Chapter 3

Education of the Whole Child?

The claim that we should 'educate the whole child' is familiar to us from many educational contexts and debates. In common with claims such as 'we should teach children and not subjects' and 'process is more important than content', it sounds intuitively plausible and appealing. Claims of these kinds are often brandished as rhetorical slogans in educational discussion and debate, where they can serve several functions. The important truths the slogans are alleged to contain can make a seemingly decisive contribution to a developing argument, and can sometimes bring discussion to an end by appearing to transcend or resolve matters of dispute. However, since the meaning, let alone the truth, of such slogans is unclear they are better seen as contributing suggestively rather than decisively to educational argument and as opening up educational discussion rather than closing it down.

What is meant by the, claim that we should 'educate the whole child' and in what sense is it true? In this essay I shall suggest that, while the claim expresses a number of significant educational truths, it is not unproblematic. In particular, I shall claim that there are important respects in which we should not educate 'the whole child'. This conclusion has important implications for education in relation to 'spirituality' and 'spiritual development', and should lead us to approach these matters with caution.

Education and Wholeness

A critical analysis of the term 'education of the whole child' can usefully begin with attention to what is meant by 'whole' in this context. It is capable of at least two interpretations, which I shall refer to as the comprehensiveness' and the 'integration' interpretations respectively.

Wholeness as comprehensiveness

On this first interpretation, 'whole' is opposed to 'narrow' or 'restricted' and can be read as an appeal for education to focus upon a wide range of aspects of the child, and not merely (say) intellectual development or academic formation. It calls for education to have 'broad', 'rounded' or 'balanced' influence.

In evaluating such claims it is important at the outset to call into question a tendency to see the different 'aspects of the child' as sharply distinct from each other, as in the drawing of crude contrasts between the 'intellectual' and the 'emotional' and between the 'cognitive' and the 'affective'. Such distinctions, including the well-established tripartite categorization of domains of the person into the 'cognitive', 'affective' and 'conative', are untenable in any very rigorous form, and require more nuanced re-statement. All the dimensions of a person are logically as well as psychologically related to each other. A person's beliefs, for example, are logically tied in complex ways to (*inter alia*) his or her attitudes, emotions, virtues and motivations. One way of putting this point is to draw attention to the 'cognitive core' of all aspects of mind and of all human capacities. Emotions, for example, are partly constituted by forms of cognition in which situations are seen under various aspects. To feel fear is to see a situation as threatening, to feel guilt is to see it as involving undischarged obligations and responsibilities, and so on. A proper understanding of a person, therefore, requires a 'holistic' perspective in at least the sense that involves a rejection of the sorts of the sharp distinctions and dichotomies which have been mentioned.

One implication which might be thought to follow from this point is that education is therefore inherently holistic in its effects. To introduce a child to a subject of study is to open up not only possibilities for cognitive or intellectual development but also for the development of new attitudes, emotions, feelings and motivations. Any educational influence, therefore, can transform the whole person. The qualification 'can' is important here, however, because whilst 'holistic' implications are implicit within education, they do not necessarily follow and, if desired, need to be deliberately aimed at. So although there is some substance in the descriptive claim that education *is* as a matter of fact, of the whole child, the prescriptive claim that education *should* be of this kind is not redundant.

What is involved in the claim that education *should* aim at 'wholeness' in the 'comprehensiveness' sense? Whilst we might not accept

the early claim of R. S. Peters that 'education is of the whole man' expresses (although imprecisely) a 'conceptual truth' about education (Peters, 1966, p. 32), an aversion to narrowness and restrictedness in educational aims and processes is widely felt. Such narrowness or restrictedness can take many forms, relating to the goals of education, its subject matter and its methods. Educational goals, for example, can be limited to the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy, to narrowly-conceived vocational preparation or to specialized academic training. The 'subject matter' of education may be conceived in a way which excludes or underemphasizes significant elements of knowledge and understanding or kinds of development, and educational methods may concentrate on (say) memorization to the exclusion of critical questioning and other strategies more likely to bring about genuine engagement and understanding.

It is easier to criticize such narrow or restricted conceptions of educational aims and processes than to provide a positive account of an appropriately broad conception. Notions such as 'breadth' and 'balance' in themselves are of limited help here since they are uninformative about the nature and justification of the evaluative judgements they imply (Dearden, 1984, chapter 5). The elements of personhood and learning in relation to which 'breadth' and 'balance' are to be sought, and the criteria which tell us what constitutes 'breadth' and 'balance' all need to be specified and justified. This cannot be done satisfactorily without giving attention to fundamental educational aims, values and purposes.

Without entering in detail into these matters, it is possible to identify a central issue which arises in relation to the claim that education is of persons (Langford, 1985, chapter 7) and that it should exert wide-ranging or 'holistic' influence upon them (on this, see, for example, Bonnett, 1994). Underlying this general claim is the question 'What sort of person does education seek to develop?' The complexity of the judgements of value involved in this question comes readily into focus. In part, this complexity is inherent in questions of this kind, but it is enhanced by the 'value diversity' and 'pluralism' characteristic of liberal democratic societies, which will be discussed in more detail later. In our lack of agreement about what constitutes human good or perfection we are suspicious of claims to wide-ranging educational influence upon the child. This central issue concerning the notion of 'education of the whole child'—the value basis on which we can construct a vision of 'holistic' educational influence—

comes still further into focus in relation to the second interpretation of the term.

Wholeness as integration

On this second interpretation, 'whole' is opposed to 'fragmented' and can be read as an appeal for education to ensure that the different aspects of the child be 'integrated' in some way. Education here seeks 'coherence' for the person.

Leaving aside the complex philosophical difficulties which arise in relation to the notion of personal identity (on these see, for example, Parfit, 1984, Part 3), it can be plausibly argued that since the concept of a person is one of a 'complete existent' it brings with it the notion of 'wholeness' in the sense of 'unitariness' (Langford, 1979, pp. 68-70). What is involved in the 'unity' of a person is complex. One aspect of it is the notion of a person having, or striving towards, a unity of 'purpose and outlook' (Langford, 1979, p. 70) in which, through the governing of conflicts by a stable system of priorities, the person's life becomes, or at least aims towards, a harmony and a wholeness in the 'integration' sense. Mary Midgley claims that this desire to integrate is related to some of our most basic wishes, capacities and needs. She writes: 'People have a natural wish and capacity to integrate themselves, a natural horror of being totally fragmented, which makes possible a constant series of bargains and sacrifices to shape their lives' (Midgley, 1980, p. 190). A continuing preoccupation with the significance of 'wholeness' in the 'integratedness' sense is a feature of Midgley's latest book *The Ethical Primate* (1994).

The notion of a person 'integrating' his or her life in this way gives rise in an even sharper way to the value questions mentioned in the last section. What is the nature of the 'coherence' which is aimed at? 'Coherence' in itself merely suggests the notion of elements fitting together according to some principle. But what the principle, or principles, in question should be remains to be settled (Dearden, 1984, chapter 5). Some of the principles which persons might invoke in relation to their achievement of 'coherence' are 'architectonic' in the sense that they relate to the fundamental structuring elements of a person's overall view of life. Examples of such 'architectonic' principles are those relating to religious belief or unbelief. A position on these matters can shape in a basic way individuals' views of themselves and their lives, and provide central principles for 'integration'. Whilst value questions arise in relation to all aspects of 'integration', 'architectonic' principles illustrate sharply the con-

cerns expressed at the end of the last section about the evaluative basis on which we can approach such matters educationally. One of the features of liberal democratic societies, and their associated cultural and philosophical developments, is absence of agreement about 'thick' or substantial views of human good. We lack a shared view of 'the meaning of life' and, therefore, about what 'architectonic' principles are appropriate for the achievement by persons of 'integration' and 'coherence'. Indeed, we lack a shared conception of what, in detail, 'integration' and 'coherence' mean in relation to the human person. What value-basis can education therefore appeal to in relation to these matters, and to 'education of the whole child' generally?

The significance of these questions can be illustrated by reference to the work of an educationalist particularly noted for his preoccupation with the notion of 'wholeness', Friedrich Froebel.

Froebel and Education of the Whole Child

The educational thought of Friedrich Froebel is particularly interesting for our purposes, because he placed great emphasis not only on 'wholeness' in the aims and methods of education but also on the need for 'the spiritual' to be cultivated in children. Froebel is not much studied these days, and there has been a long-standing tendency to abstract his methodological principles from the wider framework of his thought, together with its religious and metaphysical assumptions. Close attention to Froebel's overall view does, however, illustrate some of the evaluative concerns expressed earlier in relation to the notion of 'holistic' educational influence.

Froebel placed great emphasis on 'unity' in his educational theory, differing in this respect from Pestalozzi (see Bantock, 1984, pp. 80–90). At the heart of Froebel's theory was a teleological (or purpose-directed) conception of the universe and of human beings, involving an 'inner law' binding all into a unity with God. Froebel writes:

> An eternal law pervades and governs all things. The basis of this all-controlling law is an all-pervading, living, self-conscious and therefore eternal Unity. This unity is God. God is the source of all things. Each thing exists only because the divine spirit lives in it and this divine spirit is its essence. The destiny of everything is to reveal its essence, that is, the divine spirit dwelling in it. (Quoted in Bantock, 1984, p. 81)

For Froebel, the 'wholeness' or 'unity' of the educational process is related to, and characterized in terms of, this particular metaphysical theory which, in its affirmation of the 'wholeness' of reality, has affinities to idealism. (On idealism and its educational significance see Gordon and White, 1979.)

The centrality to Froebel's thought of religious concepts and claims is clear, as is the importance of specifically religious teaching and formation to his theories of educational practice (Hamilton, 1952). Froebel writes: 'By education … the divine essence of man should be unfolded, brought out, lifted into consciousness, and man himself raised into free, conscious obedience to the divine principle that lives in him, and to a free representation of this principle in his life' (Froebel, 1888, pp. 4-5. See also chapters V and VI, pp. 237-48.) Froebel's account of educational 'wholeness' and 'unity', as incorporated, for example, into the Froebellian 'gifts', is inseparable from his religious views. The aim of instruction, claims Froebel, is 'to bring the scholar to insight into the unity of all things, into the fact that all things have their being and life in God, so that in due time he may be able to act and live in accordance with this insight' (p. 128). Froebel's overall framework of thought also needs to be brought to bear if we are to grasp his distinctive interpretation of the claim that we should attend to the 'universal cultivation of the spiritual' in our children (p. 328). For Froebel, the religious sentiment manifests the unity of all things.

Although Froebel expresses his overall metaphysical theory in an imprecise and somewhat 'mystical' way, its religious elements are sufficiently prominent to give rise to serious doubts about the acceptability of the theory as a basis for 'holistic' educational influence in the common schools of a liberal democratic society. This is because, in such societies, we are confronted by the wide-ranging and deep-seated disagreement about values which was alluded to earlier. Froebel's religious assumptions are now seen as highly controversial. Referring to the key concept in his overall theory, Froebel claims: 'a quietly observant human mind, a thoughtful, clear human intellect, has never failed, and will never fail, to recognize this Unity' (1888, p. 1). Froebel is surely wrong about this, at least as far as his own interpretation of 'unity' is concerned, and his view is now likely to be seen as only one of a number of rival overall views of life as a whole which require critical understanding and assessment. To base 'holistic' educational influence on Froebel's theory in its fullness is to invite accusations of metaphysical, if not religious, indoctrination.

Values, Pluralism and Holistic Educational Influence

The central issue which arises in respect to the notion of 'education of the whole child', whether in the 'comprehensiveness' or 'integration' sense, is therefore the difficulty of establishing, especially in the context of the pluralism of a liberal democratic society, an acceptable evaluative basis for holistic' educational influence (on this see, for example, Standish, 1995).

This is not to suggest that such societies are completely lacking in value agreement, or that education based on liberal democratic principles is without any value foundation. However, what is distinctive about the 'liberal democratic' approach to values, in its typical articulation in the philosophical theory of liberalism, is the self-conscious attention paid to the scope of influence and validity of particular value judgements. In this approach, the values which can be insisted upon for all are precisely seen as applying to part, not the whole, of life, and imply a principled forbearance of influence on the part of education.

In liberal democratic societies we are confronted by people holding many different, and often incompatible, views of life as a whole. Catholics, Jews and Muslims live alongside atheists and agnostics. Their differing 'holistic perspectives', articulated by contrasting 'architectonic principles', give varying accounts of human nature and flourishing, and of what constitutes 'integration' in the shape of a whole human life. Education based on such 'holistic' views can specify in some detail the sort of person it seeks to produce. Examples of such 'holistic' educational influence include certain forms of religious schooling, which seek to form (say) Christian or Islamic persons in a substantial way. Froebel's educational recommendations, though more general, can be seen as similarly 'holistic'.

From a 'liberal democratic' philosophical perspective, however, there is no objectively conclusive way of determining which, if any, of these 'holistic' views of life—or 'thick' theories of the good—is correct. They are deeply, and perhaps permanently, controversial. The differences of belief and value involved are tenacious and fundamental. Therefore such 'thick' views cannot be permitted to impose their particular vision on all citizens in the public domain through the use of political power. For example, from the point of view of some 'thick' theories of the good, remarriage after divorce is morally unacceptable because, since marriage is morally indissoluble and divorce has only legal and not moral force, the couple in question are living in a state of permanent adultery. Such a view is

significantly controversial in the sense that a number of different perspectives on these matters exist 'within the moral pale'. The view cannot, therefore, be imposed on all citizens through the civil law on divorce. On similar grounds, the education offered in the common schools of a liberal democratic society cannot be based on 'thick' theories of the good.

From a liberal democratic perspective, such 'thick' theories, and the patterns of life which they generate, are matters for individual and family assessment, judgement and response. Many such theories are reasonable and morally worthy but lack the objective grounding to be imposed on all. They should, however, be seen as part of a range of options from which people might construct their lives. Whilst such 'thick' theories cannot form the basis of common schooling, they can underpin forms of distinctive schooling chosen by parents as part of the exercise of their moral rights over their children's upbringing and education (McLaughlin, 1994a).

In contrast to the diversity and pluralism associated with 'holistic' or 'thick' theories of the good, the liberal democratic perspective seeks to establish consensus and unanimity concerning basic or 'public' values. In virtue of their fundamentality or inescapability, such values are seen as binding on all persons. Frequently embodied in law and expressed in terms of rights, they include such matters as basic social morality and a range of fundamental democratic principles such as freedom of speech, justice and personal autonomy. The theory of the good underpinning such values is described in the philosophical theory of liberalism as 'thin' not because of the insubstantiality or unimportance of the values involved, but because of the attempt to articulate them in terms which all people of goodwill can accept regardless of the fuller theory of the good which they hold. 'Public' values do not presuppose some particular metaphysical theory of the self, or of the nature of human destiny Atheists and Catholics differ profoundly on these wider matters, but can share common ground in condemning cruelty and supporting a democratic way of life, even if their overall frameworks of belief given them distinctive perspectives on them. Such 'public' values do not cover the whole of life, but only its 'political' aspects. They form an important part of the value foundation of common forms of education based on liberal democratic principles.

These principles generate a two-fold educational task for common schools which can be expressed roughly as follows. On the one hand, education must 'transmit' the basic or 'public' values, principles and

procedures, and secure appropriate forms of respect for, and allegiance to, them. On these matters, the school seeks to achieve a strong, substantial influence on the beliefs of pupils and their wider development as persons. It is unhesitant, for example, in promoting the values of basic social morality and democratic 'civic virtue' more generally. On the side of values associated with 'thick' theories of the good, on the other hand, the school exercises a principled forbearance of influence. It seeks not to shape either the beliefs or the personal qualities of pupils in the light of such theories. Instead, the school encourages pupils to come to their own reflective decisions about the matters at stake, and promotes appropriate forms of understanding, open-mindedness and tolerance.

Much more needs to be said in relation to the articulation of this general perspective and the many problems associated with it (see McLaughlin, 1995a; 1995b). However, regardless of the various philosophical difficulties to which it gives rise, it is recognizable, at least in outline, as a widely-held view of the value basis of education in a liberal democratic society.

From this perspective, the respects in which we should not 'educate the whole child' come into focus. At least in common schools, no substantial 'holistic' view of life should be transmitted to pupils, nor should they be shaped 'as whole persons' in the light of any such theory. Rather, schools should open up views of this kind for critical assessment and exploration. Schools should therefore be suspicious of aiming at 'wholeness' for pupils in the 'integration' sense unless the character of the 'integration' is seen in terms of the pupils' own fashioning of the shape of their lives. With regard to wholeness' in the 'comprehensiveness' sense similar worries arise. A school might argue that it was merely exercising 'open' and non-indoctrinatory influence across a range of aspects of the child's life. One issue which such a claim needs to confront is the question of the rights of Parents in relation to those of teachers. It is not clear that, without further argument, teachers have a right to exercise influence of whatever kind across all aspects of a child's life.

Spiritual Development and Education of the Whole Child

In the light of the discussion above, it is clear why talk of promoting the 'spiritual development' of pupils in schools as part of the 'education of the whole child' is problematic.

Central to evaluating the issues here is clarity about what is meant by 'spiritual development'. General questions of value in recent edu-

cational debate and policy-making have often not been handled in a clear, systematic and sustained way. As is widely recognized, the structure and implementation of our recent educational reforms have not been governed by any clear and defensible overall vision, and questions of value were not squarely addressed at the outset. The reforms are widely regarded, even by those not wholly opposed to their general thrust, as pragmatic and piecemeal. A lack of clarity and critical attention to fundamental issues has also characterized the emergence of the area of 'spiritual development' and the other areas of development associated with it. The initiative is widely seen as a belated attempt to enrich the educational reforms with an explicit value dimension, in which the immensely complex issues at stake in the meaning, let alone inspection, of spiritual development were ignored or glossed over. The straightforward question, 'What is meant by "spiritual development"?' by itself fully reveals this complexity. In these circumstances, one can only have the greatest sympathy for OFSTED in its attempts to make sense of the area and to fulfil its obligations with respect to it. The extent and openness of the consultation process which OFSTED has engaged in has been refreshing, and its discussion paper issued in February 1994 (Office for Standards in Education, 1994) asks the right sorts of questions about the area, and provides a focus for philosophical debate (J. White, 1994).

It is important that the debate about spiritual development in schools be located within an overall view of educational aims and purposes: a 'vision' of the educational enterprise as a whole. Without this it will be hard to achieve the coherence sought for the area and for education itself (McLaughlin, 1994b). 'Spiritual development' also needs to be considered in close relationship to other areas of the work of the school, such as 'education for citizenship' (P. White, 1994).

The obscurity of what is meant by 'spiritual development' (see Hull, 1996) makes it difficult to assess in relation to the sorts of general principles outlined above. An interpretation of the term which insists upon a close connection with religious development (see, for example, Carr, 1995) gives rise to worries about undue influence arising from the presupposition of a 'thick' view of human good, as do views of educational influence on the matters at stake which are explicitly secular (see, for example, White, 1995). What seems necessary for compatibility with the values outlined earlier is a view of 'spiritual development' which is significantly 'open' in the sense

that it leaves room for critical exploration of the relevant issues by pupils and does not presuppose any significantly controversial assumptions of the sort indicated. One major difficulty here concerns a specification of what could be meant by 'development' in relation to these matters.

The fact that 'spiritual development' is now part of the formal inspection criteria for schools makes it difficult to ignore these issues or to employ 'edu-babble' (imprecise and platitudinous rhetoric) in relation to them; two strategies commonly used in the past.

'Spiritual development' focuses attention in a strong way on the 'holistic' aspects of education. As we have seen, the notion that we should 'educate the whole child' is not as straightforward as it appears, and there are important senses in which, in the light of the values discussed earlier, we should not attempt this. However, one outcome of the debate about 'spiritual development' in schools may be to focus renewed critical attention upon these values themselves and the liberal democratic educational principles discussed in the last section.

One of the major lines of criticism in general of the philosophical theory of liberalism which has emerged in recent years from a broadly 'communitarian' direction is that its values, and the political community which it generates, lacks the substantiality needed to enable persons to achieve defensible and necessary forms of affiliation and commitment to a 'larger moral ecology' beyond their own individual, and indeed individualistic, concerns. Such a 'moral ecology' embodies a social ethos, a consensus on the common good and notions of loyalty and responsibility to the community as a whole as well as a framework of wider beliefs and values providing (at least to some extent) a culture of 'narrative coherence' as well as 'freedom' for lives. The liberal view, it is claimed, leads to individualism in its various forms, and a tendency for individual choice and self-definition to be based on arbitrary preference or self-interest, rather than a view of life which is more coherent and other-regarding. In addition, attention is drawn to the corrosive effects of private economic pursuits and consumerism on the notion of a caring public ethos, the negative effects of an undue separation of public and private realms and so on (on these matters see, for example, Mulhall and Swift, 1992).

These critiques, amounting to a call for the recovery of a more 'holistic' perspective, are also applicable to liberal educational principles. Is the attempt to confine the value basis of the common school to values which are in some sense not 'significantly controversial'

counter-intuitive and damaging? Is the influence of the common school as a result undesirably thin? Does the attempt to exercise a principled forbearance of influence lead to a weakening of the power and coherence of the value influence of the school? Must not a greater substantiality—a 'holistic' vision of life and of society—be supplied to the common school and to education itself?

The wide-ranging debate needed for a proper evaluation of the claim that spiritual development' should be seen as part of the process of 'education of the whole child' in common schools raises questions which touch upon some of the central issues relating to the value basis of education in liberal democratic societies.