SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Education Politics

Journal of the Socialist Educational Association

Autumn 2013, Nº 117 Free to members

£1 non-members

Fact and Fiction in Education

There have been some stunning successes among individual sponsored academies and academy chains, and these have raised expectations of what can be achieved even in the most deprived areas. But it is increasingly clear that academy status alone is not a panacea for improvement

From the Pearson/RSA report on academies ***Unleashing Greatness***

IF ACADEMIES ARE THE ANSWER ….

…. WHAT WAS THE QUESION?

In this issue:

Editorial

The gathering storm

English education is in an astonishing state. Officially, Michael Gove is regarded as a "superman", the words of a Times article on 18th September . Unofficially his record is known to be disastrous. However the media view was reflected in journalist Alice Thompson's comment "I think he is brilliant, phenomenally bright and even more polite". But then she added "maybe he's magnificent but wrong" and then listed some, but not all, of his disasters.

Political reality is that the media and political classes share Alice Thompson's views. Whatever Labour says, and it is not much, they do not contest the direction of the Gove Revolution and it is clear that he is continuing the Blair/Brown reforms – though Labour would probably stop at open profit making in schools. Beyond the immediate Westminster consensus, or paradigm, lie the Black Papers of the early 1970s and the Callaghan speech of 1976 which set the tone for the decades to come. Certainly there have been new developments. The role of the OECD and the PISA surveys did not exist in the 1970s, and we should expect the next set of PISA results to trigger another moral panic in the media.

In this context, Alasdair Smith, secretary of the Anti Academies Alliance, is right to argue in his most recent report that all campaigns must be seen in the wider context of the consensus. While not everyone on the Lib-Dem and Labour front benches would accept the profit taking, academy and free school dogmas, waste of money, bigotry in some of the academy governing bodies, and the forcible process of academisation, which stem from the School Revolution, far too many are fellow travellers of this hard right agenda. The broad agreement on fundamentals across the media and political classes is the problem.

The politics of Westminster

As Alasdair argues, "The Westminster village is in thrall to Gove. We should not believe... that the Lib Dems are holding back Gove... the political class remain wholly committed to the neo-liberal vision (of).... GERM, the Global Education Reform Movement". This is accurate. The primary machinations over accountability are Lib Dem creations, and the most powerful advocates of the GERM are in Washington, where the Democrats and Republicans are commtted to the War on Teachers, charters and the rest.

However the call Alasdair makes for a National Campaign for Education, despite some union support, is too broad to be a panacea. Though no one should give up on the anti academies struggle, Alasdair is right to argue Gove is "more vulnerable" on other areas than academies at the moment, a successful campaign on Education cannot be too general. Too many people fail to grasp what we are talking about.

I wrote the article on page 3 on the patio of my local pub, a pint being needed to tackle Gove yet again. The guy on the next table asked what I was doing, so I explained I was writing opposing Free schools. He wondered why, as he had been to a Free school himself. It was clear that he had no idea what Gove was doing – there are no Free schools in Stafford, and what he thought was a Free school was his local comprehensive. To him, there are fee paying schools... and state schools. Nothing else registers. It was a salutary warning that we have become divorced from what people think about.

Focussing on the immediate

It would be immediately valuable to tackle the problems posed by Gove's arrogant and incompetent record on tackling the issues people can see as vital – school buildings, the teacher supply, and exams. Estelle Morris wrote well about the two developing crises affecting day to day schooling in the Guardian of 24th September. The teacher training situation, already under investigation by the Education Select committee, is likely to be clarified during October. Whatever the figures turn out to be, what Estelle wrote – echoing Tim Brighouse and Geoff Whitty in the SEA "School Revolution" pamphlet – is that Gove has, uniquely, abandoned the role of the Ministry in securing teacher training places. The abolition of the Training and Development Agency (TDA) by the coalition means that no one is actually responsible for teacher training.

While the devolution of training to school level is driven by dogma, in an almost anarcho-syndicalist belief that overall decisions are best made at school level, the consequences are likely to impact in ways that the mainstream can see as being driven by Gove. Alice Thompson missed this in her article. But she saw the other impending crisis – the failure to build enough schools and the folly of building free schools where there are already enough places while other areas have packed classrooms.

However we must not assume this is a magic bullet. The Daily Mail has already blamed the crisis on immigrants, and UKIP is poised well placed to exploit the blame culture. To make sure that the buck stops at Michael Gove's door requires a specific campaign. This should draw on local experience especially as councils will be blamed for problems but academies and free schools can opt out. Here we can make real links across government policies. The challenge is to burst Gove's image as superman. Now is the time.

Trevor Fisher

The Reality Gap widens

Trevor Fisher

New Developments in Free Schools and Academies over the summer highlight the growing gap between the real state of education and the media image. The existing fantasies of alleged academy successes were joined by the Free School phenomena, and the links with OFSTED's increasingly suspect behaviour began to attract some attention. The big news was however Michael Gove's attempt to counter Labour's suspicions over Free Schools.

The criticisms from Front Bench speakers – though not the education team – led to Gove writing a personal defence in the Guardian of 1st August. Gove argued that the Free School initiative was "not ideological" and was "rooted in evidence", like his national curriculum where he claimed "the evidence shows that children benefit from high expectations" - no evidence offered, naturally – but for the Free Schools there was evidence which Gove took from OFSTED inspection reports.

Gove cited 24 OFSTED reports just published on the first two years of Free School operations. This is too small a sample for real conclusions – there are 24,000 or so institutions under Gove's control – and two years is too short a period for patterns to emerge. But Gove put forward the figures as proof of success, namely that "the proportion that are good or outstanding outstrips other state schools. However, Gove did not give the actual proportions rated in these categories by OFSTED.

The BBC on 2nd August dug out the figures. They stated that overall 79% of all state schools were in the good/outstanding category, while 75% of free schools were. Thus Gove was wrong to say the Free Schools were ahead, though the differences was so small the BBC commented that the figures showed they were 'performing in line' with other state schools. However when the figures were analysed, all the 'outstanding' schools proved to be primaries, with no secondary free schools in the category. There is a clear failure here to match the secondary sector.

The only real conclusion to be drawn from the limited sample is that, like the Academies that Free schools mirror, the claims of outstanding success for a project producing almost miraculous improvements have no factual basis. There is a reality gap. However the Summer Debate widened to take in OFSTED itself, whose behaviour is now causing concern. In the Guardian of 17th September John Harris showed that OFSTED is now failing schools which then are forced to become academies on a regular basis. However even more damaging criticisms of an inspectorate whose Chief Inspector was appointed by Michael Gove was made by Robert Coe of Durham University at the ResearchEd conference reported in the Times Educational Supplement of 13th September.

Professor Coe, a source of Gove's data on exams, argued that the observations used by OFSTED for its judgements were "not research based or evidence based" and that OFSTED had not proved that observations led to better learning. This was a comment based on politicians in general, and was part of a critical debate at the conference in which another major reform initiative designed as part of the school autonomy strategy was criticised – Teach First. Dr Rebecca Allen of the Institute of Education said that this had been fully funded without any research evaluation into its effectiveness. There was no evaluation of whether it was value for money.

Academies were not immune from criticism at the conference. Sam Freedman, cited as a former policy advisor to Gove, stated that there had been only two studies into the effectiveness of academies. This is curious, since studies from LSN, the House of Commons Library, Terry Wrigley, the LSE and the National Audit Office have been made. But these were of exam results. Whether Freedman meant wider studies was not clear.

And as for Free Schools, the dogma that they are the property of parents seeking to improve their children's chances in poor areas with indifferent schools is also under question. Zoe Williams in the Guardian on 26th September pointed out that there is a high proportion of religious foundations operating in the Free Schools system. And many of these are far from inclusive and rationalist. The Anti Academies Alliance has claimed many are pursuing homophobic policies. And the amounts of money being allocated to them is questionable.

There is a growing gap between the reality of the Academy and Free schools initiatives, and other school based projects, and the rhetoric of successfully improving standards. Most of the media remain convinced by the rhetoric. But for how long can the gap continue to grow?

The editor wishes to than Janet Downs of the Local Schools Network for help in researching this article.

PISA, Power and Policy

Mike Newman

The emergence of global educational governance
Editors: Heinz-Dieter Meyer & Aaron Benavot,
Oxford Studies in Comparative Education 2013
Symposium Books, ISBN 978-1-873927-96-0

PISA stands for Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA is sponsored by the OECD and produces test results in reading, mathematics and scientific literacy, at age 15, for sixty one participating countries. This book is a collection of papers by twenty three academics from universities in the US, Australia and Europe, especially Finland.

It should be required reading for journalists and politicians, liable to attacks of "PISA shock"[i], a condition caused by finding that one's own country is only mid-league.

Comparing like with like

How should we interpret Peru's score of 370 compared with Germany's of 487 or Finland's of 536, knowing that a third of Peru's children are engaged in child labour … only a quarter of Peruvian households have internet access … that only 70% of Peru's secondary aged children attend school and that Peru's child mortality is four times that of top performing countries?

Heinz-Dieter Meyer &Kathryn Schiller p211

The most important contention in the book is that the role of PISA is turning the OECD into the "arbiter … diagnostician, judge and policy advisor to the world's school systems"[ii]. The danger is that "PISA best practice will drive attention away from more relevant local policy alternatives (while) officials, politicians, parents and communities enact … their favourite reform … believing that it is a magic bullet". "Schooling is highly open to fads and fashions of the moment."[iii] There are in any case two pathways to PISA success. One is the "agrarian egalitarianism" of Finland[iv] and the other is the "school disciplinary climate" of the East Asian tigers[v].You pays your money and you takes your choice.

The authors deny the universal relevance of PISA results as indicators of school success. The 61 countries involved differ widely in culture, deprivation, equality and colonial history. It is far from clear that any test can apply across the piste. The samples are different. In the UK, special schools are not included and the sample is 61% whereas in Germany they are and the sample is 95%. The UK sample is not extensive enough to allow valid comparisons between England and Wales, although this does not stop journalists from doing so.

There are further differences between different tests. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) uses 25% of algebra and 33% multiple choice questions. For PISA the figures are 11% and 66%. The two tests produce different rankings. With TIMSS, Finland is no longer top of the class, but is well beaten by Flanders[vi].

In a powerful paper[vii] Meyer & Schiller explore the socio-economic and cultural variables that impact strongly on PISA outcomes. They conclude that global PISA ranking provides "very little information about the quality of … schools". "GDP and per pupil spending accounted for two thirds of the variation in mean PISA scores across countries"[viii].

Finally, the papers deal with the Finnish miracle. The authors state that global quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) promoted by the OECD and copied slavishly in the UK (and it is feared in Wales) is not used at all in Finland, the highest scoring of the European liberal nations.

Finland shows that it is "possible to combine quality and equity at a reasonable financial cost – without school inspection, standardised curriculum and high stakes student assessment, test-based accountability or a race to the top mentality"[ix]. "The purpose of QAE is to develop – not to control, sanction or allocate resources."[x] "There is no basis or need to publish school-based ranking lists."[xi]

Finally two Finish authors[xii] describe teacher training in Finland. It is university based and research orientated. As a result the status of teachers is high and likewise the quality of teaching. Yet another example of the aphorism – if you want to know what good education is, look at what Gove does – and then do the exact opposite.

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Education, Competition and Deterring Middle-Class Parents

Dr. James Duggan

The issue of competition in schools is one the perennial bugbears of those committed to developing more socially progressive forms of education. Indeed having to say "more socially progressive forms of education" is indicative of the dominance of discourses of competition in education because you can't really use the right-left distinction because New Labour and One-Nation-might-become-Next Labour are happy to hoist a hammock and doze in the apparently unproblematic space between the two pillars of competition and collaboration.

In the mainstream media and political discourse, there are two broad narratives of education:

One is a competitive vision of schools, in a world that is, red in tooth and claw. From the genetic to the global the gnashing and rending of the strong ousting the weak is a (or the) key principle of the right view of education. Education is presented as a constant process of selection, of smarter girls sitting at the front of the class, of the goal scorer on the winning side held aloft while the losers slink away, of ribbons and places at Oxbridge won and all through this the character building process of spurning the dread taste of defeat and the joyous pleasure of a foe bested. This journey takes the quivering, pale child and adds the grit, gall and gumption to become the captain of industry or an Olympic gold-medal winning champion. With seamless logic schools also compete against one another in this search for character, ethos or some other intangible quality… perhaps with the policy aim of seeing the first inner-city free school rising to become the CEO of a FTSE 100 company and an academy chain winning the 4 x 400 relay in the 2032 Olympics.

Opposed to this is 'the prizes for all', dumbed-down, celebration of mediocrity and tyranny of the poverty of aspiration that the 'enemies of promise' (Gove 2013) shackle every poor child they can get their hands on… with the inarguable logic that every left wing family is made up of a teacher father, a social worker daughter and a prison guard brother, and e dad's determination that his failure will keep ex-pupils in the system and his kids in work.

So, what to do?

A first step is found in Melissa Benn's book 'School Wars' (2012), where she points out that the reason why the 11+ was discontinued was largely because increasing numbers of middle-class parents lambasted politicians, outraged when their children failed the exam and ended up in a secondary modern.

In this there is a germ of an idea for how to engage with the obsession with competition in education. Although we have to recognise that society has changed – see for example David Boyle's (2013) book 'Broke: Who killed the middle class?' – the middle class is the key driver of social change in class obsessed Britain. Yet this observation, this locus for engagement, is hugely problematic because the education system is currently rigged in the favour of the middle classes, with property prices excluding access to school catchment areas in addition to a whole host of other tricks such as extensive tutoring and pretending to be religious. So, how do we turn the middle class against a system that works in their favour?

Of course, one option is normative cum political rant but there is the odd mix of self-interest and ideology, indeed if the two are different, in the middle class affinity with competition so it's a tricky one to disprove by evidence or plaintive cries. Furthermore, this so far hasn't worked.

I live in Manchester near a fee-charging, independent day school where each morning parents in fancy cars, predominantly Range Rovers, drop their children off before they drive, I'm guessing, to their well-remunerated jobs in competitive industries. One time in a department store for the well healed I heard a store announcement for this demographic, "Come to the Computing & Phones section to buy the [brand name and model] laptop. Give your child an unfair advantage when they go back to school." I think this speaks to the perspective that it's a tough world out there and ensuring your child has all the unfair advantages means they will get the opportunities to get on in life.

I think one option is to draw parallels between this competitive mode for education and anti-smoking campaigns. A reason for learning from anti-smoking campaigns is that in a generation smoking has gone from popular to pariah, at least amongst the middle-class. Although we should probably have qualms about stoking parent's guilt, there is arguably something in bringing together evidence that competition harms children and more specifically will harm your child even if they 'win' the place at the right school, the best university and the exclusive graduate scheme.

There is, for example, evidence that selection and competition is stressful for children (Kruger et al 2007), and can provide disincentives for those that 'lose' (Jones 2007). This message can be countered by the need to 'toughen little Jonny up' so we can point out the evidence that details that in its current form competition requires standardised testing, which has a tendency for teachers to teach to the test (Natriello 2009), which leads to narrowing the curriculum (Au 2007; Crocco and Costigan 2007), and this means less time learning different types of skills – the kind that are needed in an increasingly needed in a more complex and challenging workplace where 'the jobs of 5 years time are yet to be invented'. Added to all this is the negative effect of competition in schools on teacher job satisfaction and retention, engendering a 'paradox of performativity' that drives out the best teachers and frustrates those that remain (Goodson 2003).

So to complement the message that competition needlessly harms your child now and in the future is the question: why are classrooms, schools and the school system being rewired to compete? Well, the reasons are complex but one consequence is that some people are getting richer and stand to make a lot of money (e.g., Boffey 2013). Thus the argument is your child is not winning when you and he or she are pitted against other parents and other children but there are individuals and companies returning a profit.

Detoxifying School Accountability

John Bolt

It is hardly controversial to say that schools should be accountable for what they do and how well they do it. But that is about where the consensus ends. Challenges to the current accountability regime are becoming more common. Recently Demos published "Detoxifying School Accountability" by James Park (*www.demos.co.uk/publications/detox*).

His argument that our approach to testing and inspection is forcing schools to narrow their focus down to what they are going to be measured on is both familiar and absolutely right. Everyone has to focus on targets and these frequently get in the way of providing pupils with real learning. Doing well in a test is not the same thing as actually mastering knowledge and knowing how to use it. Park spells out how the accountability regime distorts what schools do – for example first the rush to so called equivalents to GCSE and then the u-turn to the EBacc.

The paper addresses too the pernicious impact of Ofsted in its current form. Park stresses rightly the fear that many schools live under but also the way in which it forces schools who don't feel secure to take the safe route focussing on control and "the imposition of a narrow learning agenda".

The question then is what should be done. Park offers two proposals – a new approach to self-evaluation and inspection and a radical reform of qualifications and therefore of performance data.

He argues that an external and punitive model of inspection should be replaced by an approach rooted in self-evaluation. Where Park's approach is distinctive is that he argues for a very comprehensive engagement of stakeholders in the process of self-evaluation. That is how, he argues, you prevent self-evaluation from being a cosy self-congratulatory process.

The second set of proposals relates to the performance tables. It's clear that these have had all manner of perverse consequences. Park argues for the de-regulation of qualifications – put somewhat simplistically, if you have more different types of qualifications, outcomes will be less easily quantified and people will be obliged to look in a more sophisticated way at what the results are telling us.

This section is the least convincing in the paper. The main problem is its complexity. We have suffered before from an alphabet soup of qualifications without any clarity about what value many of them have. It doesn't seem likely that this will get rid of the hierarchy amongst qualifications. The Russell Group will surely decree what it expects. These qualifications will become the gold standard and even if government does not measure how many pupils achieve them, we can be sure that someone will and we will be back to league tables.

The challenge is how can we get rid of the belief that some qualifications are "better" than others? But until we do, the pressure to move up market and thus to drive pupils into courses that are not appropriate for them will not go away.

So this is an issue that still needs sorting. But that should not take away the value of this paper. Its assault on the current punitive accountability regime is of great value. So is its focus on self-evaluation and on listening to the views of all those with an interest in a school's effectiveness. It adds further strength to the argument that the oil tanker is going the wrong way – turning it round however remains a very big ask indeed.

The Debate That Never Was – Education at the Labour Annual Conference

David Pavett

The debate on the education section of the NPF report, on the first day of Conference, was opened by Peter Wheeler (NEC). Six delegates spoke: three prospective parliamentary candidates and three union delegates (GMB, Unison, Unite). Stephen Twigg replied to 'discussion'. No teachers, local authority councillors, educational campaigners or university educationalists took part. The session lasted 36 minutes.

Although the nominal purpose of the session was to debate the education sections of the NPF report no one referred to its contents. It was a debate in name only. Had the speakers read the education part of the NPF report? Did they approve its contents? We will never know.

An innocent observer could be forgiven for wondering why the party that came to power saying that its three priorities were education, education and education could only find 36 minutes of its annual conference for the subject. Such an observer might also wonder how it was that the Labour Party's complex policy-making machinery resulted in educational material for conference that passed no comment on the transformation of English education under the Coalition. Schools have been removed from local authorities and made into “independent” units – often with private sponsors. Local Authorities are being progressively distanced from education and private operators play an increasing role, but none of this was mentioned in the NPF report.

How is it that Labour can present policies on education which do not deal with these problems? It is hard not to conclude that Labour's educational policy makers don't actually see these things as problems. Labour policy differs from that of the Tories/Coalition on matters which do not go to the heard ot the Gove revolution (which is not to deny the importance of those matters). On the basic principle of restructuring education so that schools compete for parental choice as the way to “drive up standards” it is hard to see the difference between the Labour and Conservative Parties.

In opening, Peter Wheeler for the NEC said that Labour wants cooperation in order to produce the best education while the Tories favour division and competition. He seemed unaware that both parties want to make all schools into independent competing units. He said that only Labour authorities were resisting Coalition policy. Sadly this is untrue. Some Conservative Councils have put up more resistance to Gove's reforms than some Labour Councils.

Of the three union speakers two spoke about the importance of teaching assistants and the Coalition cuts forcing a reduction in their numbers. This is a good point but there is nothing in the NPF report about it. One speaker called for the abolition of tuition fees in FE/HE but this point was simply ignored as if it had never been said – such was the nature of the 'debate'.

The prospective parliamentary candidates tried to raise enthusiasm with talk of Labour as the “Party of Aspiration”, denunciations of the Tories on childcare and rising child poverty, the demand for quality apprenticeships and the claim that the economy “must be powered by the many and not the few”. This conference rhetoric had nothing to do with the report which was supposed to be under discussion consideration.

Stephen Twigg replied to the preceding non-discussion. He talked of growing child poverty and Labour's plan to provide child care as of right from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. He denounced the use of unqualified teachers and claimed that Labour's “mission” was to “place power and wealth in the hands of the many not the few”. This radical sounding statement was immediately offset by an elitist discussion of opportunity to get to “top universities” which seems, from its frequent mention, to be an important measure of the success of the education system for Stephen Twigg. He referred to “top universities” three times in his eleven minutes at the podium. It should be clear that if a small minority of universities are designated as “top”, then by definition the great majority will not go to them. It seems reasonable to point out that when one focuses obsessively on “the best” one tends to forget the rest.

Labour's commitment to providing high quality apprenticeships for all those who do not go to university was reaffirmed although we were not told how this would be achieved beyond saying that firms with government contracts would be required to provide quality apprenticeships.

For anyone following the dramatic changes to the educational landscape in England the whole debate would have had an air of unreality. The major issues of Gove's school revolution were not even hinted at. Labour is still set on the educational course and the educational philosophy set by New Labour. It is a path to fragmentation and division. Its basis is in neo-liberal ideology which is as far from a democratic and socialist perspective it is possible to be.

FLAWED MEASUREMENT PROPOSED FOR PRIMARY

Colin Richards

In the last half century primary education has achieved far greater prominence world-wide than previously. That welcome recognition of its fundamental importance has come at a price, especially in so-called "developed" western societies. Consideration of "performance" in primary schools has led to the development of a range of "performance indicators" which have recently morphed almost imperceptibly into "performance measures". That change is having a marked and, for many of us experienced in primary education, a misguided, pernicious influence on school policy and practice and on children's education and well-being. That process is particularly marked in England. Its most recent and dangerous manifestation is *Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum*, a consultation document outlining the Department for Education's ratcheted-up proposals for national testing.

The extent of children's understanding of particular concepts cannot be measured but it can be *judged* with all the tentativeness that the term "judgement" implies. The people best placed to make those judgements are teachers who work with children every day along with parents/carers who live with them.

In summary it is proposed to retain national testing at ages seven and eleven but with "a higher and more ambitious expected standard" including a "secondary ready standard" set as a target for at least 85% of pupils. Test results are to be reported using scaled scores and enabling pupils to be compared against all other pupils in the same age group through placement in one of ten ranked categories or deciles. To "measure" pupils' progress" their performance at age eleven is to be compared with that of pupils with similar prior attainment. The idea of introducing "a simple baseline check" at the start of compulsory schooling is also floated .

Underlying the proposals are a number of assumptions, unacknowledged by their authors and by government ministers and shared by governments of other "competitor' countries. Three of these are arguably more important to question than the precise details of the proposed testing regime.

The most fundamental assumption underlying the proposals is that it is possible to use tests to *measure* children's understanding. An allied assumption is that the younger the children the simpler it is to assess that understanding. Measurement implies accuracy, precision and confidence – which cannot possibly apply to something as wide-ranging, amorphous, elusive and covert as understanding, particularly, but not only, among young children. At the most, tests *indicate* possibilities, suggest what under certain very limited conditions children can do and understand but they cannot be used validly to generalise much beyond the test situation. The extent of children's understanding of particular concepts cannot be measured but it can be *judged* with all the tentativeness that the term "judgement" implies. The people best placed to make those judgements are teachers who work with children every day along with parents/carers who live with them. Hence the importance of teacher assessment, downgraded in the proposals by the prominence given to "performance measures", and the importance of dialogue with parents and with children , viewed in the consultation document simply as recipients of test-based "measurements" rather than as contributors to the assessment process.

An allied assumption is that progress in understanding can be *measured* by comparing results on one test with results on another taken years later. Whatever it is that tests indicate rather than measure is subtly influenced by the conditions in which they are administered, the language in which they are expressed, the form they take and many other uncontrollable variables. It is simply not justifiable to compare performance in ,say, English and mathematics in tests administered to children at age seven with performance on different tests four years later. Like is not being compared with like unless the same test is administered in exactly the same way in exactly the same conditions on successive occasions – an impossibility. *Measurement* of progress is impossible; what is feasible, however, is tentative, provisional judgement of progress, informed on occasion by testing and by discussion with children themselves, by those who know the child well on a daily basis. This needs to be recognised, celebrated and developed.

A third assumption is that the "expected standard", including "the secondary ready standard", is value-free or, at least, widely shared. Yet standards, properly conceived, are criteria used in assessing

or evaluating the *quality* of particular activities or processes with that quality dependent on the identification of the purposes and values within them. The English Department for Education claims that "the single most important outcome" of primary schooling is to ensure "as many of its pupils as possible are 'secondary ready' by the time they leave". That belief, emanating from ministers, may or may not be widely shared but it is assumed to be by the authors of the proposals. Many teachers as well as parents would contest that as the prime purpose while acknowledging that any stage of education (including secondary) must take cognisance of what follows it, as well as what precedes it. The so-called standard or standards reflecting that highly problematic "readiness" purpose are not value-free, are not objective but reflect the assumptions and values of those producing the proposals. Setting the "secondary ready standard" as the target for at least 85% of eleven-year-olds is an equally arbitrary decision, presumably made on statistical grounds.

Not only in England but internationally the move from "performance indicators" to "performance measures" is not just a matter of semantics. It represents a fundamental shift in mind-set which is unwarranted and is likely to restrict rather than enhance the education of primary-aged children including those in "competitor" economies. Hopefully the proposals will be contested fiercely by those who do not share the government's confident but ill-founded assumptions. Hopefully too, this impoverished approach to assessing children's understanding will not accompany and thereby damage the provision of primary education world-wide.

Prescription for Failure

John Coe

The current public consultation regarding the government's proposals for assessment is more important to the quality of primary education than even the new national curriculum. Assessment is the most powerful of the mechanisms of control exercised by government because what is assessed through national testing very largely determines what is taught and how it is taught.

The Coalition politicians know full well what he is doing. They have, in their own words, "raised the bar" for young children, more has to be learned earlier in their lives, while national testing is limited to English and mathematics. No prizes for understanding how they see the work of primary schools -- they sees them as elementary schools preparing children for secondary schools. Indeed they are now right out of the political closet as they describe the purpose of the first seven years of education as getting pupils "secondary ready".

Progress in learning is defined as the difference between the test score achieved by children aged five or seven and the test score achieved at the age of ten or eleven. It is likely that there is not a single parent or teacher, either primary or secondary, who believes that a child's multifaceted progress over the primary years can be measured or summed up by such limited and sterile means. It gets worse because the data wonks have been at work and raw scores are to be converted into a 'scaled' score of readiness for secondary education using formulae developed by the Standards and Testing Agency. How this is to be explained to parents and teachers has yet to be made clear.

All the children in the age group are to be divided into ten categories known as 'deciles'. Children will then be allocated on the basis of their scaled score to one of the ten 'deciles'. Parents and teachers will be told of the allocation but there can be no doubt that most children will be only too aware of their allocation. The DfE gives as an example Tom who receives a scaled score of 87. He does not reach the secondary readiness standard of 100 and so is placed in the bottom 10% of pupils nationally. What a magnificent, encouraging message to send him as he prepares for the exciting challenge of his secondary school!

The government, in common with its predecessors, labours under the illusion that raising the expected statutory level of attainment automatically raises standards. It is a dangerous illusion since all that raising the expected level does is to encourage more coaching for improved test performance. Educational attainments are not improved one jot. The expectation embodied in the current proposals is that 15% of children will not be secondary ready by the time they leave primary school. This is a prescription for failure.

Discussions with professional and voluntary associations indicate that there is widespread concern regarding the government's ill-conceived proposals. Yet again we can anticipate that critics will receive abuse from the Secretary of State rather than any opportunity for rational debate. It is symptomatic of the weakness of his ideas that faced with professional opposition he turns not to dialogue but to insulting invective.

THE ACTUAL CONCERNS OF BUSINESS ABOUT OUR SCHOOLING

Michael Bassey

One of the disturbing features of education in England is the erroneous image of it projected by the dominant right-wing press. For example, the *Daily Telegraph*, in an editorial on 11th June 2012 said:

"When business and industry complain – as they frequently do – about the quality of the graduates they are asked to find jobs for, the universities tend to blame the secondary schools … The secondaries, in turn, blame the primary schools … The primaries presumably excuse themselves by arguing [about] the nurseries."

Poppycock! A month after this piece of nonsense appeared the *UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey of 2011* was published. It was based on telephone interviews with establishments who have recruited education leavers in the previous 2-3 years. The evidence on "perceived work-readiness" shows the error of the *Telegraph.*

Key: Column A: University or HE leavers (N = 13,762 employers)
Column B: 7-18 year-old school leavers (N = 12,386 employers)
Column C: 16 year-old school leavers (N = 9,784 employers)

"Perceived work-readiness of education leavers in the last 2-3 years" (Figure 3.1)			
	A	**B**	**C**
Very well prepared	23%	10%	10%
Well prepared	59%	50%	49%
Poorly prepared	12%	24%	28%
Very poorly prepared	2%	5%	9%

But of particular relevance to current educational debates are the reasons for students being 'poorly prepared'.

"Those employers in England who reported that the education leavers they had recruited were poorly-prepared for work were asked to indicate what skills or attributes they were lacking". (Table 3.2)			
	A	**B**	**C**
Lack of working world/life experience	8%	18%	23%
Poor attitude/personality or lack of motivation	5%	14%	18%
Lack required skills or competencies	5%	9%	10%
Lack of common sense	2%	4%	6%
Literacy/numeracy skills	1%	3%	5%
Poor education	1%	2%	3%

This shows, for example, that while 37% of 16 year-old leavers recruited were judged to be poorly prepared for work in industry it is only 5% of these leavers who were considered to be lacking literacy and numeracy skills.

So, how do we interpret the "poor attitude, personality, lack of common sense" etc? My view is clear. This is a consequence of schools needing to 'teach to the test' and having less opportunity to promote the all-round development of young people through a properly broad and balanced education. The CBI's recent report *First Steps** recognises this and shows a much more profound understanding of education than our right wing press and most politicians.

*http//www.cbi.org.uk/campaigns/education-campaign-ambition-for-all-/first-steps-read-the-report-on-line/

What is education for?

Fiona Carnie

What do we see as the broader purposes of education in 2013 – and where are the voices of young people and parents in discussing what these might be? The Coalition Government is forging ahead with sweeping reforms to the school system without any apparent consultation with key stakeholders. So much for living in a democracy and giving those in receipt of public services a say in shaping them.

In asking whether our schools are fit for purpose we need to have a close look at them from the perspectives of those who work or study or bring their children there day in day out. But how much do adults – teachers, parents and governors - really understand the child's everyday experience at school? And to what extent do children and young people themselves feel that their education is relevant to their lives in the 21st century?

Schools generally point to the existence of student councils as evidence that they listen to pupil voice. But these bodies are often tokenistic and do not involve young people in a meaningful dialogue about their education. And yet the research is clear – when children have a voice and feel listened to they are more motivated and they do better at school. At a recent consultative event in Scotland young people told policy makers:

> *"The world is changing four times as fast as the classroom." "If we are going to catch up we need to be enterprising, creative, innovative and inspired." "The days have long gone when an education system can simply force an all-knowing curriculum down our throats."*

As for parents, they are pretty much excluded from discussion about what goes on at their child's school. On a practical level, at the present time many parents are concerned about the exorbitant cost of school uniform, or the cost of taking children away during school holidays when travel companies charge top rates. Issues such as these have a big impact on families and consulting parents on them would be a way of drawing them into the education debate. Government needs to listen and support parents rather than set itself in opposition. There is significant research evidence indicating the crucially important role that parents play in their children's education. Where are the parent councils that enable parents to contribute to school decision making? Those countries which are most successful at educating their children – in particular the Scandinavian countries - are those where parental participation is enshrined throughout the years of schooling.

And most teachers feel that they scarcely have any voice and that they go to work every day and "deliver" the curriculum. The terminology says it all – a consumer culture in which young people are passive recipients of prescribed knowledge. But that is not at all how real teaching and learning happens. Many teachers feel compromised by the role that they are expected to play. The votes of no confidence in the Education Secretary passed at some union Easter conferences speak volumes.

So what is the way forward? We need a national conversation about the purposes of education to challenge the increasing marketisation of the system and the test-based diet that it is dishing up – a conversation which policy makers actually listen to. And at local level, every school would surely benefit by setting up an on-going intergenerational dialogue involving young people, parents, teachers, governors and school leaders together to develop a shared vision for their learning community - one in which children and young people will flourish.

These conversations should explore what kind of world we want to live in and how our schools can foster the attitudes, skills, knowledge and values to help build that world. And they could discuss how the school might evaluate those attitudes, skills, knowledge and values, whilst also being accountable to society. Such dialogue would strengthen the school by giving everyone a voice and increasing the sense of ownership. Yes – the external political discourse will continue – but a school which has built the support and commitment of its students, parents, staff and governors is one that will be strong and resilient.

Fiona Carnie is an education consultant and writer. Until recently she was on the leadership team of a secondary school in the Midlands.

Campus visit to Donetsk State University of Management – Ukraine

Michael Elliott

Donetsk State University requested a former MEP to attend a seminar on "Higher education in the EU and beyond" and I was invited to attend and speak on 25-27th November 2012.

The Seminar, which was conducted entirely in English, was attended by Staff and Students of the University, as well as representatives of Donetsk City Council and of the Ukrainian Association of European Studies. I was listed as the keynote speaker and in agreement with the University I spoke on the progressive development and expansion of the EU Education and Training Programmes from their inception in the mid 1980s up to the latest Erasmus for All proposals of the Commission, to be launched in 2014 with a budget of 19 billion euros.

Other speakers included the University Director of International Relations who detailed the University's growing international links both with EU Member States and other neighbouring Countries. Of particular interest were talks by two students of the University who spoke of their experiences during exchange placements with higher education institutions in Turkey and Poland and a Czech student on an exchange to Donetsk

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School Mathematics at Risk

Sue Pope

It appears that mathematics in the 2014 National Curriculum will include even more content and be even more demanding for younger children. The Department for Education – which means the ministers – seem to think they can ignore objections and evidence from the mathematics community.

Subject Associations for mathematics (the Mathematical Association and the Association of Teacher of Mathematics) have responded to the various consultations on the proposed curriculum, raising concerns about the aims, the age-inappropriate expectations, particularly at primary, and the lack of coherence between primary and secondary. The curriculum as it currently stands inappropriately emphasises technical fluency, does not articulate progression sufficiently clearly and does not support transition in mathematics.

Whilst the new curriculum does not have to be taught in academies and free schools, it will form the basis of accountability measures. It is still unclear what the end of key stage expectations will be – we are told on the one hand that the government's higher expectations are for all but on the other hand teachers should move through the curriculum at a pace to suit their learners. In which case, most learners will only get to the end of Year 4 programme of study for mathematics by age 11.

The aims for mathematics include understanding, reasoning and problem solving. However they are written in such a way that implies understanding will develop as a result of fluency and efficiency and that problem solving is simply a matter of application. There is considerable evidence (e.g. Anthony & Walshaw 2007) that learning mathematics through tackling problems in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts is more likely to result in confident, resilient learners with skills of reasoning and problem solving who are able to use mathematics fluently and efficiently.

THE IMPACT OF FORMAL APPROACHES

The 2014 programme of study for primary mathematics has considerable emphasis on formal written methods of calculation. This emphasis is wholly inappropriate in a modern technological society. The National Curriculum until now has expected mental methods as a first resort. Mental methods require familiarity and confidence with number which provide a secure foundation for progression to algebra; you need to think before you do, select a suitable strategy for the calculation e.g., will an approximation do? In contrast formal written methods rely on memorisation of procedures and can disadvantage slower or weaker learners.

Fractions: magic or meaning?

A quarter of the water from a supply source is lost through leakage. A third is lost through misuse. What is left?

This amounts to $1-\frac{1}{4}-\frac{1}{3}$

Turned into equivalent fractions we have

$$\frac{12}{12}-\frac{3}{12}-\frac{4}{12}=\frac{5}{12}$$

It's not difficult but most people can't do it. That's a problem for society so it is also a problem for education.

Currently, by the end of primary, students are expected to be able to use a calculator efficiently.

This has been assessed in recent years through one or two questions on the calculator papers where a student who cannot use a calculator would be seriously disadvantaged. Given the announcement to change the NC tests and remove calculator assessments, this invalidates these assessments. The original draft of the numeracy statement in the new curriculum included 'estimate when using calculators and other technologies to produce results and then interpret them appropriately'. This phrase has been removed from the 'final' version.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MISMATCH

The age-inappropriate expectations for the youngest children in respect of fractions, multiplication and so on have been 'cherry picked' from high-performing jurisdictions*. For example, work on fractions begins in Singapore's Y1 curriculum, but the children are 6 years old when they start primary schooling – not 5! Massachusetts includes multiplication facts up to 12x12 for grade 4 because imperial measures are still in daily use, but children will be ten years old – not nine! There is no evidence that long division is a realistic expectation for 11 year olds. Even Ofsted's 2011 survey of 20 successful primary schools did not find any schools where children could do 'long division'. The likely impact of these age inappropriate expectations is rote learning and disaffection.

In international comparisons English primary children do reasonably well in mathematics but

their progress is less good in secondary school. The government's interpretation of this is that the foundations laid in primary school are not secure, hence the curriculum changes. A different interpretation is that more needs to be done in secondary to consolidate and build on primary foundations more effectively. Given the relatively fragile subject expertise of primary teachers, increasing the expectations on them without a substantial programme of support is unlikely to be successful.

The secondary programmes of study do have aspirations related to the aims at the start of each programme of study but these do not exist for primary. However the content is presented as a list with no commentary or examples to assist teachers. The headings for the content are not the same for the primary strands, which undermines progression and transition. Ratio and proportion is separate resulting in duplication from both number and algebra. Statistics and probability has also been separated. Calculators are mentioned in the introduction to the KS3 programme of study but no other ICT.

GCSE & A LEVEL

Given that GCSEs are to be retained, it is a relief that tiering will continue for mathematics – however it is not clear what model of tiering will be used and there is no time for any piloting and trialling. After the devastating impact of relatively modest changes to A Level mathematics for Curriculum 2000, you might think the government would be more cautious. The response to A Level reform was very clear that great care was needed for mathematics if the participation in mathematics and further mathematics was to be maintained. Moving to terminal assessment means that students will be less likely to continue with further mathematics (typically a fourth A Level) as they focus on getting three excellent grades in order to secure their university place. Not allowing AS Level to count towards the full A Level will also exacerbate the situation.

MATHEMATICS AT RISK FROM REFORM

Although what is currently in place is not perfect it is far better than what is proposed. What drives classroom practice is the accountability measures, i.e .the assessments – regulation has led to an over emphasis on reliability and comparability at the expense of validity. Changes need far more careful development, with a more realistic timeline. The consequence of the current hasty developments informed primarily by ideology and dogma is that curriculum 2000 will look like a storm in a teacup.

Sue Pope, University of Manchester, Chair of the Association of Teacher's of Mathematics General Council. She writes in a personal capacity.

** ie areas, normally countries, which score highly on international tests such as PISA.*

Reading

Anthony G, and Walshaw M (2007), ***Effective Pedagogy in Mathematics****. Wellington, New Zealand, New Zealand Ministry of Education.*

Ofsted (2011) ***Good Practice in Primary Schools: evidence from 20 successful schools****. London, HMSO.*

Williams P, (2008). ***Report of the Review of Mathematics Teaching in Early Year's Settings and Primary schools,*** *London, DCSF.*

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Donetsk University was founded only twenty years ago and is very keen to develop its international links, especially into the EU. It has recently been recognised by the European Commission as a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence. Despite its newness, it already has an extensive museum of its history and development to which I was given a conducted tour. The University courses, as its name suggests, are heavily focused on economic and financial management and business studies, producing graduates who can contribute to the economic development of the Donetsk region.

On the second day of my visit I took part in a question and answer session with some 30-40 MA students majoring in European studies. I was most impressed not only with their good command of English, but their interest in the EU and their desire to visit and learn more of other European Countries. They were keen to hear as much as I could tell them about the situation of young people in other EU countries and Britain in particular, their higher education opportunities, its costs and their employment prospects. I tried to give as realistic an account as possible, covering both the positive aspects and the realities of graduate unemployment and housing and financial problems. They were also interested in asking about the possibility of Ukraine joining the EU, whilst recognising the many problems involved and that it was at best a fairly distant prospect.

Since my return, I have assisted Donetsk University in establishing UK University links, by providing them with Staff contacts in two Universities I have a longstanding involvement with in west London, both of which are currently recruiting Ukrainian students.

Two Coalitions

Then & now- and what happened in between

Derek Gillard

Amid the horrors of the second world war, a group of Board of Education officials met to plan a new public education system which would be fair to and free for all. In the seventy years since then successive governments have not only failed to live up to their vision but have increasingly sought to interfere with the teaching and learning process and to dismantle the democratic edifice they created.

Seventy years ago war was raging across Europe and Britain was fighting for its survival. Yet even at this darkest hour, the coalition government led by Winston Churchill was making plans for an ambitious programme of 'social reconstruction' in the post-war period.

In October 1940 senior officers of the Board of Education met in a Bournemouth hotel where, interrupted by the occasional air raid, they discussed the measures which would be needed to achieve ‘a state of society where the advantages and privileges which hitherto have been enjoyed only by the few, shall be far more widely shared'. Their proposals formed the basis of the white paper *Educational Reconstruction*, which led to the 1944 Education Act.

The importance of the 1944 Act cannot be overemphasised. Building on previous education acts, it created an entire system of educational provision and administration, with responsibility shared between central government, local authorities, and the schools.

It replaced the Board with the Ministry of Education and established two Central Advisory Councils. The Minister’s role was creative rather than controlling: it did not include providing schools, employing teachers, prescribing textbooks or determining the curriculum.

The local education authorities were to provide primary and secondary schools for all children, make nursery education available for under-fives and cater for pupils with special needs. Local authority schools would be known as 'county schools' and new arrangements were made for 'voluntary' schools (mostly run by the churches).

The schools themselves had considerable freedom: head teachers and governing bodies would set policies, determine the curriculum and manage the resources.

Thus the 1944 Act established a nationwide system of free, compulsory schooling. It was, in many ways, remarkably progressive: it extended the concept of education to include those older and younger than the school age and aimed to provide a comprehensive school health service by requiring the provision of school meals, free milk, medical and dental treatment. It was undoubtedly an extraordinary achievement - all the more remarkable for having been conceived in the depths of a horrific world war.

The 1944 Act did not, as is often alleged, require secondary schools to be of three types: grammar, technical and secondary modern (the so-called 'tripartite system'). But the notion that you could divide children in this way was the prevailing view at the time, and Attlee's post-war Labour government accepted it. However, technical schools were expensive and few were ever opened, so the system quickly became bipartite: grammar schools for the few who passed the new 'eleven plus' and secondary moderns for the rest.

It wasn't long, however, before this iniquitous regime was condemned. Cyril Burt's work on intelligence was discredited; the selection process was seen to be fallible; and there was huge inequality in the provision of grammar school places. The pressure for change came very much from the grassroots: parents began to campaign against a system which forced primary schools to spend much of their time training children to pass tests and which labelled millions of children 'failures'.

Some local authorities began experimenting with comprehensive schools and Labour won the 1964 general election promising to abolish the eleven plus and develop a fully comprehensive system. Sadly, the new government's actions didn't match its rhetoric. It issued a Circular (10/65) which stopped short of compelling LEAs to go comprehensive, brought forward a bill which was lost in the run up to the 1970 general election, and in 1976 produced a half-hearted Act which was repealed three years later by Margaret Thatcher.

Despite the lack of political leadership, the move to comprehensive schools gathered pace, freeing the primary schools from the constraints of the eleven plus exam and enabling them to abandon streaming and experiment with a more informal, child-centred type of education, a trend which was endorsed by the 1967 Plowden Report.

But reformers were, once again, to be disappointed. Following the global recession of the 1970s, the post-war consensus broke down. The Tories turned to neo-liberalism; Labour's leaders tried to hold the line, but the party was divided.

Right-wing commentators argued that education was not serving the country well and blamed comprehensive education and progressive teaching methods. In 1976 Labour prime minister Jim Callaghan called for a 'Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of education.

The first Thatcher government attempted to reintroduce selection but underestimated the popularity of comprehensive schools. So, aided by the right-wing press, it began trying to convince the public that schools, teachers and local authorities were incompetent. Schools were bombarded with demands for curriculum reviews; teacher training was brought under central control; the Schools Council was abolished; the powers of local authorities were reduced; and the tabloid press ran daily stories about 'loony left' councils.

All this culminated in the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act, which imposed the National Curriculum and made provision for grant maintained schools and city technology colleges - both of which were designed to weaken the role of the LEAs.

Under Thatcher, the education system suffered a massive decline in investment and a vast increase in inequality, yet her successor, John Major, saw no need to change course.

Many breathed a sigh of relief when New Labour won the 1997 election, but they were quickly disillusioned. Blair (and later Brown) extended covert selection under the guise of specialism; told teachers not only what to teach but how to teach it; expanded privatised provision of schools and services (notably through the academies programme); further diminished the role of local authorities; and hugely increased the role of churches and other faith groups in educational provision.

And now we have another coalition government. But whereas the first one saw education as a public service, this one sees it as a marketing opportunity and - with no electoral mandate - is ruthlessly privatising it.

Education secretary Michael Gove talks a lot about 'freeing' schools from local authority control, when he knows perfectly well that the local authorities have no powers left from which schools can be 'freed'. He tells teachers they're real professionals doing a grand job, but never misses an opportunity to dictate exactly what and how they should teach. Parents are told they are to have more choice, but when they choose not to have an academy foisted on them, they are ignored. When they object to the expansion of a grammar school, they are told they no longer even have the right to object. Governors are expected to exercise great responsibility, yet when they try to do so, they are overruled.

Democracy is under threat. Gove's aim is clearly to destroy the local authorities and he is certainly succeeding: more than half the secondary schools which once belonged to us have been handed over to 'proprietors' and millions have been wasted on free school vanity projects, when the money should have been used to provide much-needed places in primary schools.

The tragedy is that the damage this wretched government is doing - to our schools, to our health service, to the poor, the homeless, the unemployed and the disabled, and to democracy itself - will be difficult if not impossible to reverse. Those who, amid the horrors of a world war, had the vision to create a coherent, democratically accountable public education system must be turning in their graves.

Derek Gillard taught in primary and middle schools for more than thirty years, including eleven as a head teacher. He now runs the *Education in England* website (www.educationengland.org.uk) which includes his own history of England's schools and the full texts of many important historic education reports and other documents

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Call for debate on church take over

The Bishop of Oxford and Chair of the Church of England's Board of Education, the Right Rev JohnPritchard, has revealed that the Department for Education will be allowing community schools to join Church of England Academy chains.

Chair of the Accord Coalition, Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain MBE, said 'This is an astonishing development that has caught everyone by surprise. The public wants inclusive schools, not for the Department for Education to help further entrench exclusivity, but these hopes may now be in danger. Why has there been no public consultation – either at local or national level – on such a far-reaching change in education?

'It is vital that the Secretary of State reassures the public that there will be no mono-religious infiltration into the governance of schools that currently serve pupils of all faith backgrounds and bring together families from a wide section of society. We call on him to publish guidelines that will guarantee that community schools joining a faith Academy chain will still admit pupils without faith discrimination, employ teachers from all backgrounds, select governors without recourse to religious belief or practice, and provide an inclusive curriculum, including Religious Education lessons and assemblies.'

Notes. A November 2012 ComRes poll commissioned by the Accord Coalition found that 73% of respondents agreed that state funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy' (http://accordcoalition.org.uk)

Review of the Stanford CREDO study

Laura McInerney

England's schools are increasingly being 'academised', i.e. being released from Local Education Authority oversight and instead operating as a limited company contracted by the Secretary of State to deliver 'school services'. In America, similar laws have allowed schools to do this since 1993 (there they are called 'charter' schools). Michigan was the first state to enact such laws with others following behind. The policy originally focused on the opening of new schools, though conversions are also now allowed. Twenty years later and 4% of American's schools are now charters

But has this 'academisation' made any difference to America? In 2009, Stanford University's CREDO investigators released a report stating that the schools were doing okay, but not brilliantly. In their 4-year update released earlier in 2013, the study looked at the scores of over 5 million young people – comparing those in traditional schools to those in charters. The results were interesting.

Using data that compares rates of learning, students at charters appear to have made significantly higher learning gains in reading, and at least the same learning gains in maths as comparable students in traditional public schools. For students in poverty, and black or Hispanic students, the gains were particularly high.

Critics accuse charters of gaining the greater scores by 'creaming' higher ability students from demographics who are traditionally more likely to succeed. The CREDO report shows, however, that charters educate a higher percentage of students who are in poverty, or have special educational needs, or are black or Hispanic. The vast majority of schools are also in in 'urban' areas, traditionally considered in the US as the most challenging districts due to a series of mid-20th century housing policies which encouraged suburban relocation for among the upwardly mobile. That said, the study looks at 6000 schools across 27 states. The schools are incredibly diverse, and though some areas have focused on challenging groups, others have not.

One striking difference between England's academies and US charters is the age group they serve. US Charter Schools have predominantly focused on younger students, with only 14% of charters operating at the high school level. One hypothesis therefore given for charter school's successes is their focus on younger year's when children's ability variations are less embedded and less exaggerated than among older children.

A second under-reported issue around US charters is the wide variation in their successes across different states. Academy advocates will often describe the positives of school autonomy by referencing Louisiana or Massachussetts, both of whom have seen charter schools deliver superior reading and maths scores when compared to traditional schools. They rarely mention states such as Arkansas and Ohion, where students in charters had significantly *worse* rates of learning than comparable students in traditional schools.

Comparing schools with each other (rather than comparing pupils) also reveals that while some charters do indeed have higher average outcomes, sending your child to *any* charter is not a guarantee of success. Though 29% of charters showed greater academic growth in maths than other local schools, 31% of charters had *worse* scores. With reading results, 25% of charter schools did significantly better than local schools but 19% still did worse. In both cases, most schools achieved about the same. Hence, the idea that charters are inevitably better is incorrect. As with any school, they might be better, or they might be worse.

Academisation is happening in England and it would take an enormous amount of resource to reverse. What the CREDO study concludes is that the processes for opening, monitoring and closing charter schools matters enormously. England should take note.

Laura McInerney is a research assistant at the University of Missouri where she is studying the policy implications of charter schools and academies. She is also a Guardian Education columnist.

NEW YORK CHARTERS FAILING. The Times Educational Supplement of 16th August had the latest news from New York, a key area for Gove. The City had just published the results from new state wide tests and the TES noted "they did not make pleasant reading for the much-vaunted charter schools".

The city is performing very poorly educationally, and less than a third of students passed the tests. However the TES noted, "While all schools did poorly, charters performed particularly badly, with some of the biggest names, such as the Knowledge is Power Programme, (KIPP) schools, showing dramatic drops in pass rates compared with tests taken in previous years".

The TES quotes James Merriman, chief executive of the New York Charter School Centre: "the majority of our students aren't on track for success in college and beyond. This is clear proof that we need continued reform of the system". New York needs better schools but will Merriman recognise that charters aren't working? ***Trevor Fisher***

Home Truths From Abroad

Sheila Doré

Review of **Education Under Siege** by Peter Montimore, Policy Press 2013

The stated purpose of this book is to influence the debate on the creation of a better system of Education than the Gove driven regime under which England currently suffers. Peter Mortimore describes himself as being “Of the Left” but does not espouse any particular political creed and indeed points the finger of blame at a significant number of Education Ministers from all political parties for the creation of the fragmented and inequitable system that now exists. He draws on his wide ranging experience here and in the Nordic countries to analyse the relationship between politicians and Educational practitioners and emphatically concludes that politicians have far too much influence.

The book is thoroughly well researched and the notes and references are incredibly helpful. It is eminently readable, written with warmth and good humour. It is infused with an overwhelming sense of commitment to the well being and happiness of all children and to the belief that Education should provide an equal opportunity for all to thrive.

The first twelve chapters provide a detailed analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and ambiguities of the present system while in the final two chapters he develops his “Steps towards a better system” and asks the reader to consider “What next?”This chapter is a call to arms to all those interested in improvement and reform to make their voices heard, stating that,” the country’s education system is ours. It does not belong to any minister or political party. It is public property and, if enough people believe it is not serving the best interests of the nation’s children and of our society as a whole, it should be changed.”

The author provides his own definition of education as” the process through which society transmits its accumulated values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and customs from one generation to another and influences how an individual thinks, feels and acts.” He relates it closely to the Nordic concept of “bildung” which is “associated with liberty and human dignity to do with the spiritual and /or aesthetic side of our lives....a value in itself.”

He promotes the idea, embedded in the Nordic Education system, that education should “prepare children for democracy”. He calls into question the value of many of the tenets of the present day English system: uniform, homework, formal teaching styles and excessive testing fearing that the “school’s priorities are shifting from learning to conforming”.

Chapter 11,”How good is the system?” is largely devoted to data PIRLS, PISA and OECD. This provides a wide ranging exploration of how well English students compare with those of other countries and concludes that, “the English system produces lots of young people good at passing tests and examinations” but who are “not intellectually curious”. He fears that, “our system may depress rather than stimulate such a characteristic.” Evidence also shows that the achievement gap between those at the top and those at the bottom was markedly greater in England than in other countries.”Finland’s high average scores are consistently combined with the smallest achievement gaps.” He concludes that in Finland “their slow patient approaches to education-avoiding early and unnecessary failure-seem to pay off.”

Mortimore is clear that England’s system is failing but he is also clear that “it is not the teachers that are the problem. It is the system in which they have to work.” He reiterates his view that “England’s teachers are its prime education asset.”

Drawing on wide ranging evidence he criticises the destructive and inaccurate nature of the work done by OFSTED and calls for the restoration of HMIs. He critically examines the myriad of testing and assessment regimes to which English children are subjected and concludes that “our assessment system has grown into an accountability monster rather than providing constructive feedback to learners.”He argues strongly in favour of the restoration of Local Authorities as the main providers of education and invites all private schools, grammar schools, faith schools, academies, free schools to pool their resources with those of the maintained sector to create a system in which every school is a good school, is equally well resourced and has an equal spread of learners of differing abilities, aptitudes and social backgrounds.

His strongest criticism is of the divisive, fragmented, market driven aspects of Government policy and in particular of the present Coalition Government by which “education has become one the major tools by which to transmit privilege from one generation to another”. The question is whether “Labour can develop a coherent set of proposals to restore confidence and belief in a performing public education system as the route to a fairer society.”

In this stimulating and thoroughly engaging book Peter Mortimore calls on us to “finally leave behind the class-ridden system which separates out and labels our children.”

Labour, New Labour & Comprehensives

David Pavett

With the 2015 election looming, both Labour's analyses of current problems and its policies to solve them remain frustratingly meagre. Campaigners for a unified system of state-funded education have repeatedly expressed their concern about this, including in these pages. The excuse that policy should not be revealed too far ahead of an election clearly does not wash – it fails to explain the lack of a critique of Coalition policy or Labour's failure to conduct a well-informed debate about its educational policies.

A book to help us grasp the nettle

A clear appraisal of Labour's current approach to education requires an analysis of the evolution of its views, including the record of New Labour in government. This is something Labour's Policy Review has notably not done. Now Clyde Chitty has filled the gap with his book **New Labour and Secondary Education 1994-2010** (Palgrave Macmillan, May 2013). He explains in his introduction that

> *One of the purposes of this present book is to show how so many aspects of the education agenda of Mrs Thatcher's government were continued and expanded upon, by all the governments ... that followed. It will, in fact, be argued that the postwar educational settlement that was dismantled in the 1980s remains in pieces today, as we come to terms with living in a post-welfare society.*

The second chapter describes the development of political parties from the 19th century. This is to take a long run at the problem of New Labour's education policy, but I think that readers will appreciate the historical grounding this gives to understanding Labour thinking on education.

Clyde Chitty reminds us that political parties are coalitions. Labour members range from a socialist left to a social democratic middle right through to a right-wing favouring neo-liberal, market-based solutions to social problems. These differences lead to widely contrasting approaches to education.

The third chapter outlines Labour's education policies from 1944 to 1994. It does not make for comfortable reading by anyone who wants Labour to work for a democratic education system (let alone a socialist one). But the nettle has to be grasped and this chapter prepares us to do that.

Labour opposition to comprehensives

What emerges clearly from the analysis is that Labour has never unequivocally supported the idea of a common school for everyone. In fact it has been reluctant to support educational equality even within the state-funded sector.

Ellen Wilkinson, education minister in the post-war government, opposed comprehensive schools. Her idea of social equality meant providing certain services to all while leaving existing structures intact. She told the Party Conference in 1946

> *Free milk will be provided in Horton and Shoreditch, in Eton and Harrow. What more social equality can you have than that?*

On her watch, the '44 Act was interpreted to mean that at secondary level children would be sent to three different types of school according to their ability. She explicitly rejected the long-standing socialist demand for common schools for all.

Ellen Wilkinson's successor, George Tomlinson, resisted continued pressure within the Labour Party for a comprehensive solution. In 1947 he told the House of Commons

> *it is no part of our policy to reduce in any way the status or standing of the grammar school.*

A few years later he argued that

> *the Labour Party are kidding themselves if they think that the comprehensive ideal has any popular appeal.*

Support for comprehensives grew despite such resistance. It even got support from the one-nation side of the Conservative Party. Reflecting on his time as Education Minister in the early 60s, Edward Boyle wrote that it was clear to him that

> *… support for the development of Secondary Education along comprehensive lines was gaining considerable momentum.*

However, by the end of the 60s the right-wing assault on comprehensives was in full swing and Boyle failed to command the support of his Party.

Labour support for comprehensives reached its highest point with Anthony Crosland, the only Labour education minister to unequivocally favour them. But, his circular 10/65 did no more than "request" to local authorities to draw up plans for comprehensive reorganisation. Without a vigorous defence of comprehensives to resist the right-wing campaign against them this was never likely to take hold. Furthermore, the right-wing case was based on educational arguments (however spurious), whereas Crosland supported comprehensives for *social* rather than *educational* reasons.

The 70s – the educational right triumphant

The main phase of the right-wing assault on comprehensives was opened in 1969 with the publication of the first of the *Black Papers* on education edited by Cox and Dyson. By the mid

-70s Rhodes Boyson was able to say “The forces of the right in education are on the offensive”.

As the new right took charge of educational debate, some clear themes emerged: (1) denigration of comprehensive schools; (2) defence of grammar schools; (3) denigration of local (educational) authorities; (4) demand for diversity of provision, and of providers, to suit different abilities; (5) support for individual (parental) choice over collective choice. All of these these themes were later to be adopted by New Labour.

Callaghan's Ruskin speech of 1976 was an attempt to wrest the mantle of reform from the Conservatives by adopting some of their arguments. From 1979 to 1997 Labour did “very little but react to the 'radical' education policies being pursued by the ... Thatcher and Major administrations”.

The exception to this rule was the consultative Green Paper *Opening Doors to a Learning Society* (available on the SEA website) prepared in 1993 by Ann Taylor as Shadow Education Minister to Labour leader John Smith. Clyde Chitty says of this document that it

> *… was the outcome of a wide-ranging and extensive consultative exercise; but, despite her energy and commitment, she was made to realise, after Smith's death, that her position as Labour's education spokesperson was under threat largely because of her broad support for comprehensive education.*

The era of New Labour was under-way.

What did New Labour do?

Tony Blair repeatedly emphasised the centrality of education to his policies. He also insisted that a change of approach was required. He and David Blunkett, shadow education minister from '94 to '97 soon indicated what that direction was to be.

An early sign of things to come was the launch of Ann Taylor's *Opening Doors* document prepared under John Smith. Straight away Tony Blair told the *Daily Telegraph* that he did not share its approach! Crucially it had advocated “collective parental and community involvement in education” and rejected the Conservative efforts “to turn parents into consumers and critics”. This was not what Tony Blair or David Blunkett wanted to hear.

Opposition to the new direction surfaced at the Labour Party conference in 1995 where there was strong opposition to the educational document *Diversity and Excellence*. Roy Hattersley said of it

> *by building its policy around different classes of school, Labour is clearly endorsing selection.*

Blunkett subdued the opposition with his famous “Read my lips, No selection, either by examination or interview, under a Labour government”. He was later to make clear that “no more selection” meant “no *further* selection”. Hattersley was right.

New Labour increased the number of types of school, backed privatising measures (even handing over entire LEAs to private management) and the Academies programme was launched (encouraging rich sponsors to take leadership roles). The key ideas were “diversity of provision”, “parental choice”, “accountability” (through high-stake exams), “league tables” and “rigorous inspection. Estelle Morris' dismissal of schools she “would not touch with a bargepole” and her characterisation of comprehensives as a “one size fits all” approach were typical comments of the period.

At the same time the slogan “standards not structures” took hold. This denial of a relationship neither made sense nor reflected actual practice. Its purpose was/is to avoid discussion about the benefits of a unified system of provision.

Clyde Chitty points out that many good things were done under New Labour. Educational expenditure increased in relative and absolute terms, nursery provision improved, decaying buildings were repaired and there was a reduction in child poverty. *Every Child Matters* brought about a focus on the whole child rather than just narrow examination measures. These are matters of record and have rightly been defended. The book, however, is about the *political* ideas of New Labour and their implications for educational development.

Not where we wanted to be

In conclusion Clyde Chitty says that his aim is to

> *throw light on those areas, often controversial in nature, where New Labour has been prepared, indeed happy, to pursue an education agenda set by its Conservative predecessors.*

Ed Miliband has tried to distance the Party from New Labour but this has not involved any appraisal of New Labour's education policy. With that, and given many powerful pressures to stick with the same fundamental approach, a future Labour government will be likely to do just that.

Clyde Chitty shows that New Labour took us further away from a unified system under democratic control. This book warns us that without a break with New Labour's marketising nostrums a future Labour government may soften implementation details but will retain the underlying policies developed by New Labour and the Conservatives.

In addition to the topics indicated above there are very useful chapters on the national curriculum and the international dimension to educational reform. This an important book to help us understand Labour's educational politics. I hope that a reasonably-priced paperback edition is planned. At £50 the book is likely to to be accessed mainly in university libraries. It deserves a wider readership than that.

THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

No More of the Same!

This was written in June, when Gove's plans for longer days and longer terms were headline news. They have not gone away, the Teachers Pay Review Body having destroyed teachers national pay scales at Gove's behest is now mulling over destroying the rest of what makes the teachers job feasible. So this remains relevant. Editor.

Gove's latest attack on the teaching profession is to insist on longer teaching days and shorter holidays. Pause for a second and you will hear a very long and weary sigh emitted from the entire teaching profession. A vision of a fatigued old donkey* pulling a cart full of rocks up a hill comes to mind. Then its ignorant owner piles on yet more bags, whips it and asks it to break into a trot. The owner is bemused, for the donkey doesn't go faster at all, instead it collapses into an exhausted heap.

As a profession we cannot allow this man to bring such baseless and ill informed ideas to the table. There is NO evidence that more teaching will raise standards. However there is LOTS of evidence that better teaching will. And better teaching comes when teachers are supported and the profession highly respected by government.

Contrary to Gove's ideas, there is the evidence that shorter holidays, longer teaching days, and exhausted pupils and teachers do not lead to academic success.

- Finland is one of the most successful countries in educating its teachers.
- Children start school at 7 years old
- Teacher training is 5 years long – all teachers begin their career at Masters level.
- Teaching is a highly respected profession, on a par with doctors and lawyers.
- Holidays are LONGER than in the UK
- Teaching days are SHORTER than in the UK
- Children are usually taught in mixed ability classes.
- Private schools are not allowed, paying for schooling is illegal
- There is far less disparity between school performances
- Schools have a less prescriptive, more flexible curriculum
- Finland is top of the table for time spent in school against academic success.

They also have a much fairer society, where socio-economic differences aren't supported and maintained by a skewed school system, which is favoured by privileged people like Gove himself.

Why would anyone in their right mind want to align our school system with a country like South Korea where children do as much a thirteen hours study a day? Korea has a very low teaching to academic success ratio – it is 24th out of 30 countries. This means that while it might be high on the overall league table for academic success, it has a very inefficient system and the lives of its children are in effect blighted by hours and hours of unneccessary schooling. In truth, they don't have a childhood.

Why doesn't Gove listen to people like Dylan Wiliams and John Hattie? I will just say it very loud TEACHING WON'T IMPROVE WITH MORE OF THE SAME!

** in fact the latest OECD survey shows that England has the youngest primary school teachers in the world. The issue of burn out means that experienced teachers are now in declining numbers. If they were whales, they would be a protected species.* Ed

News and information on SEA

Education Politics: (issn 1354-2028) The journal of the Socialist Education Association. The articles reflect the views of their authors and not the SEA unless this is clearly indicated as approved by the SEA executive or annual conference.

The Journal is edited by Trevor Fisher, layout by David Pavett. Contributions to are welcome but space is limited. Please discuss with the editor before submitting.

SEA MEMBERSHIP INVOLVEMENT; the SEA executive is open to all members to attend & speak. Contact General Secretary Martin Dore, 6 Preston Ave, London E4 9NL, email: *m.dore27@ntworld.com*

Join the Socialist Education Association a Labour affiliated group. Details from the General Secretary – membership £20 per year – the organisation which debates policy informed by evidence and principles.