In Search of the Comprehensive Ideal: By way of an Introduction

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This introductory article first gives a brief overview of the articles in the remainder of this special issue. It then considers what we can learn about the comprehensive ideal, and what questions still remain about it, from the treatment it receives in these articles. After an initial discussion of the nature of the common school, two dimensions are identified in which interpretations of the comprehensive ideal often differ: how fully the content of such schooling is filled in, and what its scope is considered to be. Six categories of values are identified to which arguments both for and against the comprehensive ideal may appeal: educational values; values of community; justice and equality; respect; freedom; and non-discrimination. It is suggested that in a context of value-pluralism there can be no canonical interpretation of the comprehensive ideal.

The 'comprehensive ideal' is somewhat elusive. The notion of the common school runs through this volume, and even the contributors who do not explicitly discuss arguments for and against the common school are discussing principles directly relevant to our evaluation of the common school in comparison to alternative arrangements. But most of the contributors do not explicitly discuss the nature of the comprehensive ideal. My purpose in this article is, first, in an editorial role, to give a brief overview of the structure of the volume and the topics addressed, and then to consider what we can learn about the comprehensive ideal, and what questions still remain about it, from the treatment it receives, directly or indirectly, here. In the process some relevant points of contact and differences between the authors will emerge; I shall give particular attention to the range of underlying values to which both advocates and critics of common schooling appeal.[1]

It is in this present section that the comprehensive ideal is most clearly in focus. Michael Fielding follows up Richard Pring's lead article by wanting to take Pring's own commitment to the good of community rather further, stressing the democratic nature of the community in question and the radical implications of taking the ideals of the common school seriously. Robin Barrow in contrast is more cautious. While he recognises the importance of goods associated with a flourishing community, such as mutual respect and understanding, and social harmony, when it comes to arguments for or against the common school, the comprehensive ideal is outweighed, in Barrow's eyes, by specifically educational concerns. For Harry Brighouse too the comprehensive ideal, understood as involving the integration of students across their diversity, can be outweighed by another value, in this case the demands of social justice.

For Pring the comprehensive ideal engages importantly with culture, in that it both seeks to nurture and promote a common culture, and also has to respect diversity of culture. The contributors to the section on 'Common Schools in Multicultural Societies' pursue questions raised by this dual commitment within a context of pluralism. Walter Feinberg examines in more depth the relationship between (in Pring's terms) the descriptive and evaluative senses of 'culture', arguing that there has been a flattening out of former

evaluative hierarchies that is educationally unproductive; he proposes a conception of 'culture-for-educational-purpose'. Hanan Alexander examines and finds wanting the conception of rational autonomy that for many liberals is central to the capacity of individuals to evaluate the cultural possibilities open to them in a plural society. Arguing that evaluation must be rooted in specific traditions, he concludes that schools affiliated with such traditions can offer as good a preparation for liberal democracy as common schools. Next, Meira Levinson tackles head-on the question of whether common schools and multicultural education are, as one would expect, mutually reinforcing. She concludes that, while they express similar ideals, their link in practice is in the confusions and challenges they face. Dianne Gereluk takes up a specific and currently controversial challenge for both common schools and multicultural education: what restrictions, if any, should common schools put on the clothing that students wear as an expression of their cultural identity?

The following section continues the theme of common schools in plural societies by focusing on the role of religion. Articles in this volume do not for the most part discuss arguments for and against the existence of, or state support of, separate faith schools (though an argument for these is implicit in Alexander's article).[2] The concern of the contributors in the section on 'Common Schools and Religion' is what kind of presence, if any, religion should have *within* common schools. David Carr, Kevin Williams and Kenneth Strike, exploring many aspects of this question in their respective articles, converge on the conclusion that, contrary to the traditions of France (discussed by Williams) and the United States (discussed by Strike), religious discourse should not be excluded from the common school but has an important role within the education it offers.

The next section takes up a practical and political issue that to many advocates of the comprehensive ideal will seem an obstacle to the realisation of that ideal: the demand for parental choice between schools. Rob Reich argues that both common schooling and educational choice are legitimate responses to pluralism, and that democratic societies can find ways of accommodating both. James Tooley, well known as an advocate of school choice, tackles Pring's claim that such choice stands in the way of the social justice and equality that common schools hope to achieve. Responding to recent arguments from Adam Swift, Tooley makes a moral case for school choice. Mary Healy, favouring common schools, argues that the commodification of schooling threatens the achievement of the aspirations of common schools, through its tendency to subvert the form of loyalty that is important in a flourishing community.

One central commitment of the comprehensive ideal is clearly to the inclusion of students regardless of their specific differentiating characteristics. As the debate on school choice shows, it does not directly follow from a commitment to inclusion that all must be included in common schools regardless of their own or their parents' wishes on the matter. It does follow that both in access to common schooling and in the education offered by common schools there should be no discrimination against particular students because they do not fit the 'norm'. The final section of this volume takes up issues of inclusion and non-discrimination in respect of three categories of differentiation:

disability and special needs; sexuality; and physical appearance. Lorella Terzi, like Brighouse, concentrates on the demands of justice, and works out a conception of these demands, drawing on Nussbaum's capabilities approach, for the specific case of students with disabilities and special educational needs. Ruth Cigman is concerned with the needs of the same class of students but concentrates on arguments from respect: do we, on grounds of respect, have to insist that *all* students with special needs must be educated in common schools? Kevin McDonough asks whether liberal philosophy of education can adequately address the challenges posed to it by and on behalf of queer students; he finds resources for answering the challenge in the liberal commitment to autonomy. Finally, Andrew Davis takes up a form of discrimination that is more rarely examined: 'lookism', or discrimination on the basis of physical appearance. In part drawing, like Cigman, on the value of respect, he concludes that the common school should take lookism into account in the education it offers and that doing so can be a route to tackling other forms of discrimination too.

It should not be surprising if no obvious consensus emerges from these articles about the nature of the comprehensive ideal, whether it should be supported, and if so why. It is in the nature of ideals that they resist precise articulation. The notion of the common school gives something concrete to work with; we can identify particular institutions as common schools, look at how they are functioning, compare one common school with another, or compare common schools with ones that are in one way or another separate or segregated. The notion of the comprehensive ideal is much harder to pin down. Nevertheless, if the term 'the comprehensive ideal' had never been invented, it would still be useful to have some shorthand way of referring to those values and aspirations that have led so many educational practitioners and theorists to support common schools, or at least to think that the burden of proof lies with those who do not support them. For if it were possible at all to give a neutral descriptive definition of a common school, it is clear that such a definition would not rationally compel anyone to favour such a school. The purpose of the remainder of this article is, first and briefly, to illustrate that (perhaps obvious) point, and then at greater length to seek to understand what may be meant by 'the comprehensive ideal', referring in the process to the various positions that the contributors to this volume appear to take in relation to that notion. I shall argue that what we refer to loosely as the comprehensive ideal must inevitably involve a number of values and aspirations that will not necessarily fit neatly together; that there are various dimensions along which understandings of the comprehensive ideal can vary. While I shall continue for convenience to use the phrase 'the comprehensive ideal', the argument will suggest that there can be many interpretations of such an ideal; perhaps, indeed, competing comprehensive ideals.

What is one committed to when one supports the common school?

For many supporters of common schools, the comprehensive ideal is something that, even if it is barely articulated, provides their justification for favouring such schools, and sometimes too the motivation for working actively to promote such schools. So one way to pursue an enquiry into the nature of the comprehensive ideal is to look into the reasons that people have for favouring and supporting common schools.

It is clear, first, that people may support particular common schools for a variety of reasons. Parents, for instance, may have a variety of reasons for wishing their child to attend a particular common school. But what should we expect of theorists, including philosophers of education, who in that role may be expected to pay more attention than parents to overarching principles and ideals? If a philosopher is committed to the comprehensive ideal, can we say more precisely what he or she is committed to?

Often a good way of understanding a practical commitment or moral position is to know what it is taken to exclude. In the case of common schools, it might at first sight seem obvious that someone who is committed to the comprehensive ideal, and therefore is a supporter of common schools, must be opposed to separate schools. But such a view would be too hasty, because it deals too simplistically with what it is to support or favour common schools, on the one hand, and certain sorts of distinctive schools, on the other. As the dedicatee of this volume, Terence McLaughlin, might have said, a more nuanced response is needed.

While it may be part of the comprehensive ideal as it is held by some writers (including probably Fielding in this volume) that there should be no separate or segregated schools, this is not true of all supporters of the common school. Richard Pring is one such; his lead article here shows that he is very much an advocate of the comprehensive ideal,[3] but at the end of the article he indicates that there could be a not incompatible role for faith-based schools. McLaughlin too was a prime example of a thinker and practitioner who was committed to the goods of education and wished to see those goods realised whether in common schools or faith schools. He was able to take such a view because he had a consistent understanding of what a good education in a liberal-democratic society would be, and was, therefore, able to evaluate both common schools and separate schools in terms of their capacity to promote such an education. Thus his support for common schools took the form not of backing any common school, come what may, but of understanding the strong arguments for common schools and, in the light of these arguments, taking very seriously the problems faced by such schools if they were to fulfil their promise (see especially McLaughlin, 2003). Likewise his support for separate schools took the form not of, say, backing parental choice whatever the educational outcome for the students might be, but of carefully arguing the proposition that *a certain kind* of faith school could contribute positively to the development of students' autonomy (McLaughlin, 1992b).

Nevertheless, without calling into question at all the sincerity of the belief of McLaughlin and of many others that *both* common schools (of a certain kind) *and* separate schools (of a certain kind) can be thoroughly good things, some would still want to ask whether there is not some inconsistency in seeking to support both kinds of school. For whatever accommodations we may need to make in practice, might it not still be said that the comprehensive *ideal* rules out separate schooling? One cannot answer such a question without a better understanding of what the comprehensive ideal involves and, also, an understanding of what the common school is taken to involve (since it is this that is being

contrasted with a notion of a separate school). I shall look first, though not at length, at our understanding of the common school.

What is the common school?

We can take a minimal definition of a common school from the paper in which McLaughlin drew together and systematised many of his distinctions, insights and arguments on common schooling. 'At the most basic level, a "common school" can be regarded as a school that is open to, and intended for, all students within a given society regardless of their specific differentiating characteristics' (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 122). This is a minimal definition in at least two ways: first, that from the fact that a school is 'open to, and intended for, all students . . .' nothing directly follows about the actual mix of students within such a school; and second, that such a definition says nothing about the nature of the education that students within the school will receive. I will say a little more about each point in turn.

First, when a school is nominally common according to the minimal definition (which refers to intention), there may still be empirical factors operating with the actual consequence that various 'differentiating characteristics' will make a difference to the actual composition of the student body. One kind of example could be drawn from the experience of the provision of comprehensive schools in certain parts of England during the rapid expansion of comprehensive schooling to which Pring refers, when the primary policy concern was to move away from selection according to measured ability. In some urban areas schools were set up that were nominally comprehensive in that they would admit any students from a given geographical area up to the limit of their capacity (and some of those schools were very large). Each such school was, then, a common school by the minimal definition so far. But often there continued to be schools selecting by ability that were accessible to students within the same geographical area, both private schools and even in some cases publicly funded schools. The complaint was often heard in that era that the common schools were only nominally comprehensive since the top few percent of the ability range was being 'creamed off'.

Another kind of example of the school that is only nominally common comes more to the fore where there are relatively sharp demographic differences between the areas served by different schools. In England one should perhaps not be surprised (though from the perspective of a more maximal understanding of the common school one might regret it) that there are many schools whose student body is entirely white; what has, rightly or wrongly, caused more comment and concern in recent years is the fact that there are schools whose student population is, say, almost entirely Asian and Muslim, even though the schools in question make no such distinctions in their admissions policy. It just happens that the schools are in areas where the local population is predominantly Asian and Muslim; and parental choice does the rest. There are, of course, comparable examples in many parts of the world, as Meira Levinson points out in her article in this volume. It may well be thought that such *de facto* segregated schools fall well short of the comprehensive ideal.

The second way in which the minimal definition of the common school is too minimal is that it says nothing about the education promoted within the school. As McLaughlin goes on to point out in the same article, the common school is usually held to incorporate a conception of a common education for the students.[4] A common education can in turn be given more or less minimal interpretations, as was pointed out by Eamonn Callan (1997, Chapter 7). At the minimal end, the common education might comprise no more than a list of subjects that are widely and almost uncontroversially accepted as educationally relevant: numeracy, literacy and some scientific basics (though even the supposed scientific basics are not uncontroversial, as shown by the disputes over 'intelligent design' to which Strike refers). Indeed this most minimal conception of a common education is too minimal to be at all distinctive of the common school, since a common curriculum can (as in the National Curriculum in England and Wales) be enforced in schools that are not common in other senses.

As regards curriculum, we can move further away from the minimal definition of a common school by specifying that the task of the curriculum is to build or maintain a common culture (which, as Pring points out, was a prime concern of many of the early advocates of common schooling), or to promote a shared sense of citizenship, and then attempting to work out the curricular implications of these commitments. There are issues raised here that I shall come back to below in discussing interpretations of the comprehensive ideal.

There is a further important element to be added to the minimal definition of the common school before we even arrive at anything like the more or less shared conception with which the contributors to this volume are working. This is, in effect, a rough specification of the nature of the 'given society'. For as McLaughlin points out (2003; see also Fielding in this volume) very different societies can promote a common education through common schools: the common education promoted through common schools in a theocratic society may in some respects be more like the separate education promoted through certain religious schools in a liberal-democratic society. But it is in the context of the latter sort of society that the arguments in this volume are played out.

There are, too, aspects of common schooling on which its advocates may differ. Is it implicit in the idea of common schools that one common school is—or ideally would be —rather similar to another? (One reason for including in the comprehensive ideal an idea of an essential similarity between one school and another may be derived from the thought that all students in common schools are to have a common education.) In 2001, a spokesperson for the New Labour government in England said that 'the day of the bog-standard comprehensive school is over'.[5] Even native speakers of British English are hard put to say where the phrase 'bog-standard' comes from, but its connotations are well understood. They are connotations both of a standard model (nothing special or exceptional) and of standards that are relatively basic or no more than adequate. So the phrase has a clearly pejorative tone, suggesting, above all, mediocrity; understandably, there were angry reactions from many teachers and teacher union leaders to the implication that the schools in which they were teaching were merely 'bog-standard'. But while the choice of language may have been, at best, ill-advised, the remark did issue a

challenge to existing common schools on two fronts: that standards should be raised, and that there should not be one standard model of common school: in other words, there should be diversity among common schools. While it is obvious that schools that are not intended to be common schools (that is, 'separate schools') may differ widely from one another, it is not so clear how far the comprehensive ideal, or any specific version of it, allows diversity between one common school and another. Nor is that issue resolved in this volume.

Up to this point, by examining the idea of the common school, we have raised some issues about what is or is not included in the comprehensive ideal. Any resolution of those issues will require closer attention to the values underlying or involved in that ideal. I shall look at these values in the final section of this article. Before that, I want to look further at the variety of interpretations to which the notion of the comprehensive ideal is subject. In the case of the common school, as we have seen, there is the possibility of a spectrum from minimal to maximal interpretations (an interpretative tactic often used by McLaughlin—see, for example, 1992a, 1996). Is it possible in a similar way to distinguish minimal from maximal interpretations of the comprehensive ideal?

Minimal and maximal interpretations of the comprehensive ideal

One striking difference between different articulations of 'the comprehensive ideal' is that some are far more fully specified than others. At one end of the scale there are expressions that give no indication as to what it would be for the ideal to be realised: such expressions might be considered pious platitudes or vague aspirations. Take, for instance, the idea put forward by P. E. Daunt in 1975 in a book called *Comprehensive Values*[6] (not explicitly as equivalent to 'the comprehensive ideal' but as 'the guiding defining principle of comprehensive education'): 'that *the education of all children is held to be intrinsically of equal value*' (Daunt 1975, p. 16). It is not that such an expression is meaningless. If it is possible to disagree with it, it must have some meaning, and we can be sure that in certain times and places there were people who would have disagreed with it without any compunction. Perhaps they rated the education of white people as more valuable than that of black people; or the education of boys as more valuable than that of girls; the education of people with high IQs as more valuable than that of people with lower IQs, or the education of people of the dominant religion as more important than that of people of a different faith or none. Today one is much less likely to find anyone willing to deny the proposition that the education of every child is intrinsically of equal value.[7] If that proposition is *part* of the comprehensive ideal, then the comprehensive ideal contains at least one element of major importance. If this proposition were the *whole* of the comprehensive ideal, we might conclude that nearly everyone now subscribes to (or, at least, pays lip service to) the comprehensive ideal. But that shows what is wrong with such an expression of the ideal: because it says very little by way of any practical consequences, it says nothing that will differentiate between proponents of some radically different educational policies. It is, in that sense, minimal.

Ideals that are less minimal, in this sense, are ones that have more content—ideals filled out in such a way that someone subscribing to them could know more concretely to what

it is that he or she is subscribing. An ideal that, say, every child should attend a school that has a mix of students in terms of parental occupation and income has greater specificity (and is correspondingly more open to dispute). It may not be possible to say what would, in this sense, be a maximal interpretation of the comprehensive ideal (since whatever specification is given, further specification will still be possible). But what is important there is that any specification above the minimal can go in a variety of directions: for instance, where one expression of the ideal puts weight on a mix of students in terms of parental occupation and income (in shorthand, in terms of socioeconomic class, as is emphasised by Brighouse in his article here), another will put more weight on mix in terms of religion (schools that are not committed to a particular religion *versus* separate faith schools), or on some, not always clearly defined—but see Feinberg in this volume—notion of culture, where that is not itself meant as a shorthand for 'religion and ethnicity'. At the origins of the comprehensive movement in England, as Pring shows, mix in terms of ability was the factor most emphasised. Discussions in this volume and elsewhere amply illustrate that different theorists of the comprehensive ideal put weight on different factors.

It is, besides, not clear that if mixing in one respect is good, mixing in as many respects as possible is better. Suppose for one educationalist the comprehensive ideal is a school system not divided along class lines; for another it is a school system not divided in terms of the intellectual ability of students; for another it a system not divided in terms of religion; and so on. It does not follow that all these educationalists will be satisfied by a system that mixes everyone up as much as possible. This is only partly because of practical issues—such as the inconveniences and potential restrictions on freedom involved in bussing, mentioned by Pring and Brighouse here; it is also because, as Levinson notes, there may be such a thing as too great a mix of educational influences on a child, making it difficult to achieve coherence in the education provided.

A similar point concerning the interpretation of the comprehensive ideal applies if we say that the comprehensive ideal involves the same curriculum for all. With no further specification, we may be left with a minimal notion of a common curriculum, as mentioned above. As Callan (1997) has noted, echoed here by Reich, such a curriculum would satisfy no-one and, hence, would not for anyone be constitutive of the comprehensive ideal. As we add more specification to the content of a common curriculum—building in, say, particular understandings of moral education and citizenship education, or a particular account of an intellectual and cultural inheritance to which all are entitled—we get more fleshed-out ideals, but are also likely to get a proliferation of different ideals as different thinkers develop their particular specifications of content. Perhaps part of the solution is that the comprehensive ideal must include room for diversity within the curriculum, but this too allows for multiple interpretations in terms of how much diversity and in which curriculum areas.

For the most part the articles in this volume do not go into any detail about the likely content of a common curriculum, with one important exception: the place of religion within a common curriculum. The movement for common schooling in the United States and in France—though less so in Britain—has had a strong secular tendency, where

secularism is understood not in terms of neutral inclusion of religious and non-religious perspectives, but rather in terms of the exclusion of religious perspectives. Pring towards the end of his article is uneasy about the extent to which common schools can do justice to religious perspectives (a point on which Fielding begs to differ). Carr, Williams and Strike in their different ways argue that contact with religious perspectives and religious discourse is an important element in the education of all children and, hence, in the curriculum of the common school.

Perhaps the one thing that all the interpretations of the comprehensive ideal so far mentioned have in common is that they refer explicitly or implicitly to the education of 'everyone'. Yet this term itself is open to interpretation. Does 'everyone' really mean everyone? I shall call this the question of the scope of the comprehensive ideal, and it gives us another way in which interpretations of that ideal can vary from minimal to maximal.

In fact, verbal articulations of 'the comprehensive ideal' tend to be ambiguous as regards their scope. Take as representative an earlier articulation from Pring: 'the comprehensive ideal is that all young people—irrespective of social class, economic circumstance, ethnic origin, intellectual power, geographic location—should be "emancipated" by the enhancement of their own powers' (Pring and Walford, 1997, p. 83). The final clause, of course, invokes an interpretation of the aims of the curriculum. What comes before that clause adds to the discriminations that are to be avoided yet another category of differentiation: geography. Pring's allusion, no doubt, was to the very reasonable point that children's access to educational opportunities should not be determined by whether they live—say, in inner cities or in leafy suburbs, or in industrial areas of Northern England or affluent areas of Greater London. But if we are to put weight on geographic location, a wider range of issues opens up.

There is a sense in which one can apply a comprehensive ideal to a single school, asking whether this school affords a good education to all in its surrounding area regardless of such categorisations as those above. But as the earlier example of 'creaming off' illustrates, and as is amply borne out by Fielding's article, advocates of the comprehensive ideal have aspirations beyond a single instance. Besides, if we are concerned with the quality of education within a common school, the nature of the surrounding community is not irrelevant. 'The common school is the neighbourhood school, and as such it reflects a particular kind of community', says Pring (2007, p. 000), who goes on to point out that a more liberating education may require exposure to and involvement in a wider community. But just how wide? Barrow too says: 'we should be thinking in terms not of local or parochial communities but of the community writ large. . . . For the community we are ultimately concerned with is presumably the community of the whole' (Barrow, 2007, p. 000). But Barrow is not explicit about the size of the whole. References to 'a' or 'the' whole society are quite common within expressions of the comprehensive ideal. But would the relevant whole society be—say, a state within the USA, or the United States? England or Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland (each of which has differences in educational policy and administration), or the United Kingdom?

We could go further, and perhaps we should. Levinson asks whether, in determining how 'common' a school is, or in asking to whom the common school is responsible, we should take as our reference group the population, not just of the locality or the nation, but of the world. If it is, as mentioned above, a part of the comprehensive ideal that 'the education of all children is held to be intrinsically of equal value', then what ethical reason can there be for restricting the scope of this claim to one nation, and denying that it applies to children in any other part of the world?[8] Yet while it may be an ideal that every child in the world should have an equally good education, there are limits to the extent to which, even in articulating an ideal, one can fill in its content without some reference to what is more local. One does not have to be a card-carrying communitarian to recognise that circumstances differ and that what may be appropriate in one place may be less so in another. There is something of an inverse relationship between the scope of an educational ideal and the specificity with which it can be filled out; there would be something rather bizarre about trying to set out a single detailed model of education for all children everywhere. Besides, there is a more practical reason for refraining from seeking to specify a comprehensive ideal in any detail at a global level. This is that if an expression of the ideal is to have any force in educational policy it must be applicable at the level at which policy is formulated and can be influenced. This level is usually that of the nation state or of some more local unit.

Yet it remains true that many of the people who advocate the comprehensive ideal for their own society will also be people who wish students to be educated for a sense of global citizenship, recognising with Feinberg that 'absolute national sovereignty is an idea whose time has come and whose time is swiftly passing away' (Feinberg, 2007, p. 000). Many of the same values that lead to advocacy of the comprehensive ideal for the students of one nation (so that the students will come to some sense of a shared culture and perhaps solidarity) also hold the seeds for the eventual breaking down of barriers between one nation and another. It is time to look further into what those values are.

Values underlying the comprehensive ideal

Many of the articles in this volume recognise that the common school is, as Reich argues, a response to pluralism. What is mostly understood by 'pluralism' is plurality of cultures within one society, as discussed explicitly by Levinson, Feinberg and others. But the term can also refer to the value-pluralism discussed by Isaiah Berlin and others. This, at its simplest, is just the recognition that there are many values, not just one supreme value (or value system) under which everything else that matters can be subsumed. Arguably value-pluralism offers a partial explanation of cultural diversity, in that cultures—in so far as we can identify them at all without the false reifying or essentialism that Feinberg and Levinson criticise—differ from one another partly in the different ways that they weigh and combine a variety of values. Value-pluralism underlies the position of several writers—Berlin himself, John Gray and William Galston—whom Alexander cites in support of a *modus vivendi* form of liberalism. As Alexander argues, it is often liberals of a different kind—ones with a strong commitment to one specific value, namely autonomy—who are among the strongest supporters of the common school rather than a diversity of schools. Yet we can see value-pluralism at work in arguments over the common school

as well. Probably no advocate and no critic of common schools rests their case on one single value. Both advocates and critics are likely to appeal to a plurality of values, and these may indeed be the same values—subject to different interpretations and different estimates of consequences—in each case.

On my reading of the articles in this volume the values in question mostly fall into five, or perhaps six, main categories.

The *first* category (a rather diverse one in itself) is that of *educational values*. Most of the contributors to this volume do not make a systematic distinction between educational and ethical values. Pring, for instance, mentions the importance of educational values, or evaluative conceptions of the nature of education, as important in arguments for the common school, and clearly sees these values as having an ethical underpinning. Nevertheless, a category of educational values is worth mentioning so as to allow for a position such as Barrow's, in which general ethical values are recognised but outweighed (in this context) by specifically educational considerations. It is also educational concerns that are uppermost in Carr's argument for including religious literacy within a liberal education, and such arguments are important too in Williams' arguments for a similar conclusion. Williams also, like Strike, considers wider political issues of the extent to which religious perspectives should have a voice in the public discourse of a liberal society.

The remaining categories mentioned here all clearly comprise ethical or moral values. The *second* category is that of *community* (when treated as a positive value in its own right rather than a descriptive notion) and other values associated with community, such as fraternity, solidarity and loyalty. The *third* category comprises *justice and equality*. The *fourth* category comprises *respect*, both for individuals and for cultures. The *fifth* category is *freedom or liberty* as a positive value, including both personal autonomy and social freedom. The *sixth* category I have in mind comprises principles of *non-discrimination and non-oppression*. It is not clear logically that this should be treated as a distinct category, since principles of non-discrimination and non-oppression can themselves be given further justification by appeal to justice and equality, to liberty or to respect. Nevertheless, the importance of non-discrimination in some of the arguments in this volume justifies naming it here as a distinct category. I shall say a little more about each of these categories of value in turn as they figure in this collection.

It is the category of community that is most prominent in Pring's article. In what could be taken in itself as a succinct articulation of the (or a) comprehensive ideal, he writes: 'education aims to create a more cohesive and enriching community, shaped by a common culture, from which all benefit, whatsoever the cultural background from which the learners come' (Pring 2007, p. 000). As the discussion above has shown, when community is treated as a positive good we cannot avoid difficult questions of the scope of that community and of how far a sense of community is possible across a larger society. But supporters of the comprehensive ideal can still be sufficiently optimistic to put weight on fraternity (Fielding) and loyalty (Healy). Democracy is highlighted particularly by Fielding and Davis.

Social justice is mentioned by Pring as one of the values that was being pursued by the early advocates of common schools. Clearly one important connection in the thinking of those pioneers was that non-discrimination could be better achieved through a system that, indeed, did not discriminate at the point of entry to secondary schools. Nevertheless, Brighouse argues that in the weight it puts on integration across differences the comprehensive ideal does not always or necessarily serve the cause of justice. Conceivably, in a context of value-pluralism, justice could be outweighed by other values; but Brighouse is writing within that liberal tradition, following Rawls, in which justice is the *first* virtue of societies. For Brighouse, as for Terzi, we need a sound understanding of the demands of justice before we can adjudicate whether common schooling is necessarily the most just form of provision of schooling for particular individuals. Both Brighouse and Terzi interpret social justice—which in this tradition is justice *to individuals*—in terms of equality, and Brighouse explains why in an educational context it is equality, rather than the benefit to the least advantaged, that is important. It is not only, of course, liberals of a Rawlsian stripe who can frame their argument in terms of justice and equality; Tooley, for instance, appeals to the same values in his defence of private schooling.

In Pring's discussion, after community, it is respect that figures most strongly among the values to be realised through common schooling. This includes both respect for individuals and respect for cultures[9]. Respect enters into the arguments of a number of the articles here. Both Barrow and Alexander, for instance, refer to respect in the Kantian sense of the recognition of the inherent worth of all persons, while mutual respect figures in Levinson's discussion of the aspirations of both common schools and multicultural education, and in Strike's arguments about the role of religion in public discourse. Respect for persons is a value distinct from the values of community, since in a Kantian understanding of respect one can respect persons without any particular sense of solidarity or harmony with them as members of the same concrete community. Respect (whether or not accompanied by a sense of solidarity) is important among the reasons for inclusion and non-discrimination. Davis grounds his argument against lookism largely in respect, while Cigman argues that it is not *necessarily* disrespectful to educate students with special needs in separate establishments.

In the pantheon of liberal values one would expect to find liberty as well as justice having an important place. Pring says rather little here explicitly about liberty, though he clearly works with a conception of liberal education that he sees—as in his account of the comprehensive ideal, quoted above from an earlier work—as emancipatory. Liberal and emancipatory conceptions of education give an important place to autonomy and in that sense are committed to individual liberty; the nature and value of autonomy, however, needs careful handling, as shown by Alexander. Direct appeals to the importance of autonomy are perhaps less prominent in the arguments for common schooling in this volume than they are in many of the writings of liberal theorists of education (including some of the same authors writing in other places). Notably, it is the strand of liberal thinking that gives central place to autonomy to which McDonough appeals in his critique of current educational attitudes and practices towards queer sexuality.

As regards more social conceptions of liberty, Pring claims that the *enforcement* of common schooling with a distinctive ethos could be indefensible, presumably as an undue restriction of liberty, though Fielding disputes this. Probably all contributors would endorse the central freedoms of the liberal-democratic tradition (among which freedom of religion is important in Strike's arguments), but acknowledgment of these freedoms leaves room for debate over the role of parents' freedom to determine the nature of their child's education. Brighouse acknowledges that an argument can be made from parental liberty against the promotion of common schooling for the sake of equality, but his own conclusion is that 'The parental liberty argument has more power than advocates of educational equality usually think, and less than those who press it against educational equality usually think.' Later in the volume, Rob Reich, as well as arguing that school choice is itself a response to pluralism, gives weight to the argument for school choice from liberty. Tooley too puts weight on liberty in his argument for school choice, including the availability to parents of the choice of private schooling.

Non-discrimination and non-oppression figure largely, if not always explicitly, in the final section of this volume concerning inclusion, and also in Gereluk's discussion of school dress codes. While Gereluk, McDonough and Davis come at issues of non-discrimination from different angles, all three mention clothing, which may be used either in an attempt to change a person's appearance towards the norm or in an assertion of an identity different from the norm (which may be an identity of religion, ethnicity or sexuality). Though admitting a student to a school while constraining her choice of clothing is not the same as excluding the student altogether, it may still be seen as a form of discrimination or oppression, especially if the clothing to which the school objects is central to the student's identity.

Conclusion

Since this article is introductory to all that follows, any attempt at an overall conclusion would be premature. I shall confine my final remarks to two, which seem to me to emerge from the preceding discussion.

First, the comprehensive ideal cannot reasonably be pursued as an ideal for a single school, however well that school may seem to exemplify all that is considered best in the common school. To adapt John Donne, no school is an island. The comprehensive ideal is a social ideal, and to pursue it fully involves pursuing it as an ideal for society, with a sense of what sort of society it is that we want to see. This leaves open questions of how widely we interpret the scope of the relevant society.

Second, the comprehensive ideal exists as an ideal within a context of plurality, where that means not only plurality of cultures, but more fundamentally plurality of values. Putting weight on different values within this plurality may lead to different versions of the comprehensive ideal. There is no one canonical interpretation of the comprehensive ideal. In a plural society, that is what we should expect. The 'best' interpretation of the

comprehensive ideal for a given time and place is a question to be settled not through philosophical argument, but in the for a of a democracy.

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[1]NOTES

Except where otherwise specified, references are to authors' articles in this volume.

[2] The present editor is preparing a collection of essays, based on lectures delivered in memory of Terence McLaughlin at the Institute of Education, University of London, which will go further into issues concerning faith schools.

[3] Pring is also joint editor of a volume entitled *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal* (Pring and Walford, 1997).

[4] McLaughlin cites Eamonn Callan's (1997) important discussion of common schooling as his source for the distinction between 'common school' and 'common education'.

[5] Attributed to Alastair Campbell in press reports of the time.

[6] That this work had some influence in England is suggested by the fact that in 1997 it was still cited by several contributors to Pring and Walford's (1997) book on the comprehensive ideal.

[7] This proposition is related to, though of course not logically equivalent to, the idea that the fundamental aims of education are the same for every child. Not so long ago that proposition too would often have been denied.

[8] While probably few would actually dispute this proposition about the equal value of the education of a child whatever nation the child lives in, it is by no means necessarily respected in the foreign policy of nations.

[9] I have discussed the relationship between respect for persons and respect for cultures in Haydon (1996).

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