinct from reductionist) evaluation of the alternatives, and to feed that information to the public to make their own choices instead of upward in a bureaucratic hierarchy to distant elected representatives to make decisions binding on all. Liberal indeed.

So now we have radically new job definitions for public servants ... carrying with them a requirement for new staff appraisal procedures ... and, essentially, a new understanding of “democracy”. And, of course, not all public servants and teachers

can do everything: *pervasive* change is needed. So we arrive at a similar position to that we encountered when looking at pupils engaged in the process of introducing change into their communities. Both the public service and the teaching profession requires a wide range of people who do very different things ... noticing problems, seeking out information, securing funding, and handling interpersonal conflicts ... to reiterate but a few.

But let us come back to this democracy issue. For here we see that feeding information to distant elected representatives tends to lead inexorably to authoritarian prescription instead of to making arrangements whereby people who have different values and priorities can go their own way, let alone creating a ferment of innovation and learning. But how to ensure that these public servants and teachers act on information in an innovative way in the long-term public interest? At least part of the answer is by exposing their behaviour to the public gaze²³.

Interestingly, Mill (in 1861) wrote: "Instead of the function of governing, for which it is radically unfit, the proper office of a representative assembly is to ... compel a full exposition and justification of all (acts) ... It should be apparent to all the world who did everything, and through whose default anything was left undone". How does this chime in with notions of liberal public management?

At the heart of liberalism lies an antipathy to government ... or, at least, government regulation by (to use the words employed by Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill) committees of (usually authoritarian) ignoramuses ... or, at least, distrust in the wisdom of committees of ignoramuses. On the other hand, there is a tendency among many liberal thinkers to overlook the widespread nefarious and unethical activities of big business (often legitimised and facilitated by governmental legislation clandestinely introduced by the same big businesses) to which Smith tried so hard to alert us.

The opposition to authoritarian committees deciding what we must all do (or not do) or think, is more than well founded for, as Smith and Hayek were at pains to point out, not only is it conspicuously the case that - as in education - well intentioned public action typically does not work (and, indeed, usually produces its opposite), there can, in fact, be no such thing as a wise man or woman. The basis for making this striking statement is profoundly simple: The most important information required to take wise decisions cannot be available! If A initiates a course of action in location X, and, unknown to him, B initiates a course of action in location Y, it is impossible to know what will happen as these two courses of action come together.

Worse still, the information on the basis of which action has to be taken is always grossly incomplete and widely dispersed in the hearts, hands, and heads of billions of people, all of whom possess unique expertise. (The information is in their hearts and hands as well as their heads because much of it is not articulated and is often skill-based rather than formulated in words.)

To solve this problem, Smith and Hayek proposed the "market mechanism". This was envisaged as *a societal experimentation learning and management system which would act on information which was necessarily incomplete, dependent for its implications and effects on other changing information, and widely dispersed in the*

hearts and heads of billions of people. It would not only initiate action on the basis of such information but also learn from the effects of that action and take such further (corrective) action as necessary.

The basic idea of the “market mechanism” was that, if people liked what A was doing, they could purchase his goods or services or invest in his enterprise. So, if they were doing the right things, both A’s and B’s enterprises would prosper and, as the results came together, previously unimaginable things would happen.

Note that what was proposed was quintessentially a societal experimentation, learning, and management *system*. *The market mechanism has no other raison d’être*. It does not endorse riches for riches sake. It does not laud money. It does not endorse a divided society which compels the have-nots to join in the destructive processes of the wider society.

What Smith and Hayek offered was a design for a learning society - but a learning society very different from what most people have in mind when they use the term today. It was a design for a *society* which innovated, experimented, and learned *without anyone within it having to know anything very much*. It was decentralized, organic (with many feedback loops and potentialities), nonauthoritarian, and, like evolution itself, grossly *inefficient* in bureaucratic terms. It was the ultimate expression of participative democracy: Everyone involved could “vote with their pennies” independently on a myriad of issues instead of voting every five years or so for a package of issues or “wise” governors. It did not depend on intellectuals or explicit verbal knowledge. People could attend to their feelings and vote accordingly.

Unfortunately, the proposed “market-based” solution to the problem of how to design a society which innovates and learns without anyone having to know anything very much (whilst at the same time harnessing widely dispersed information) runs into major difficulties which I cannot summarise here. Suffice it to say that they include the following:

- 1) The market does not take account of much important information ... such as that relating to sustainability.
- 2) It depends for its effective operation on costs and prices having some substantive basis. But, in reality, the costs and prices of most goods and services in modern society are virtually meaningless because (i) major costs have been externalised to the third world or the future, and (ii) they are largely determined by an accretion of expedient decisions about which costs to load onto producers and suppliers and which to spread over the whole community.
- 3) It does not deliver high quality of life because quality of life mainly depends on things that cannot be commoditised and bought and sold - like security for the future and an atmosphere in which one can survive. (It is worth noting that, even in the short term, quality of life depends mainly on quality of working life and this is driven down by the demands of the so-called “market process”).
- 4) It does not reward innovation because “climates of enterprise and innovation” depend on the (mostly invisible) contributions of many people, most of whom get scant reward for their efforts.

What is perhaps in some ways worse is that, although we have been led to believe we are living in a market economy which will somehow help us to solve our problems,

this is far from being the case. In reality, we live in heavily managed economies. Money does not provide the grist for a self-managing system. Rather, the control of cash flows is used as a management tool to compel compliance with the demands of centralised authorities, themselves largely under the control of big business.

Let me now approach the problem we face from another starting point.

The situation in which we find ourselves can be compared to that in which ships' captains found themselves prior to Newton. Having got to their destinations they were dependent on a favourable wind to blow them home again. They could not sail *into* the wind. As is also the case with our social policies, they knew where they wanted to get to; their objectives. And the conventional wisdom at the time, enunciated by huge networks of learned and dedicated bureaucrats (priests), told them exactly what they should do. They should follow the behavioural prescriptions of the church and make sacrifices to the Gods.

Today, we are told by hundreds of thousands self-styled economists, bureaucrats, and politicians (the priests of our time) to have faith in the marketplace and the goodwill and actions of ever more centralized leaders and bureaucrats.

But what actually made it possible to develop relatively safe networks of sailing boats?

Before Newton, it was not even possible to conceptualize - think about - "force". There was just the wind and the waves. Whatever was "in" the wind had to be made visible, measurable, discussable. Newton did this by jumping first in the same direction as the wind and then into the wind and measuring the length of his jumps. The difference between the two gave him a measure of the strength of the wind. One now knew that there was a common, invisible, but measurable, property in the wind, the waves, falling apples, and between the planets. "Force" was real, visible, measurable. Its interacting components could be mapped - as in the interacting forces operating between the planets or the forces acting on sailing boats. One could then invent ways of intervening in them - such as by putting keels on sailing boats to harness the equal and opposite reaction to the force of the wind on a sailing boat which must (by some apparently absurd logic) be in the sea!

On the basis of this cumulated madness, otherwise known as the classic academic and scientific theory-building, it was possible to begin the process of designing boats that could sail into the wind.

But then, to get a safe network of sailing boats, one needed a whole host of other developments. One needed charts of the seas. One needed the concepts of latitude and longitude. One needed sextons and, most difficult to obtain, chronometers so that ships captains could work out where they were and decide what to do about it. One needed networks of lighthouses. One needed associations of people to raise the funds required to pay the lighthouse keepers.

Few of these developments could have been anticipated or called for, let alone designed, by politicians. A whole series of inter-related developments based on

absurd theoretical science was required. No one of them, on its own, would have made much difference. There was no panacea.

We have no analogous way of thinking about, let alone mapping, measuring, harnessing, and intervening in, the social forces that are driving our society against the rocks. We have only what are taken to be scheming capitalists and politicians. We conceptualise the forces which lead us to select and promote such people and the mythologies they use to subjugate and control as 'human nature' - greed. We fail to realise that our leaders are no more able to respond effectively to our cries of alarm than were ships' captains and priests to respond to the pleas of sailors. We have no tools for taking stock of where we are. We have no charts of the rocks and the harbours. We have no lighthouse keepers. We have a system of taxes that could pay for them - yes - but the priests of our time do not see the need to commission their work or have much idea of how to manage them so that they work effectively. We know only that we have to get out of this mess we are in and that our priests - our politicians - are fraudsters. And our potential chartists and lighthouse keepers - our bureaucrats - pocket the money we give them without delivering the services they claim to offer.

To move forward several sets of developments seem to be necessary:

- (a) We need to invent ways of thinking about, and then study, map, measure and find ways of intervening in, the social forces which control the operation of our society in a manner analogous to the way in which Newton mapped the forces controlling the movement of the planets. An appropriate name for such activity is "socio-cybernetics"²⁴. But to progress very far we need to fund Mavericks as crazy as Newton. In other words we need to change our ideas about how research is to be funded and the criteria applied when appraising the work of scientists.
- (b) We need to acknowledge that it is our public servants who play the main role in the management of modern society and that our task must be to find ways of enabling them to both manage society more effectively and sift information for good ideas and act on them in an innovative way in the long-term public interest.
- (c) We need to establish much better arrangements to study the "effectiveness" (judged in terms of their long-term social and ecological effects) of both public and "private" provision, find out why things are not working better, and invent better ways of doing things.
- (d) We need to set aside time for, and create a structure which will promote, what Kanter has termed "parallel organization activity"²⁵ to promote innovation within the public service. Not surprisingly, such activity looks remarkably like the activities in which we found those primary school pupils engaged.
- (e) We need to systematically set out to generate variety and choice in public provision, collect information on the short and long-term, personal and social, consequences of each option and feed that information to the public instead of upward in a bureaucratic hierarchy to elected representatives.
- (f) We need new job definitions and staff appraisal systems for our public servants so that they can get credit for engaging in the difficult and demanding processes that are involved in innovation and dealing with the complex issues involved in acting in the long-term public interest and catering differentially for different subgroups of people.

- (g) We need to establish a new interface between the public service and the public so that it is easier to supervise the activities of public servants and ensure that they are doing all that is necessary to act in an innovative way in the long-term public interest.

Toward a conclusion?

So, to bring this discussion to some kind of conclusion: What does a liberal perspective on public management in the modern world look like? Certainly not the laissez-fair capitalism to the dangers of which Adam Smith went to great lengths to warn us. Certainly not the kind of authoritarian, prescriptive, deceptive, dictatorship-by-the-majority, TNC-controlled “democracy” prescribing draconian measures like national curricula, high-stakes testing, and bans on smoking, to the dangers of which both Smith and Mill alerted us. Instead the form of the public management arrangements we require needs to be encouraged to evolve through a distinctly liberal, open, experimental, evolutionary process via the kinds of procedure we have been able to dimly discern here and are also perhaps visible in the writings of Dzur²⁶ and Sullivan²⁷ in *The Good Society*.

What does a distinctively liberal educational process look like? Certainly not like any of the things we see in most of our schools. Certainly it involves a wide variety of schools experimenting with a huge variety of distinctively different educational processes each accompanied by multiple, comprehensively-oriented, evaluations carried out by researchers with diametrically opposed values, orientations, and research procedures. Certainly it involves a focus on creating, within all schools, climates of innovation engaging the talents of a huge variety of people working under the umbrella of the “teaching” profession. Certainly it involves the nurturance of diversity within and between classrooms. Certainly it involves the evolution of alternative images of science - ecological, as distinct from reductionist, science. Certainly it involves the evolution of new concepts of competence: Competence which has centrally to do with collectively seeking to understand and map the socio-cybernetic forces which undermine well-intentioned public action and inventing ways of intervening in them. And certainly it involves an explicit emphasis on evolving new concepts of public management ... new understandings of what is meant by democracy, bureaucracy, and citizenship (and not, of course, teaching the received “wisdom” of Marx, Mill, or Smith).

If we have learned nothing else in our ramblings, it is that we urgently need new, distinctively liberal, images of both public management and education if our species and our planet are to survive.

Notes

- 1 The results are available in detail in Raven and Stephenson (2001) [in which a “learning society” is taken to be one which innovates and learns without anyone having to know anything very much], Raven (1994) [in which “effective education” is taken to be an education which nurtures diverse generic high-level competencies like “initiative”], and Raven (1995).
- 2 Examples of the kind of diagram required will be found in Morgan (1986) and Raven (1995). As will be explained later, an appropriate name for this domain of research and theorising would be “socio-cybernetics”.
- 3 Indeed it has turned out that, very surprisingly, competence in modern society is *primarily* dependent on people’s beliefs about society, how it works, and their role in it .
- 4 The most recent and most comprehensive summary of this work will be found in Raven and Stephenson (2001). Raven (1994) offers an earlier, shorter, summary based on Raven (1977) and (1984/1997).
- 5 Page and Shapiro (1999).
- 6 See Part II of Raven (1995).
- 7 See Raven (1995) for sources.
- 8 Bruntland Report (1987).
- 9 See Raven and Stephenson (2001) and Raven (1984/1997) for summaries of this material, but note the summary that appears in a most unlikely place - the Waddell Report on School Examinations (1978).
- 10 Spearman (1926).
- 11 See Raven (2002).
- 12 See Raven, Prieler, and Benasch (2005).
- 13 See especially Raven (2002). But it is also of great interest that Spearman (1925) noted that his *g* had emerged from the correlations between tests (e.g. of “scientific” or “reading” ability) that had little construct validity and deployed in institutions that did not merit description as “educational” institutions because they did not educe - draw out - the talents of the pupils. (For a discussion of the lack of construct validity of the tests used in schools see Raven, 1991).
- 14 See again Raven (2002), but also e.g., Jencks et al. (1972) and Hope (1984) as alternative sources.
- 15 Even more strikingly it suggests that the focus on individualistic psychology has been seriously misguided ... for the observation shows that behaviour is mainly determined by forces external, rather than internal, to the individual. So, if psychologists are to understand and predict behaviour, they should pay much more attention to discerning and mapping these external social forces.
- 16 Knowledge has a half-life of a year: people forget 50% after 1 year, 75% after 2, 82.5 after 3 and so on.
- 17 The cumulative effect of these processes is that some two thirds of the money spent on the so-called educational system is wasted so far as the development of human potential is concerned.
- 18 Actually, the work of Hope (1984) and others shows that these credentials are less important than is usually assumed. And the work of Schmidt and Hunter (1998) and others shows that educational credentials have zero predictive validity to occupational performance (although there are criterion problems at the heart of such studies). *Years* of education, but not level of qualification at any one level, predict social mobility.

- 19 Raven, Johnstone, and Varley (1985); Raven (1994, 2000).
- 20 This literature is reviewed in Raven (1994).
- 21 Grannis (1983).
- 22 Gardner (1987, 1991); Hatch & Gardner (1990); Krechevsky & Gardner (1990).
- 23 I have developed the notions of “democracy” and “bureaucracy” briefly glimpsed here more fully in my *New Wealth of Nations* (1995) and summarised them in *The Good Society*, 9, 31-37.
- 24 Cybernetics is the study of guidance and control mechanisms in animals and machines. It is important to mention the animals because, otherwise, cybernetics becomes identified with designing the control mechanisms of such things as interplanetary missiles. So *socio-cybernetics* becomes the study of the hidden control mechanisms that control the operation of society ... and the design of better ones.
- 25 Kanter (1985).
- 26 Dzur (2004).
- 27 Sullivan (2004).

References

- Bruntland Report. (1987). *Our Common Future: World Commission on Environment and Development*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Dzur, A. W. (2004). Democratic professionalism: Sharing authority in civic life. *The Good Society*, 13, 6-13.
- Elkin, S. L., & Soltan, K. E. (Eds.). (1999). *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Gardner, H. (1987). Developing the spectrum of human intelligence. *Harvard Education Review*, 57, 187-193.
- Gardner, H. (1991). *Intelligence in Seven Phases*. Harvard Project Zero.
- Grannis, J. C. (1983). Ecological observation of experimental education settings. *Environment and Behavior*, 15, 21-52.
- Hatch, T. C., & Gardner, H. (1990). If Binet had looked beyond the classroom: The assessment of multiple intelligences. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 4, 15-429.
- Hope, K. (1984). *As Others See Us: Schooling and Social Mobility in Scotland and the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jencks, C., Smith, M., Acland, H., Bane, M. J., Cohen, D., Gintis, H., Heyns, B., & Michelson, S. (1972/3). *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. New York: Basic Books; London, England: Penguin Books.
- Kanter, R. M. (1985). *The Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work*. Hemel Hempstead: Unwin Paperbacks.
- Krechevsky, M., & Gardner, H. (1990). Multiple Intelligences, multiple chances. In D. Inbar (Ed.), *Second Chance in Education: An Interdisciplinary and International Perspective* (pp. 69-88). London: Falmer Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1861/1962). *Representative Government*. London: Dent.
- Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of Organization*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Page, B. I. and Shapiro, R. Y. (1999). *The rational public and beyond*. In S. L. Elkin, & K. E. Soltan, *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institution* (pp 93-116). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press,.

- Raven, J. (1977). *Education, Values and Society: The Objectives of Education and the Nature and Development of Competence*. London: H. K. Lewis (now available from the author at 30, Great King Street, Edinburgh EH3 6QH).
- Raven, J. (1984/97). *Competence in Modern Society: Its Identification, Development and Release*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press; First published in 1984 in London, England, by H. K. Lewis.
- Raven, J. (1991). *The Tragic Illusion: Educational Testing*. Unionville, New York: Trillium Press.
- Raven, J. (1994). *Managing Education for Effective Schooling: The Most Important Problem Is to Come to Terms with Values*. Unionville, New York: Trillium Press.
- Raven, J. (1995). *The New Wealth of Nations: A New Enquiry into the Nature and Origins of the Wealth of Nations and the Societal Learning Arrangements Needed for a Sustainable Society*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press; Sudbury, Suffolk: Bloomfield Books.
- Raven, J. (2000). Rethinking democracy. *The Good Society (Journal of the Committee on the Political Economy of the Good Society [PEGS])* 9(3), 31-37 (with responses from Robert E. Lane and William Ophuls, 38-42).
- Raven, J. (7/7/02). *Intelligence, Engineered Invisibility, and the Destruction of Life on Earth*. WebPsychEmpiricist. http://www.wpe.info/papers_table.html
- Raven, J., Johnstone, J., & Varley, T. (1985). *Opening the Primary Classroom*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Raven, J., Prieler, J., & Benesch, M. (2005). A Replication and Extension of the Item-Analysis of the Standard Progressive Matrices *Plus*, Together with a comparison of the results of Applying Three Variants of Item Response Theory. http://wpe.info/papers_table.html
- Raven, J., & Stephenson, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Competence in the Learning Society*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.
- Schmidt, F. L., & Hunter, J. E. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(2), 262-274.
- Smith, A. (1776/1981). *The Wealth of Nations*. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Mddx.
- Spearman, C. (1926). *Some Issues in the Theory of g (Including the Law of Diminishing Returns)*. Address to the British Association Section J - Psychology, Southampton, England, 1925. London: Psychological Laboratory, University College: Collected Papers.
- Sullivan, W. M. (2004). Can professionalism still be a viable ethic? *The Good Society*, 13, 15-20.
- Waddell, J. (1978). (Chairman). *School Examinations*. London: HMSO.