CHAPTER 1

What Should Schooling in the Twenty-First Century Look Like?

What you think a school should be like depends on the values you hold. What a school is like results from the values of those who dominate it. Values – the fundamental beliefs that guide all action – are particularly reflected in the curriculum a school offers. Curriculum, as used throughout this book, is defined very broadly to include not just the subjects taught, but also the choices made within those subjects, the styles and means chosen to teach them, the activities, attitudes, environments, relationships and beliefs which pervade a school. By putting early emphasis on values, I imply that school communities need to clarify their fundamental beliefs before considering their curriculum. In choosing to explore cross-curricular and creative developments in primary and secondary curricula, I claim that these are highly relevant approaches to twenty-first-century learning.

We are constantly reminded of the unprecedented rates of change we are experiencing as we travel through the twenty-first century (for example, Greenfield, 2003, 2009; Puttnam, 2009, website; Robinson, 2001; Robinson and Aronica, 2010). Illustrations of the exponential growth of knowledge, the development of technology, nanotechnology, micro-biology, artificial intelligence and the rest, pepper most books about the future. This is not the place to comment on such predictions, but it is safe to say that the world today’s children will inherit will be very, very different from our present one. Almost undoubtedly, our children will have to face the realities of global warming, rising sea levels, pandemics, human cloning, population pressures, increasing terrorism and extremism, water, oil and food shortages, frequent job changes and perhaps economic meltdown. Taking a more optimistic view, our children may witness more concerted international cooperation, just government, longer, healthier lives, a more equitable sharing of the earth’s resources and the global development of sciences and technologies to address twenty-first-century challenges. Either way, today’s children live in times of rapid and
global transformations which will quite literally change human minds and societies. What our education system can do to address such uncertainties, how we might establish an empowering curriculum that offers hope and purpose as well as knowledge, is the subject of this book.

Preparing for an uncertain future

The future has always been uncertain but rapid advances in global communications have made us hyper-sensitive to the speed and unpredictability of change. The education we currently offer our children may not be good enough to help them thrive in, and live fulfilling lives through, the century. Aside from Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), Citizenship and PSHE, the National Curriculum subjects taught in English schools would have been recognizable in a late nineteenth-century school. Whilst the six ‘areas of learning’ (DCSF/QCDA, 2010) proposed by the Rose Review of Primary Education (2009) expressed a movement towards integrated and values-conscious learning, schools were given little guidance towards making their curricula meaningful and effective for all. After the scrapping of the Rose recommendations, the coalition government of 2010 called for greater degrees of curricular freedom but also for
increased emphasis on separate subjects and the core. Governments of all complexions continue to call for schools and their communities to become more involved with each other and education is less centralized, but as local authorities and central government agencies lose their influence, support and guidance on matching curriculum to community is needed. The issues and concerns that dominate the lives of children and communities often seem distant from the curricula they receive.

Meaningful and effective schooling happily resists temporary curriculum change. Successful teachers have always been able to make restrictive curricula relevant to children. Schools have, for example, taken the opportunity offered by Citizenship and PSHE, to propose curricula that address the personal, local and global futures which young people care about (Alexander, 2010; Alexander and Potter, 2005; Leyard and Dunn, 2009; Ofsted, 2010; Page, 2000; Puttnam, 2009, Wrigley, 2005). Geographers and others interested in ‘futures education’ (the study of views about probable, possible and preferable futures) have championed curricula aimed at helping children think more critically and creatively about the future (for example, Catling and Willey, 2009; Hicks, 2001, 2006; Scoffham, 2010; Slaughter, 1996). Motivated by the desire to empower children, schools have championed ecologically, socially or culturally sensitive issues relevant to their communities. Other schools have revitalized the experience of children through working with organizations like: Creative Partnerships, Creative and Cultural Education (CCE), Capeuk, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and The Curriculum Foundation (website).

Today’s young people differ in some ways from those of the past. Youngsters contemplating the future in this century seem to expect a very much less utopian prospect than the ‘baby boomers’ of the 1950s foresaw. Research amongst children in the USA, UK, Sweden and Canada, shows children to be both serious and worried about the future (Catling, 2010; Hicks, 2006). They are pessimistic about societal health, equality, wealth, security, poverty and relationships but, paradoxically, remain generally hopeful about their own futures. Children appear to be gloomy about the world’s future and particularly worried about issues currently headlined in the news. This shift away from the general optimism of the 1990s (see Bentley, 2006) is evidenced as public policy is increasingly targeted on well-being, health, sustainability, conservation, safety and security.

Contrary to youthful optimism for their personal future, Hicks (2006) shows that boys’ views about the world’s future tend towards the gender-stereotypically violent and destructive, with wars, terrorism, natural disasters and disease dominant. It seems that girls more often imagine a generalized peaceful and idealistic future, but continue to be worried about disease and pollution. These contrasts may be driven by popular culture as much as genetics.

Economy and culture encourage us to live life in the present. Children and adults alike know that today’s consumerist public policy will deeply and
negatively impact upon our futures but such knowledge scarcely affects our behaviour. Fewer and fewer vote or play an active role in local or national democracy yet more know about its importance. Bentley confronts these paradoxes in expressing radical aims for education. He argues:

we are searching for means through which individuals can transform themselves through a process of internal discovery and self-actualisation, by participating in the reshaping of the shared context in which they live out their individual lives. (Bentley, 2006)

Confidence and fulfilment are important aims of education. Opportunities for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943) or the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) seem rare for the majority of children and often peripheral to school decisions. Neither liberation of the unique attributes of every child nor the notion of social intelligence (Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 2006) have been systematically addressed across UK schools. Few schools are as values-driven as Makiguchi’s *Soka* schools in Japan, which attempt to live out values like justice, fairness and peacemaking, in their curriculum, interpersonal behaviour and relationships with the local and world community (Sharma, 2008). Values and purposes like these, evident in education philosophy and the aims of education for millennia, have in many cases been squeezed out of the curriculum. Reference to the twin aims of nurturing individuality and fostering better social and global relationships are therefore among the themes running through this book.

In addition to their keen interest in aspects of the future, a number of topics have become pressingly relevant to the twenty-first-century child. Key preoccupations seem to be:

- information and communications technology
- global politics/issues
- relationships
- individualism and the sense of self.

These powerfully motivating interests form the starting point of this new look at our school curricula.

**Harnessing children’s interest in information and communications technology**

Nowhere are the rapid changes in the developed and developing world more evident than in the area of ICT. Growing numbers of people in all societies have access to powerful and sophisticated technologies which two decades
ago were the stuff of science fiction. In 2002 in England, 93 per cent of 11-year-old children reported having at least one computer at home, whilst in the USA the figure was 89.4 per cent (WHO, 2004, website).

Home computers and the internet are heavily used by children aged 9–16. Twice as many boys as girls used the internet to get information in all 35 countries studied by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2008, website; Children’s Use of the Internet, 2006, website). Yet a recent survey showed that 40 per cent of 15-year-old girls considered the internet-based social networking site facebook® more important to them than family (Techeye 2010, website). The internet has rapidly become a preferred source of

Illustration 1.2  Year 2 boy’s view of the future: guns, army, bang bang, bullets, dried up river, dried up stones
information for the young, with 50 per cent of parents admitting to little idea of what their children do on the internet (Pew, 2005, website). Large numbers of children regularly use internet ‘chat rooms’, and social networking sites to contact and make friends and see such technologies as very influential on their lives (BBC News, 2010, website). Some of the worst implications of these easy, anonymous and sometimes unpoliced contacts are well known. Adults’ lack of knowledge and control over the medium is illustrated in recent findings documented by the National Children’s Homes (Guardian, 2006, website).
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Illustration 1.4  Children gather enthusiastically around a computer screen in a village school in south India

Year 11 pupils at a Dover school were given a free choice of fairy story to update and perform within a single session. They chose to rewrite *Little Red Riding Hood*. After starting their play at the end, but in the traditional manner with Red Riding Hood quizzing a wolf disguised as grandma about her big teeth and hairy arms, the students did a ‘time warp’ sequence and the audience was catapulted to the beginning of the story. The scene was the chilling context of a twenty-first-century Red Riding Hood sitting alone at her bedroom computer. She was in an internet chat room talking to a paedophile ‘wolf’ pretending to be her grandmother. (McCrea, 2005)

Currently over 50 per cent of northern European children aged between 5 and 11 have a mobile phone (cell phone), rising to well over 90 per cent for those between 12 and 16. To children, the advantages of mobile phones over other ICT are privacy and control. Children report that for their mobiles, they need no permission, have little supervision and they appreciate the possibilities of constant communication (Childnet International, 2010, website). Some estimates suggest teenagers average up to four hours a week text-messaging their friends.

Children today say they like the internet and mobiles because these give them the greatest independence over what they see and find out (Byron, 2008, website). As interactive and user-centred Web 2.0 applications develop, blogs, wikis, social networking sites and a host of other applications have become commonplace for many children. Children like the ways ICT helps them discover and connect to friends, and they appreciate the way it can help them create and communicate visually and in sound. Around 50 per cent of 13-year-olds in Britain, for example, use the internet or mobiles to communicate with
friends *every day* (WHO, 2008, website). Through the internet and mobile technology, children have access to music, sports and world news, advertising and powerful new games; can communicate with television and film stars; vote out an unpopular *Big Brother* resident or catapult an unknown to *X Factor* stardom. Children are also increasingly aware of the dangers of new technologies. Most have dealt with text bullies, unwanted pornography, salespeople and crackpots well before their parents find out about it. Sadly, some do not have the personal resources to cope with such onslaughts and the ghastly results of the abuses of ICT are all too evident from news reports and investigative journalism. There are, however, interesting and positive uses of mobile phone technology which suggest it is an underused feature in our current school curricula (see box).

A primary school in Harrow maintains their link with a school in Uganda through mobile phone and texting links with the teachers in the Ugandan school. The head teacher reported: ‘Rather than holding one-off cultural events, I wanted to promote a deeper understanding of global issues such as interdependence, global citizenship and rights and responsibilities’. Therefore, children write regular letters to their partner school, but significantly they and their teachers now send regular texts with questions which are instantly answered and relevant to the moment. (*TES*, 2005, website)

The monitor screen also continues its major influence on children’s lives. In 2001, about 40 per cent of pre-school children in the USA had a television in their bedroom (*Pediatrics*, 2002, website). In 2004, 90 per cent of UK children between 7 and 14 reported watching television every day, and 93 per cent of the same age group reported watching a video or DVD ‘at least once a month’ (*UK Film Council*, 2004, website). As direct and indiscriminate TV watching decreases, the selection of particular programmes through iplayer® and other customer-controlled technologies increases. Most 2010 estimates place the average US or British child as watching about four hours of television per day, 61 per cent of them in their own bedroom – significantly less time than most spend with family. The image of large numbers of children alone in their room using televisions, games consoles, computer monitors and videos for more than 28 hours a week conjures up a rather lonely image. Susan Greenfield has suggested we may already have reached the point where for some families, many of the traditional parental roles – imparting culture, providing a model, resolving conflict, telling stories, sharing knowledge, passing on morals, sayings, advice and wisdom – have been unintentionally delegated to the monitor screen (*Greenfield*, 2003, 2009)

A Romanian study once attempted to capture the influence of TV. By far, the chief role models of school-aged children were film stars and television personalities (*Popenici*, 2006). A stirring judgement on our profession was
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that teachers were amongst the least likely adults to be considered as role models, scoring lower than terrorists. There may be reasons for national variations in such figures but teachers and parents are probably less important, in the short term, to children than they think.

Even the subject of children’s toys is not without its implications for education. Aside from the plethora of toys linked to video, television and computer game characters, the new generation of interactive cyber toys respond ‘intelligently’ to particular types of treatment or ‘grow’ or change with time or display ‘real’ facial expressions. The toy RoboSapien® is sold as ‘truly a fusion of technology and personality’. Such toys may be argued to create new kinds of moral and ethical dilemmas. Do they and their descendants teach particular values and attitudes to children? Do they come with ‘hidden agendas’? If so, what are they and who decides?

Any web search will deliver large numbers of statistics and studies about ICT use amongst children and young people. Some findings should be interpreted with care because of the social/political agendas of their sponsors. But a thorough reading of research in these areas tells a consistent story of large numbers of children spending significantly more hours with ICT than they do at school. The fact that much of this activity may well be solitary or unsupervised is an issue largely for parents, but there are serious implications for schools too.

Schools use ICT too little. Currently, and perhaps understandably, mobile phones are rarely welcome in the classroom. Internet use – particularly the use of interactive and user-centred sites – is less developed in schools than at home despite the ubiquity of interactive whiteboards. The class digital camera, recorder or video may remain little used for lack of time. Television and film is less used now in school than 25 years ago, but Wii technology and other Web 2.0 possibilities have not yet become common features of classroom experience.

Illustration 1.5 Teacher introducing the video camera to 8-year-olds in a class project on the future of the local school environment

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Such technologies are very much part of the child's world and perhaps schools should systematically consider their use as motivators and means in formal educational settings (Riddle, 2009). Signs of change are already apparent. ICT is argued to deepen understanding and promote new learning more effectively than traditional methods. As a result, many new Academies make the provision of laptop computers or ‘tablets’ a priority. The BBC’s ‘Digital Curriculum’ covering half the 7–14 curriculum was launched in 2006 and though abandoned in 2008 will undoubtedly be followed by other virtual curricula. Even the power of the mobile phone can be well utilized for educational purposes – texting a précis description, utilizing the camera or recording applications, contacting another school following a similar theme, permission to ‘phone a friend’ in the playground for help in a class quiz or voting for a school council member by text message might all be used to enliven school learning.

A rural primary school in Suffolk asked groups of six children on fieldwork near the school, to cooperate in using a mobile phone to text succinct (they could only send one message) descriptions concerning a range of contrasting environments near their school to a central group back in the classroom ‘headquarters’. The ‘HQ team’ plotted the incoming summaries against appropriate locations on a base map so that the descriptive journey was already recorded as the ‘environmental’ teams returned to class.
In considering the power of ICT to influence the lives and thinking of children, we are immediately confronted with questions of value:

- How do these technologies fit with our agreed values?
- How do we develop good and wholesome attitudes through ICT?
- How do we decide what good and wholesome is?
- Should schools be extending the time children spend with ICT?

Chapter 3 includes some examples of how schools are beginning to address such issues in cross-curricular contexts.

**Supporting children’s interest in global themes**

Schools have allowed and encouraged political debate for millennia. Easily available and global communications should have made the possibilities for debate even stronger. Almost instant awareness of major events anywhere brings dramatic, violent or tense international situations, threats, images and moral issues almost daily into the homes of most in the developed and developing world. In the past, such trauma would confront an unlucky individual only a few times in a lifetime. Despite the disturbing and challenging nature of many images open to children, there are surprisingly few guidelines or exemplars on how to address current events within the curriculum. Timetables in many schools have become inflexible. Tightly packed daily schedules rarely allow time for discussion or questions on real issues from the local, national or international news. Few British schools found the time or courage to follow the example of an international school in Dar es Salaam which organized a series of civilized and informed debates between children of all faiths and none, within a few days of the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA. Similarly, college curricula in Kerala, south India, were flexible enough to accredit the work of hundreds of students who spontaneously ran to the aid of local communities devastated by the Tsunami of Boxing Day 2004. If our curricula have become too crowded for relevance and the unexpected, perhaps children with their interest in global issues are telling us to think again.

Bruner (1968) reminds us that no issues are too complex for children. Emotive subjects like terrorism, war, poverty, HIV/AIDS, pollution, social inequality, disasters or peace treaties, are important to children as well as adults. Successful current events programmes like the Children’s British Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBBC) daily *Newsround* and its associated website cater for this interest. Such programmes are popular with children; viewer figures (BBC Trust, 2008, website) show that between two and three hundred thousand 5–12 year olds watch *Newsround* every evening. Whilst research (Pew International, 2008, website) shows a decline in young people’s news
reading over the last few years, the rise in social networking sites like facebook® and Twitter means that world news comes to them even faster. Increasing viewer figures and donations show that TV/internet campaigns like Make Poverty History, the ONE campaign, Comic Relief and Sport Relief have significantly raised young people’s consciousness of and participation in addressing world poverty.

Such initiatives catch the imagination of schools and children perhaps because they demonstrate that ordinary voices can influence seemingly impersonal trends in the global economy (One Org, 2005, website).

Young people are clearly at ease with the digital media. Increasing numbers have an automatic function on their mobile phones informing them instantly of key cricket or football scores or ‘breaking news’. Video, internet and television channel facilities on mobiles, Mp3s and iPods are rapidly becoming accessible to children in the rapidly developing countries of Asia and South America too. Each new technology brings the world closer to the child’s life, but perhaps in ways which make the events they portray seem less real.

‘Green issues’ are particularly significant to many children. Topics such as poverty, pollution, deforestation and climate change are regularly highlighted by children’s TV, film and curriculum initiatives (e.g. Eio Schools, 2010). TV and internet campaigns supporting water, rainforest and developing world anti-pollution projects, regularly reach ambitious targets from school and individual donations. The David Puttnam documentary, ‘We are the people
we’ve been waiting for’ (Puttnam, 2009, website) has been used in many secondary schools to direct young people’s existing commitment towards global issues and their place in their education now. Individual schools and clusters have been instrumental in raising awareness of environmental issues nearer home too.

The apparent interest in global issues is not straightforward however. Children’s connection with the wider world seems dependent upon what has been highlighted by the television and tabloid news editors. Very few American children knew where Iraq or Afghanistan were before the wars there, and the word ‘tsunami’ meant little to most children before December 2004. For British children, Haiti and the Mississippi Delta were unheard of before the 2010 tragedies of earthquake and oil spill. Whilst global communications have successfully raised consciousness, place and general geographical knowledge is often poor. A study of world ‘place knowledge’ amongst 18–20-year-old prospective teachers on a UK teacher education course, showed a serious ignorance about the location of many foreign countries outside Western Europe (Catling, 2004). The same lack of knowledge can apply to environmental or development issues. Unless a child attends a school which has followed up leads such as the United Nations’ (UN’s) millennium goals (UN, 2000, website) or the Eco Schools programme, or an individual teacher has shared an interest in a particular concern, then children’s exposure to crucial aspects of their changing world remains a lottery.

It is not difficult to fire children’s interest in the environment. They experience signs of environmental ill-health all around them in dying trees, polluted rivers, fly-tipping, disappearing countryside and asthma. Concerns about the future of environments also arise from children’s generic interest in nature, life forms and the outdoors. Students of teaching frequently remark on the good behaviour of children engaged in well-planned fieldwork. Schools with a clear environmental focus to their curriculum capitalize on this interest and use it to generate the feeling that individuals can do something to change the probable future of damaged or threatened environments. The Eco Schools programme (Eco Schools, website) is a good example of a well-supported initiative providing guidance and resources to feed these interests. Suggested and potentially engaging topics, such as litter, waste, energy, water, transport, healthy living and school grounds, however, require a range of very specific subject skills and knowledge to bring them alive for children.

Recognizing the importance of relationships

The popularity of facebook® and other social networking sites among young people arises naturally from their interest in relationships. Websites and
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magazines devoted to personal, beauty and relationship problems of young people have also grown in recent years (National Literacy Trust, 2005, website). Relationships are important to all, but for the developing psyche of the child they may dominate everything. Each year, the numbers of children who contact the charity ChildLine grows by more than 10 per cent (ChildLine, 2010, website). This UK charity gives support to children who are abused, fearful or worried, and in 2008 supported 700,000 children (NSPCC, 2009, website). The vast majority were between 5 and 15 years old and about a third of cases concerned bullying and interpersonal relationship problems, by far the most common reasons for contacting ChildLine. Concerns about family, peers, friendships, who they can trust and who is caring towards them are central to children’s lives (see Illustration 1.7).

The family into which a child is born provides the first and most powerful model of relationships. Most of us recognize that the interrelationships within family go on influencing the trajectory of our lives well beyond childhood. Family support is often the key to a child’s learning and development within school. A family member was given as the most important role model by 16 per cent of children in a recent European survey (Popenici, 2006). Yet there may be a mutual suspicion between schools and families, and few

Illustration 1.7  Shared endevour often promotes improved relationships
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schools currently place family centrally in their curriculum. The establishment of multi-agency children’s centres and the extension of the school day under the UK Children Act 2004 has had a positive effect on contact between some schools, families and communities. There are several aspects of twenty-first-century life, however, where mistrust seems to be growing.

Recent reports show a growing atmosphere of suspicion in some societies. One large-scale study involving 160,000 children shows, for example, that only 43 per cent of English children aged 11–15 (53 per cent in the USA) could agree with the statement, ‘I find my peers kind and helpful’. By contrast, 80 per cent in Switzerland agreed with the same statement (WHO, 2004, website). UNICEF places the UK bottom of a 21-nation league in ‘family and peer relationships’ (UNICEF, 2007, website). Growing distrust may be evidence of social polarization and increasing suspicion between generations, sub-cultures and communities. The gap between the educational achievement of rich and poor children continues to widen in the UK (BBC News, 2010b, website).

Polarization is likely to be increased by schools if they do not recognize and address the gulf between their aims and values and those of their children. Popenici found that in Romania most secondary-aged children saw school as simply instrumental to getting a good job, and that a school’s interest in altruism, goodness, education and sincerity was somewhat irrelevant to their lives (Popenici, 2006). If a school community is given genuine opportunity to discuss and agree their values however, they will most often arrive at similar caring and community values (Booth and Ainscow, 2002).

Intercultural and cross-community understanding is seen by many to be crucial to national and international peace and progress in the twenty-first century. Schools can play their part in fostering such a utopia. Relationships between cultures and sub-cultures have been subject to a number of UK government-sponsored initiatives, especially since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999, website) and the subsequent Race Relations Act 2000 (Ajegbo, 2007). The QCA site, ‘Respect for all: reflecting cultural diversity through the curriculum’ (QCA, 2003, website), is a helpful attempt to show teachers how relationships of greater understanding between and across cultures can be developed through the curriculum. A number of websites, for example the DfES-sponsored Global gateway (DfES, 2006c, website), promote international links between schools, where meaningful and unpatronizing contact across continents can be developed.

Wholesome relationships are, of course, important to well-being and inclusion. Children need them to feel secure and ready to learn. We give little formal attention to building, maintaining and understanding relationships in our curricula and yet – as Daniel Goleman (1996, 1999, 2006) and Elizabeth Morris (2005) remind us – ‘emotional intelligence’ can be more important than other kinds of intelligence. By emotional intelligence, Goleman means the ability to understand and handle one’s own emotions (the subject of the
next section) and relationships, and how to understand and deal with those of others. Emotional literacy programmes have been very successfully introduced in a number of schools seriously approaching the PSHE and Citizenship curriculum. The recommendations from the now disbanded UK Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) for Key Stage 2 include:

- taking responsibility
- feeling positive about the self
- participating in decision making
- making real choices
- understanding the different views of others
- developing relationships through work and play
- dealing with inappropriate pressure
- recognizing risks
- resolving differences (QCA, 2002a).

The danger is that these non-compulsory aspects of the primary curriculum are left to chance and excessive pressure on timetables means that such themes are often only dealt with in a cursory and unplanned manner (Layard and Dunn, 2009).

**Helping develop a positive sense of self**

As far as we know, our sense of self is a defining human characteristic. Self-consciousness is argued to have massive survival and evolutionary advantages (Dawkins, 2003; Morris, 2004) and with it comes awareness of good and bad about our world. The concept of ‘self’ is, as neuroscientist Antonio Damasio puts it: ‘the critical biological function that allows us to know sorrow or know joy, to know suffering or know pleasure, to sense embarrassment or pride, to grieve for lost love or lost life’ (Damasio, 2000: 4). Deutscher (2006) sees language as ‘the invention that invented us’, in that self-talk or thought can be argued to shape both consciousness and identity.

The trend towards prizing and nurturing individuality has resulted in increased interest in cultural and personal identity. The philosophy for children movement (e.g. Fisher, 2008) is also part of this development. Damasio has devoted his career to research in the area of self-consciousness and describes two identifiable selves in our minds: a *core self* and an *autobiographical self*. The core self is that sense of consciousness where objects, sounds and senses around us are not only perceived but understood within our mind to be being perceived at that moment by ourselves. Core consciousness is consciousness in the moment, here and now, ‘ceaselessly recreated for each and
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every object with which the brain interacts’ (Damasio, 2000: 17). The autobiographical self consists of a set of memories of situations which bear centrally and usually invariably upon an individual’s life: ‘who you were born to, where and when, your likes and dislikes, the way you usually react to a problem or conflict, your name … your anticipated future’ (p. 17). Significant to those involved in education, Damasio draws three key conclusions from work in the field of selfhood. He suggests first that both the core and autobiographical self are interrelated; secondly, that consciousness is inseparable from emotion; and finally, that the sense of self exists to maintain or promote the healthy equilibrium of the body. Deutscher (2010), on the other hand, reminds us of the crucial impact of culture and language on that self.

Four questions of central educational importance emerge from this research:

1. If core consciousness is so totally dependent upon the senses and society, what do we do in our curriculum positively to introduce, develop and enhance experience across all the senses and social groups?

2. If the fully developed sense of self includes a clear sense of autobiographical self, what help are we giving children in school to identify their own individualized and special sense of identity confidence and belonging? How are we adding to their own positive memories, responses, talents and opinions? (Illustration 1.8)

3. If emotion is so closely linked with consciousness, are we spending enough time and effort in our teacher education on understanding emotion? In the education of children, are we planning for the positive engagement and enhancement of their feelings?

4. If self-awareness has developed from language and from nature as a way of promoting, assessing and fine-tuning our health, what are we doing in our curricula holistically and positively to involve both mind, body and relationships in the learning process?

It will not have escaped attention that I have used the word ‘positive’ in each of the four key educational implications of current thinking on self. Many writers attempt to place their scientific conclusions outside any values framework; teachers and the curriculum can have no such luxury. Almost everything teachers do is interpreted in some way as support or denial of some value or another. Each facet of the child’s world described so far has implied questions of value. Some kind of morality is always at the heart of what society has required of its teachers and this fact can be used to generate vital discussion and decisions in schools. If we agree, for example, on a desire to work to make the world ‘a better place’, common sense might suggest that we agree on what better might mean. We might, for example, start by establishing a culture in which a positive sense of self, behaviour, feelings, relationships and
environment are more likely than negative ones. The theme of promoting well-being through the educational choices we make runs through every chapter in this book.

Well-being is as important to our learning as it is to our relationships. A wide body of research (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6) suggests that the inner and underlying sense of what we simply call ‘happiness’ is the most common foundation for the transferable and lifelong learning we aim for in schools. Happiness is not always easy to come by. After basic needs are catered for, increased wealth does not seem to increase happiness (Layard, 2005, 2006; Young Foundation, 2010). The USA and the UK are amongst the richest countries in the world, but can only manage 26th and 28th rankings in a 35-nation survey of life satisfaction in 11-year-olds. Such figures have concentrated government attention on child well-being (e.g. DfES/OFSTED, 2004, website; DCMS, 2008, website).

Illustration 1.8  A 12-year-old introducing David Miliband (UK ex-government minister) to his group presentation on identity. Courtesy Gifted and Talented Summer Academy, Canterbury
Not everyone sees happiness as an appropriate aim for education. Placing each child’s and teacher’s personal happiness as a necessary background to everything that happens in school is sometimes characterized as the family’s job or an erroneous, over-idealistic and unrealistic aim. Detractors cite numerous examples of great but unhappy people, like Van Gogh, Schumann or Sylvia Plath, or perhaps their own painful struggles to suggest that good learning does not always come from ‘being happy’. These examples do not necessarily negate the value of aiming at a default position of well-being. Neither does aiming at a generalized state of well-being deny the personal importance of living through, empathizing with, expecting, valuing and using periods of suffering, difficulty and pain.

The famous bipolar creators rarely created anything in their times of deep depression, but rather used their times of positive emotion to process and make sense of their more negative experiences. Few would suggest that we deliberately make children depressed in order that they become more creative. Neither is the depressed state typical of the mind at its most creative (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Layard, 2005). Lasting learning can be painful and stressful, but unless this difficulty is experienced against a background of deeper personal security, learning is likely to be associated with negative feelings. A preponderance of negative life experiences seems more likely to result in a relative lack of resilience and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Fredrickson and Tugade, 2004).

Personal happiness is generally and deeply important to us. There is clearly something universally recognizable in the happy face (Ekman, 2004), positively interpreted even by children with neurological barriers to emotion such as severe autism (Howard-Jones and Pickering, 2005). Even very young babies respond positively to a smiling face from any cultural source. Several strands of current research now suggest that a feeling of positive emotion is a prerequisite for high-level efficient and creative learning on social, physical and intellectual levels. Placing emphasis on positive aspects of the child’s self and supporting all to feel included may not simply be a more efficient way of teaching them; it beneficially affects body and spirit too. Damasio (2003) offers a refinement to earlier thoughts about the links between consciousness and the body. He suggests that positive emotion, particularly the feeling of joy, signifies a biological state of: ‘optimal physiological coordination and smooth running of the operations of life ... [Joy is] not only conducive to survival, but survival with well-being’ (p. 137). In other words, when we are happy our body is in the best state for psychological and physical survival. When we are in this positive state, our brain responds by ‘feeling’ happy in order to help us maintain its current context. Damasio describes an unbroken loop between body and mind – the happy/healthy body promotes a more happy/efficiently working mind and vice versa. If this is the case, then seeking curricular opportunities to create the sense of joy in as many children as possible must be considered a desirable way for
them to be and to learn. Teaching with enjoyment as a major aim seems to have the potential to serve mind and body, here and now, and also to create in children a positive sense of self which will benefit them well into the future.

These findings mirror those by ‘positive psychologists’ like Csikszentmihalyi (2002), Fredrickson (2003, 2009), Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) and Seligman (2004), who also propose that positive emotional states are the optimum mental conditions for learning, social and intellectual connection making, discovery, creativity and invention. A particularly accessible hypothesis in this regard is Fredrickson’s ‘broaden and build’ theory of positive emotions. This is examined in Chapter 4.

There also seem to be strong links between happiness and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Veteran ‘people watcher’, Desmond Morris, has suggested that our feeling of happiness relates to ‘the degree to which we find ourselves able to exercise the particularly human skills of creativity, the use of symbols including symbolic language, and family relationships’ (Morris, 2004). A recurring theme of this book is the relationship between the self involved in creative activity and the ensuring sense of contentment, achievement, fascination, engagement and joy we often call happiness.

The developing self of the child is also prey to a powerful set of negative influences. Notions of rampant materialism, excessive wealth, risky behaviour,
violence, fame and a narrow concept of physical beauty are all too easily assimilated into the hoped-for self. These features of young life are constantly reinforced by toys, advertising, television, film, computer, internet and video images. Human young are probably genetically predisposed to finding joy in these things, but it is also commonly held that such simple pleasures do not bring particularly long-lasting satisfaction. Indeed, studies of lottery winners throughout the world have demonstrated the short-lived nature of material wealth. Left to their own devices without ICT to distract them, children quickly find enjoyment in physical and social activities. Physical play clearly engages the vast majority of young mammals. A casual observation of children during games sessions and at playtime shows most exhibiting wide grins, sparkling eyes, relaxed faces and joyful conversation – the key signals of happiness. It seems particularly disastrous that school sports and PE are so constrained by time, especially since negative body image and obesity are growing issues in developed societies like the UK and the USA (WHO, 2004, 2008, websites; Young Foundation, 2010).

Schools of the twenty-first century are right to be thinking hard about what implicit and explicit values they wish to teach their pupils. Perhaps the call for more complex and challenging activities in the curriculum results from a feeling that it is in creative, often symbolic, physical activity that lasting human satisfaction is to be found (Morris, 2004). Political demands on schools have sometimes resulted in significant conflicts of values in this regard. In the context of ‘back to basics’ demands on US education (Hirsch, 1999), Csikszentmihalyi castigated schools and parents for: ‘making serious tasks dull and hard and frivolous ones exciting and easy. Schools generally fail to teach how exciting, how mesmerisingly beautiful science or mathematics can be; they teach the routine of literature or history rather than the adventure’ (1997: 125). He goes on to give evidence from his own research which suggests that creative individuals in all walks of life go beyond the limitations of genetic or cultural programming to live ‘exemplary lives … [which] show how joyful and interesting complex symbolic activity is’. Attitudes to the self – how I learn best, what I find fascinating, satisfying, pleasure-giving, helpful – can be developed through education, but it is probably important that we consider carefully what kind of ‘selves’ we are helping to create in our classrooms.

How can we know what it is like to be a child in the twenty-first century?

The current concerns of children remind us that it may not be easy being a child in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, anywhere in the world. At one extreme, children suffer disproportionately. In the developing world, five-sixths of the world’s children have the least access to scarce resources and
Illustrations 1.10, 1.11, 1.12  Seek out the facial manifestations of happiness, the smile, the shining eyes, the raised cheekbones and the un-furrowed brow. Photos: Cherry Tewfik
What Should Schooling in the Twenty-First Century Look Like?

16,000 of them die each day because of poverty (Bread for the world, 2010, website). Two hundred and fifty million children under 14 work for their survival (UN, 2006, schools website). On the evidence of researchers and current media headlines, many young people in the resource-rich and developed world live a pretty sad and lonely existence too. Poverty of all kinds singles children out for special problems. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2009, website) reminds us that 30 per cent of children in the UK and USA live in poverty described as ‘an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development’ (UNICEF, 2005, website). The gap between rich and poor is as significant as poverty itself. Life expectancy correlates exactly with levels of inequality, and children born into low-status, low-income and high levels of stress, start life smaller and significantly more prone to psychological problems and illness (Layard, 2005, 2006; Wilkinson, 2005; Young Foundation, 2010).

Beyond poverty, relative wealth may have brought its own problems. Young people in advanced economies are reported to be increasingly involved in risky behaviour. Several studies demonstrate the rapid growth in behavioural and emotional difficulties amongst the young, and rising rates of teenage alcoholism, early smoking, depression, self-harm and suicide (Collishaw et al., 2004; Layard, 2006, website; Layard and Dunn, 2009). Indeed, Collishaw’s report recorded that in the UK behavioural and emotional problems among teenagers have risen by over 70 per cent in the past 25 years. The WHO reports (WHO, 2004, 2008, websites), graphically presented a rise in many of the possible causes of such trends: family breakdown, bullying, loss of trust, lack of success or pleasure in school, stress, loneliness and subjective health problems. Within many categories of health-related behaviour, young people in England (not necessarily in the UK as a whole) and the USA were shown to be amongst the least happy in the Western world. There may be a sensationalist element to some newspaper headlines and opinion polls about young people’s health, but it is more difficult to argue with international organizations with a well-established research methodology and, hopefully, less culturally biased views.

The most important way of finding out about what concerns children is by asking them. The pupil voice movement is still in its infancy in the UK and USA but increasingly schools are listening. In The School I’d Like, Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor asked children their views on school (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003) and life in general (Davey et al., 2010). The collected children’s statements plead for a very different school environment to the one which many adults may think children would like. Here are a few provocative suggestions for the schools of the future:

- Children will learn more about the future than the past.
- Adults will listen to them and not dismiss their opinions.
- Children will be free to be children.
Illustrations 1.13, 1.14, 1.15  Each child shows engagement in a different way, but it is recognizable across time and culture. Photos: Cherry Tewfik
What Should Schooling in the Twenty-First Century Look Like?

- Children will not be ‘treated as herds of identical animals wanting to be civilized before we are let loose upon the world. It will be recognized that it’s our world too’.
- Playgrounds would have ‘something to play with’.
- ‘Power will be evenly spread throughout the school’.
- ‘More time should be devoted to art, design and technology’.
- The curriculum will be ‘concerned with fulfilment’.

Several case studies from this book will outline projects where children have taken the lead in successfully defining and achieving what they wanted to learn and make in environments where the ‘locus of control’ was passed to them. These may still seem radical more than 200 years after Rousseau’s idealized and naturally good, ‘noble savage’ approach to the education of the child (see Introduction).

Less radical but very much in line with a ‘reconstructionist’ education ideology, the UK government and government agencies are now acting on the Children Act’s Every Child Matters (HM Government, 2004). This Act, seen by some as far-reaching and bold, is constructed around five outcomes which arose from consultations with children about their hopes and needs from the adult-controlled worlds of the health, social and education services. These common outcomes, against which all government agencies working with children are judged, are to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.

A newly articulated emphasis on feelings, security and well-being is evident in this list. Similar stress is also evident in a number of other UK government directives. Ofsted’s ‘framework for inspection’ (Ofsted, 2004, s. 4: 25) required schools to self-evaluate efforts made towards enhancing the ‘personal development and well-being’ of all learners. Similarly, the Healthy Schools Status document (DH/ DfES, 2005, and website) holds as one of its key areas of activity ‘the emotional health and well-being’ of children. Under new administration since May 2010, the ‘smaller’ UK government continues to see itself as enabling children:

- to overcome disadvantage and deprivation so they can fulfill their innate talents and take control of their own destiny ... [and affirming a] belief in the power of human agency to give meaning, structure and hope to every life. (Gove, 2010, website)
It now seems clear that national education systems in the developed world and beyond are charged not just with the education and socialization of children, but also the active promotion of their personal emotional security, health and well-being. Schools are designed to reach every child – they are the only agencies in a position fully to enact such policies and philosophies. In the next chapter, we examine some schools’ attempts to address the central issues for children of the twenty-first century.

Summary

The twenty-first century has challenges like every other century. Aside from the obvious implications of overpopulation, there are three major differences to the challenges of this century: the much more rapid pace of change (Figure 1.2), their perceived often negative character in the minds of modern children and their global characteristics.

The changes and challenges in our world, and consequently our minds, cannot be kept local; our global economy, instant communications and global pollution have meant that whatever happens in one place quickly affects every other. If they want, ordinary people, particularly teachers and children, are now in a position to exert some influence over the interrelated

![How long it takes new technologies to reach a mass market](image)

**Figure 1.2** How long it takes new technologies to reach a mass market. Where cell phones, internet and personal computers penetrated 20 per cent of the US market in less than 20 years, it took the car and the telephone 50 years to achieve the same take-up.
future of this world, but to do so effectively we need to be very clear about
what we value most. The answers to questions of value should underpin all
our education decisions. So far, we have selected and examined five key areas
of special interest to children:

- the future (which is taken to include environmental as well as personal
  concerns)
- ICT
- global politics
- relationships
- the self.

Research and experience in these areas also suggests that a number of related
statements can be made which might impact upon a curriculum designed to
liberate those children from the combined threats of materialism, fear, exclusion
and lack of self-fulfilment. Each of the following statements rest on arguments
for a more cross-curricular, creative, meaningful and child-centred approach:

1. Security about the future is an essential prerequisite for the happy child.
   A curriculum which addresses children's anxiety about the personal
   and global future (as well as insecurities about the self and relations-
   ships) is crucial if we agree that school activities should be relevant to
   their lives.

2. A sense of personal control over aspects of their daily life is central to children's
   motivation for learning. A concentration on developing emotional literacy,
   the constructive use of ICT and establishment of personally meaningful,
   curricular experiences to interpret and examine is more likely to generate
   personal engagement among children.

3. It is possible for ordinary individuals to make a positive impact upon global
   and environmental issues. It is suggested that cross-curricular themes that
   touch upon children's culturally or genetically determined interests in
   any area are more likely to generate involvement.

4. Opportunities to build and deepen positive relationships with others are
   embraced by children. We should seek a curriculum, teaching methods,
   community links and classroom organization which offer a range of
   activities to promote and utilize such relationships.

5. The child's positive self-image is fundamental to a healthy mind and body.
   Education should therefore be physically active and individualized as far
   as possible and aim to promote a personal sense of achievement and
   resilience and to discover the strengths of each individual.

Education in the UK and USA is now in a position where government policy on
health, education and social services could be seen to be broadly in line with
theoretical/professional opinion on priorities for children. Key words which arise from both areas each relate to feelings:

- health
- security
- enjoyment
- positivity
- well-being.

Each of these concepts and each of the five key areas of special interest to children are dependent upon judgements of value. Each school and community should found its curriculum upon the values they agree to share. I believe such decisions and actions would significantly and positively impact on the character of twenty-first-century life.

**Key questions for discussion**

- Do you think that the 2000s are pessimistic times?
- What do you think schools can do about integrating family learning into the curriculum and structures of the school?
- What can the playground tell us about children’s learning? How could this be integrated into the curriculum?
- What are the pluses and minuses of ICT in the lives of children?
- How can we make relationships a more central part of our curriculum?
- How can we ensure times of happiness and positivity for every child?
- What can the school do about the health of the child?

**Further reading**

