



Education Politics

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Growing, preparing, serving and selling food at Bedales School

Really useful knowledge

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Editorial

Didn't someone once suggest that a week is a long time in politics? In terms of the electorate's responses to events, it has become increasingly clear for some time that such is the case. Yet the mass media, taken as a whole, have been unable fully to take this on board. A number of factors made the election result unpredictable: literally, in the sense that the research methods used by polling companies are inadequate to create a reliable understanding of the ways people are thinking and, crucially, changing their minds.

One factor is the ever-growing tendency towards the disappearance of the 'I always vote...' On this occasion we had some 'always Labour' declining to support that fella Corbyn, and 'never Labour' going for the Corbyn manifesto, or parts of it. Then we had the dilemma of the remainers. And as it turned out, almost enough people agreeing that Theresa May organised a party but didn't bother to turn up to it. There is a need for analysis of the implications of this for social class structures and cultures — but only based on more valid and reliable research.

Another factor is the clear volatility of opinion. In post-industrial society, it looks as though deep and shared values derived from class are being lost. People of all classes have no frame of reference on which to base their judgements. People are left to form their view on each individual issue with only the mass and social media for support. And they are no kind of support. Indeed, Labour's critique of 'New Labour' was based on that pragmatism in the Blair programme which did not seem to have a basis in social analysis.

This is written at a moment when it remains unclear for how many weeks Theresa May can remain Prime Minister. Or indeed, whether a Conservative minority government will be viable. Or whether some kind of progressive alliance would be viable. But for the Labour Party, some things have been clarified.

True to form, the media have largely misinterpreted the surge in support for Labour. The BBC is not alone in its continued obsession with personalities, and for them the apparent transformation of Jeremy Corbyn into an attractive and winning personality is a good new story. Only the most curmudgeonly of observers could deny that the electorate was allowed to see the best of the Leader— and that it liked what it saw. The public's disapproval of him dipped sensationally in just a few weeks, and for a public which heartily disapproves of politicians in particular and politics in general, this is an achievement which no-one in the Party should underestimate.

But did the thousands knocking on doors discover that this personal popularity amongst the uncommitted was the biggest reason for Labour's turnaround? I think not. It was policies. It was the manifesto, or more precisely the part of it which appealed to each voter, which was decisive. The SEA played its part in the hurried manifesto drafting process. And there was something in it for everyone. From the young, enthused by the student finance proposals, to the old, fearing a Tory property theft. But most significant was the anti-austerity theme behind the manifesto. For the first time for a quarter of a century voters had the choice of an explicitly non-neo-liberal Party, and they jumped at it. The number of normally Tory professionals who jumped was striking; they want us to invest our way out of a flat economy. Hats off to Labour speakers who convinced many that the programme was not 'far left' but mainstream European social democracy.

Let us be clear: Jeremy Corbyn's leadership has moved the political debate in this country. Social justice and its links to economic justice is back on the agenda. After two years in which the media could focus on leadership disputes, the rules of 'balance' allowed policy, including Labour's concern for the 'precariat', to be presented to the electorate for the first time.

The bulk of Labour Party members must be optimistic for better times ahead. But there is a superfly in the ointment—the neo-liberal wing of the PLP. Too many have been silent about austerity. Some may try to explain away the 41% share of the vote, enough to win most elections. But the Party has the right to expect its MPs to adopt the frame of reference which won them their seats, and to spend their time advertising the key components of the manifesto so that the electorate can continue to re-learn what Labour stands for. And to those in denial about the vote for Labour, members will only repeat the words of the last 'nonentity' to lead the Party, Clement Attlee: 'a period of silence on your part would be appreciated'.

In this edition, two well known contributors offer their takes on the significance of the election result for education policy. Otherwise, it has a focus on the school curriculum. Socialists must never forget that, while the structures of the education system do matter, the every-day learning experiences of the young matter more. A curriculum founded on socialist principles will not produce a socialist society—but it would help.

MJ

After the election

John Bolt

That moment when the exit poll dropped on June 8th will not easily be forgotten. Seldom has an election been turned on its head so dramatically. It's important to remember the background – in the immediate build up, the loss of the Copeland by election and dreadful local elections including the loss of the West Midlands mayoralty. The final outcome was so dramatically different that it felt like a victory even though Labour was still 56 seats behind the Tories.

We now find ourselves with a government in total disarray and a Labour Party in which the whole dynamic has been transformed. The manifesto gained the enthusiastic support of nearly all sections of the party and will without question be the basis on which we campaign during this parliament. The leadership issue is settled for the foreseeable future and with it the basic political strategy – we won't be going back to hugging the centre ground any time soon.

So it's time to look to the future – to a possible second election and to the genuine possibility, at least, of a Labour led government after it. But elections are rarely one by just one more heave – re-running 2017 won't necessarily of itself be enough, especially as the Tory campaign surely cannot be so dreadful again.

Some fundamentals are in our favour. The economic outlook is grim with rising inflation, low wages and slowing growth. The Brexit process is likely to be chaotic and will see the Tories tearing themselves apart. For all the pretence to the contrary, austerity and the cuts will go on. And the Prime Minister has lost all authority.

The question for us though is how should Labour move forward from here. Most obviously, we need to maintain the enthusiasm and the energy that was so apparent this time. We need young people to come out again and for that we need to maintain a radical cutting edge to both policy and presentation.

But we also need to understand and address areas where we did less well. In parts of the north east, Yorkshire and parts of the midlands there was a swing against Labour – not big enough to do huge damage but if we'd kept the six seats lost to the Tories the overall result would have looked significantly different. Areas suffering most economically were the least positive for Labour – just as the rust belt went for Trump and areas of economic decline went for Le Pen. There is something serious to think about here.

Maintaining a clear line on Brexit will be hard. As Keir Starmer said, Labour represents the country because it's just as divided as the country is. Only time will tell whether there is a middle way combining the

advantages of the single market with some limit on free movement of people. At the moment everyone is still expecting to 'have their cake and eat it' in Boris' immortal words. Sometime this is going to come up against the reality of the EU position that for the UK, leaving can't be an improvement on staying. When that happens there will be tough choices to be made. But meanwhile we should resist Tory efforts to get us to share responsibility for what will happen – the blame needs to be theirs alone.

There is now the opportunity to put the party itself back together. The leadership is no longer an insurgency – it doesn't need to look constantly over its shoulder at internal opponents. But there is also the need to evaluate honestly its strengths and weaknesses. The election campaign itself was remarkably professional but much of what went before in all honesty wasn't. There is now the opportunity to pull together and build a more coherent and powerful opposition based on the positives from this manifesto and campaign.

It may be useful to look at how other successful leaders who've sought to change the whole direction of their parties have operated. Thatcher and Blair are examples. Both had someone close to them whose loyalty was unquestioned but who could reach and get onside people the leader couldn't. Thatcher had Whitelaw and Blair had Prescott and as Thatcher famously said '*every Prime Minister needs a Willie*'.

Finally, some thoughts on education. This section of the manifesto was obviously right to major on funding as the central issue and it seems likely that this was a significant electoral issue. But otherwise there is a lot of work still to do. There was no real critique of the dead hand of Gove's curriculum and exams. Nor was there any commitment to roll back the privatisation of schooling through the handing over of schools to academy chains. On higher education, abolition of fees is literally the only issue addressed despite the damage being caused by the increasing marketisation of higher education.

The manifesto was highly successful in attracting voters. But, on education at least, it's not yet a comprehensive programme for government. No doubt this is partly because of the sudden calling of the election three years early. But there is the need for an education programme that's actually significantly more radical than this one and also one that is more fully worked through. So no room for resting on our laurels!

John Bolt is the General Secretary of the SEA

After the election

Mary Bousted

The 2017 General Election will be remembered for many things. The transformation of Theresa May from strong and stable to weak and brittle. The transformation of the type of Brexit which a minority government will be given permission to pursue. The realisation that a Labour manifesto which contains socialist policies which give a sense of hope to young and old, and those voters in between, proved to be extremely popular and, given encouragement, the young can be motivated to vote.

A minority government changes everything for Theresa May. A repeal on the ban on the establishment of grammar schools is now highly unlikely to be included in the Queen's speech. (And it was noticeable, as the election progressed, how the grammar school proposals were quietly dropped as the Tories learned just how little their proposals did to excite and energise the public - indeed the reverse was true. The electorate could see just how divisive and unfair the reintroduction of grammar schools would be.)

So we can expect very little domestic policy, including education policy, from this minority Conservative government. Even before the election the DfE was told to batten down the hatches and to focus on existing policy implementation. Recognising that Brexit would take an inordinate amount of civil service attention, domestic policy reform would take a back seat.

The weakness of the government makes that line of travel inevitable. The problem, however, with a policy lite agenda is that attention becomes focused on present problems rather than a brighter future. And for Justine Greening, there are three major issues which will dog whatever time she has in office.

The first is the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. This is not going away, indeed it is getting worse. One remarkable statistic tells us all we need to know. Over half (52%) of England's teachers have less than ten year's classroom experience. Burned out by stress and overwork and inadequate pay, they leave the profession in droves. Politicians are fond of telling us that no education system can exceed the quality of its teachers. The English education system is now being systematically undermined by teacher shortages, particularly in the core subjects.

The second issue is school places. The Conservative manifesto promised a ban on school places being created in 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' schools. This will be quietly dropped because everyone apart from free school zealots such as the PM's departed adviser Nick Timothy knows, free schools take forever to be established and are immensely costly to boot. Expect the rise in pupil numbers to be met by insufficient school places. Parents are likely to notice this inadequacy....

The third issue is school funding, which is just not going to go away. Rumours abound that the government realises it must radically reform its funding proposals and put much more money into the pot.

Remarkably, school funding became one of the key issues in the 2017 election, rivalling the NHS in voters' list of concerns. This prominence is almost wholly down to the role played by a coalition of education unions, led by the NUT, in highlighting the scale of the cuts facing schools and the broad-based campaign, involving parents' groups, which demonstrated to politicians of all parties that education matters.

A Survation poll released just after the election showed that 26% of voters changed their mind during the campaign, and of those switchers, 10.4% gave the reason as school funding. Henry Stewart of the Local Schools Network has calculated that this equates to 871,000 voters.

The school cuts video received 4.5 million views and 100,000 shares. The school cuts website did something really rather brilliant – it translated the £3 billion real terms cuts in school funding identified by the NAO and demonstrated just what that huge figure meant for every school in England. The general was made particular, and when parents saw just what that meant for their children's education, they did not like it. The school cuts website also enabled users to send an email to all the prospective parliamentary candidates in their constituency asking them to declare their position on the proposed cuts. None of them could escape scrutiny, and many Conservative candidates did not like that. Newsnight's Chris Cook commented that the school cuts campaign may have been *'the most successful union campaign in recent history'*.

The National Education Union fully intends to keep the Conservative Party's feet to the fire on their education policies. In addition to the three issues I have already identified, we foresee further trouble on a whole range of issues, including public sector pay, qualification reform at secondary level and primary testing, children and young people's mental health. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Justine Greening's problem is that, without the momentum of an education legislative and reform programme, education professionals' attention, and the public's, will be focussed on her mopping up the mess of her predecessors in office.

Mary Bousted becomes the Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union on 1st September

Really useful knowledge, a curriculum for all

Really useful knowledge is knowledge calculated to make you free. Thus, the radical historian Richard Johnson in 1988. Johnson debated with E.P. Thompson as to whether it could be gained through experience, or had to be mediated through (marxist) theory. Whatever, the phrase remains useful to the left to place against the 'powerful knowledge' of Goveians who now occupy too many powerful places within what passes for England's school system. This edition of *Education Politics* looks at alternatives to the current sterile, out-dated and crushing curriculum.

It is not necessary to interpret emancipation in a political sense as intended by Johnson. He meant a curriculum for working class people which exposed the reality of their conditions of existence and enabled the development of a revolutionary consciousness. But for liberals emancipation has another meaning, that of individual young people encouraged to look through and beyond their everyday experience. *EP* has argued consistently that to be emancipatory in any sense a curriculum must reflect the range of human behaviour. Yes, humanity can be intellectual, but is also physical, social, emotional, and creative. Doing and making is at the core of humanity, providing not only our survival needs but deep satisfactions. Note: not some humans, all. This has to be at the heart of a comprehensive curriculum. There is no justification for depriving some youngsters during their years of compulsory education of practical or creative experiences because they are considered 'clever'. Such a view also rejects the inherently reactionary concept of 'academic' and 'vocational' streams without bothering to demolish the nonsense of 'parity of esteem'.

The following pages contain critiques of the present offer in England – more accurately, imposition. There are also two examples of schools which have taken different paths. It may or may not be surprising that one is a public school (a private school, actually: aha, you British and your humour) free from the requirements of state apparatus, and the other is an academy, free from some of the requirements of state apparatus though not from the accountability axe. But while maintained schools are under huge constraints, these only become irresistible at year six and key stage four. Dave Strudwick (p10) inspires us by resisting the irresistible while Keith Budge (p6) describes what looks suspiciously like a socialist version of curriculum. Other examples of schools trying to meet wider needs can be found at 'a Curriculum that Counts' on the website of the education union ATL, and there are many more out there, trying to keep under the radar.

There are plenty of shout-outs for more creativity, usually meant as performing and creative arts, and

quite a lot for various kinds of PE. Yes, and yes, but there is little for relationships education. This should encompass oracy and other communication skills but also psychology and ethics. And what about social and political education? These are compulsory subjects in both lower and upper secondary schools, including 'vocational' courses, in many other countries. And as for doing and making: it has not quite gone away, (cover and p6), but needs to have much more time and centrality, so that all pupils can have extended experience of the variety of aspects of DT.

In *EP130* Kevin Smith reviewed the curriculum development process ongoing in Wales based on the report *Successful Futures* by Prof. Graham Donaldson. Elsewhere in this edition we report the Minister's concern that the process is behind schedule and her welcome view that if its introduction has to be postponed, it will be. Smith argued that this curriculum potentially lays the groundwork for overturning the hegemony of the 'academic' but pointed out that the recent experience of Scotland showed that this would be a problematic process. *Successful Futures* is a close copy of Donaldson's curricula for Northern Ireland and Scotland. The latter, Curriculum for Excellence, has been in place since 2010 after a six year development phase, but with teething problems. Now, as the first products of CfE come to their National exams, their lack of fit is a major difficulty, as described by Seamus Searson on p14.

EP131 laid out the case against the assessment scene in England's schools. Of course, any radically new curriculum would need to be accompanied by radically different assessment and accountability. It is simply not possible to assess achievement in doing and making, social and political education, or artistic creativity by means of written exams, and it is difficult to see any alternative other than some form of teacher assessment.

None of this is necessarily revolutionary in intent. Surely no-one should oppose the idea that a very expensive state education should provide really useful knowledge? In modern societies education must facilitate people to see through the mist – to understand that things are not what they seem – as well as giving them interests and skills to enrich their working and non-working lives. But yes, for the left, such understandings could well lead to demands for change. And just maybe, a focus on young people's learning experiences could become at least as important for the left as the administrative arrangements of schools.

MJ

Politics, paradox and the progressive curriculum

Keith Budge

I was saddened, but not particularly surprised, to read in April of the resignations of Alex and Peter Foggo as head and deputy head of Longparish school in Hampshire. These two experienced educators had simply had enough of what they described as a 'bland and joyless educational diet' and saw no ethical alternative to walking away in the face of recent reforms. I completely understand the Foggos' decision, but wish for them that they might have had the option to pursue an alternative path, as my own school did a little over 10 years ago.

At Bedales, not that far away from Longparish, our overriding objective is: *'to develop inquisitive thinkers with a love of learning who cherish independent thought'* and *'to enable students' talents to develop through doing and making'*. Shortly after I started at Bedales in 2001, we became increasingly frustrated with GCSEs in particular as dull, narrow and irrelevant to our purpose; in 2006, I introduced the Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs) to replace some non-core GCSEs. Today, it is possible to study as a BAC Art, Dance, Design and Theatre, to name but a few – all, sadly, now fighting for survival in much state schooling. We have been more than pleased with the results. Universities have been keen to accept BACs, and Bedales is the first school to be recognised by UCAS as offering its own GCSE-replacement qualification. No less importantly, a research programme conducted in partnership with Harvard researchers confirms that BACs serve our educational aims very well indeed.

The new Bedales Art & Design building brings together the different elements of fine art and, as the title suggests, various design specialisms – product, fashion and jewellery, to name a few. Our explicit wish was to create a space that might encourage interesting interactions, and new possibilities consistent with 21st century commercial realities.

The same applies to the neighbouring Outdoor Work department – a core subject at Bedales, as well as a BAC qualification. Pupils learn bushcraft, horticulture, animal husbandry and a variety of other crafts. The outdoors is also used as an environment for learning in a range of more conventional school academic subjects – for example, the undertaking of soil surveys for science classes, or sketching of flower beds as inspiration for a William Morris art topic.

Outdoor Work commonly sees students prepare, serve and sell food in which they have had a hand. Parents are served lunch not only made by their children, but also grown, and even raised when it comes to the meat used in sausages. There is now onsite a student business

making and selling soap, and when building of the Outdoor Work farm shop is complete (yes, students are doing that too), there will be an even greater incentive for the making and marketing of new products.

Our emphasis on doing and making, then, is focused at least in part on giving our students the space in which to develop their own interests and initiatives. However, this is not to detract from a high expectation of academic excellence. Nor is school a mere proving ground for unbridled entrepreneurialism; collaboration is key, and older students get involved in outreach projects, bringing their practical skills to bear in voluntary capacities both locally and internationally – often assessed as part of their formal education.



On the face of it, policy makers appear amenable to schools going their own way in this fashion. The government's 2016 Education White Paper articulated a wish to place the governance of schools under academy chains, and to put trust in headteachers to *'use their creativity, innovation, professional expertise and up-to-date evidence to drive up standards'*, and so mirror what it saw as happening in the independent sector.

I am all for independence, of course, and yet aspects of government's understanding of it continue to puzzle me. In accepting that *'the country's best school leaders know what works'*, and that these leaders are to be found in both the state and independent sectors, policy makers suggest a willingness to embrace diverse approaches to education. However, such a stance would risk a departure from recent ministerial rhetoric in favour of traditional chalk-and-talk teaching methods, a limited and knowledge-based curriculum and a distaste for all things progressive. Indeed, I fear that policy makers look to independent schooling for the legitimisation of an outdated reactionary impulse – for iron discipline and no-nonsense teachers, for non-negotiable uniform policies, and an unswerving belief in Oxbridge and Russell Group university admission as the only true measure of human merit.

Keith Budge (cont)

Blocking the way to this tweed-jacketed nirvana is what Minister of State for Education Nick Gibb has identified as a creeping and harmful educational trend dating to the middle of the 20th century in which *'confidence in direct instruction was lost and replaced with a misguided belief in children's ability to discover knowledge for themselves'*.

Misguided or otherwise, this particular belief sits close to the Bedales heart – not least through a focus on doing and making. In this way, Bedales looks both backwards and forwards. The school's founder John Badley wished that his pupils should not be feeble or ignorant about the world that surrounded them – they should know a hawk from a handsaw, and know how to use the latter.

Badley encouraged a strong communitarian ethic, and the school motto *'Work of Each for Weal of All'*, challenges the individual to realise themselves whilst also serving the greater good. This tension can require some unpicking, but then to hitch one's wagon to Bedales is to resign oneself to wrestling with contradiction and paradox. For example, Badley envisaged a perfect school community with a rural sensibility whose members would play a part in improving society. The irony, of course, is that at the time those turning in repugnance from industrial society relied on incomes derived from the industry and commerce they reviled.

Today, despite radical changes to the world of work as understood by most parents of secondary school pupils, Badley's preoccupations remain relevant. Jobs within corporate structures for life are rare, and individuals will have to become much more proactive in the development of their own personal 'brand', and be fleet of foot. Young Britons today are far more likely to want to run their own businesses and to favour a higher degree of autonomy than their parents, and also to be more fluid in both their thinking and their practice. It is those who have a genuinely rounded education – that see the practical and academic as complementary aspects of the same commitment – who will be best placed to shape their worlds. BACs encourage creative demonstrations of learning and expertise irrespective of discipline, and place a particular value on collaborative and cross-disciplinary work – a preoccupation increasingly reflected in the physicality of the school.

Badley's views were socialist in the school of John Ruskin, William Morris, Edward Carpenter and the Fabians; he enjoyed a long-standing friendship with Ramsey MacDonald whom he was to advise in 1934 during the latter's tenure as Prime Minister, and he voted Labour. Today, we claim continuity with Badley's

founding vision, and yet there is no escaping the fact that, as with many other independent schools, a Bedales education can be prohibitively, and even divisively, expensive (although I should explain that we are a non-profit making body). In their book *Bedales School: The First Hundred Years*, Wake and Denton observe: *'there are Bedalians who see themselves as left-wing, disapprove of independent schools, and believe passionately in Bedales'*. This conundrum is unlikely to be squared any time soon, although I console myself with the thought that as with the birth of state education, and indeed the labour movement itself, much social reform has required seemingly unlikely coalitions.

To locate historically the 1950s educational orthodoxies in which government currently places such faith, we must go back to the monitorial system of the early 19th century and the prevailing sense that for the masses education was no more than preparation for a life of compliant drudgery. The powerful reaction against such an arrangement – subsequently enshrined in a nascent state education system that valued children for their own sake – was significantly down to the work of the great non-conformist educational innovators such as Owen, Wilderspin and Stowe. Perhaps the enduring point is that distinctive educational approaches can have a broader reforming value. We should not be content with an education system that finds value only in a prescribed corner of the range of education possibilities. It is those young people with a genuinely rounded education – who see the practical and academic as complementary aspects of the same commitment, and are keen and independent learners and problem solvers – who will be best placed to identify and then shape the world as they encounter it.

For all that it may be difficult to spot using conventional structural ideological lenses, the development of our education system has been hugely reliant on dissenting analyses from the independent of mind, and such interventions have invariably challenged rather than supported the status quo. Today more than ever, egalitarian educational provision requires educators to work together so that its boundaries might be kept as wide, inspiring and humane as we can make them.

Keith Budge is Headmaster of Bedales Schools

From secret gardens to polytunnels: curriculum's fate in neoliberal times, and what is to be done about it

John Yandell

Once regarded as a 'secret garden', the preserve of professional interests, curriculum has become an instrument of policy, and of politicians. Nowadays, curriculum can seem less like a garden than a polytunnel, a place of frantic activity, managed, monitored and measured from afar by those who are remote from the classroom. What children and young people should know has become the stuff of soundbite. A recent instance will serve. *'We have established that all pupils should learn three Shakespeare plays over the course of their secondary school education'*, declares government minister Nick Gibb (2015). The statement comes from an essay celebrating E.D. Hirsch, the American academic whose argument for a curriculum founded on a notion of 'core knowledge' has become massively influential on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gibb's statement reveals much about the taken-for-grantedness of this, currently dominant, approach to curriculum policy. First, there is the promise of universality – a strand in policy that has characterised all the various incarnations of the national curriculum since 1989. This aspect might seem entirely unproblematic. It sits easily with progressive ideas of a common curricular entitlement, and more widely with the view that knowledge is, or ought to be, the common property of us all. There are questions to be asked, however. Who is to decide what should be included in such a curriculum – who is the 'we' who have, in Gibb's word, 'established' that this particular provision is desirable, or even necessary? Should such decisions be arrived at through some democratic process, or are they best left to the experts?

In practice, what has happened throughout the past three decades is that government ministers have exercised somewhat capricious influence over the shape and content of the curriculum – from Margaret Thatcher's interference over the question of Standard English in the first version of the national curriculum through to Michael Gove's extensive meddling in the most recent one. In relation to Gibb's statement, one might be tempted to ask: why three plays? Why not two, or four, or thirty-eight? Why Shakespeare, and not Aristophanes, or Brecht, or Chekhov? Nothing in the newest version of the national curriculum provides a rationale or justification for this – and I am not aware of any research that established the precise benefits of studying three plays by Shakespeare. My hunch is that there is a simple explanation, for the quantity at any rate: previous versions had suggested that students might study two plays, so in this, more rigorous version, why not demonstrate the added rigour with a 50 per cent increase in Shakespeare?

So, might it be better to leave it to the experts? But what kind of expertise is required for those tasked with designing a curriculum? The assumption might be that this is a job for academics, for those with the knowledge. One problem with this is that it treats disciplinary knowledge – the knowledge that is located in a university physics or history department, say – as stable, clearly boundaried and uncontested. Knowledge, however, is always provisional, the subject of debate and contestation, and the organisation of knowledge into neat disciplinary categories is always more a matter of institutional convenience than a representation of some underlying truth.



But there is another, much more fundamental problem with this way of thinking about the curriculum. The difficulty is exemplified by Gibb's claim that all pupils should 'learn three Shakespeare plays'. What does that mean? What is involved in learning a Shakespeare play? Does this mean committing it to memory? Finding out who does what to whom? Reading it? Acting it out? Working in role? Comparing different interpretations of it by watching different versions on film or in the theatre? Researching how it has been differently understood at different times and in different places over the past four centuries? Talking and writing about it? Remaking it in different media? Exploring the different contexts of production and reception, and thinking about concepts of leadership, or loyalty, or love, of gender or status or society, and how these are represented and interrogated in the play? I don't imagine that Nick Gibb has thought about these issues very much, if at all. But they are not trivial questions, since what it means to 'learn three Shakespeare plays' isn't in any meaningful sense separable from what school students *do* with them (nor, indeed, is it separable from the questions of how the term 'play' is understood – as a published text, as a performance script, as a radically unstable set of culturally powerful signifiers).

John Yandell (cont)

For the 2016 book *Rethinking Education: whose knowledge is it anyway?* by Adam Unwin and John Yandell, see <http://newint.org/books/no-nonsense-guides/nono-education>

What I'm getting at here is the argument made by Douglas Barnes in *From Communication to Curriculum* (1976). What matters is not the curriculum as a list of things to be learnt – whether such lists are produced by politicians or professors, or even if such lists appear in the teacher's own plans – but the curriculum that is *enacted*, moment by moment, in the classroom. And what Barnes understood is precisely what has been evacuated from much of the more recent, policy-led representations of curriculum: there is nothing straightforward about this process of enactment, a process that is never merely a matter of transmission, a delivery from the already-knowledgeable (the teacher, the textbook, the PowerPoint slides) to the not-yet-knowledgeable (the learners). Such processes can never be straightforward because learning itself is a messy, complicated process and because classrooms are irreducibly social places, where the interactions among people are never simply the transfer of neat packages of knowledge. (Because of this, to envisage a curriculum as something that can be 'delivered' is deeply misleading.)

Any attempt to discuss curriculum apart from pedagogy involves a kind of wilful forgetting, an erasure of the lived reality of classrooms, as if what is learnt could be abstracted from the social relations and interactions that are the means whereby learning is accomplished. The perspective that I am advocating here has direct consequences for how we understand the work that teachers do and for how we conceptualise teachers' expertise. If the curriculum is *enacted* in the classroom, not delivered there, then it follows that the participants in that enactment have far more responsibility for, and power over, the making of the curriculum than policy tends to indicate.

This does not mean that knowledge is unimportant, but rather that it is to be seen as a set of resources to be worked on collaboratively, not a fixed entity to be handed over. In this version of teaching and learning, teachers exercise professional judgement about the design and development of the curriculum. Such judgement depends on their own knowledge but equally on their attentiveness to the funds of knowledge that their pupils bring with them. Curriculum, rather than arising from some central mandate, is locally negotiated. (To avoid any misunderstanding here, a locally negotiated curriculum does not mean a curriculum of merely local relevance, nor does it imply one that is any less intellectually demanding. Real rigour isn't a product of ministerial *fiat*, of lists of grammatical terms or canonical authors; it is to be found in the learners' conceptual development and in the forms of pedagogy that enable this development to take place.)

What I am proposing has implications for assessment. Under the current system, it is assessment which, to a very large extent, determines the shape and content of the curriculum. This pertains both to overall curriculum design (which subjects, which areas of knowledge and activity are valued, which are marginalised) and to the organisation, the emphases and omissions, within any one area. EBacc determines subject choices, Progress 8 confirms the centrality of a 'core', the GCSE specifications and the SATs papers exert a dominant influence on what gets taught and even on how it is taught. Could it be otherwise? Quite easily – just as it is in many other parts of the world where there is no equivalent centrally-imposed framework of assessment. The choice is not between accountability and anarchy, as it were, but between different systems of accountability. Accountability by high-stakes test score makes it easy to compare 'performance' across different sites (classrooms, schools, regions), but is remarkably uninformative in what it reveals about the learning that has been accomplished. It is, on the other hand, perfectly possible for those directly involved in the processes of teaching and learning to provide rich, nuanced accounts of these processes and to reflect carefully on what has been achieved through them.

This also involves the reintroduction of another vector of accountability. With locally negotiated curricula, we would return to the situation that confronted me as a newly-qualified teacher, more than thirty years ago. 'Why are we doing this?' my students would ask. And part of my professional responsibility – my responsiveness to my students – was to have an answer, to be prepared to share a rationale for the curricular choices and decisions that I and my colleagues had made, not merely to hide behind the dictates of the national curriculum or the idiosyncrasies of Nick Gibb or Michael Gove.

It might seem hopelessly idealistic to envisage such profound changes to our firmly-entrenched systems of curriculum and assessment, particularly at a time when the priority must be the campaign against massively damaging cuts to school budgets. What is already happening, though, as this campaign develops, is the formation of alliances of teachers, pupils, parents and carers. It is precisely in such struggle, and in the dialogue that takes place in such circumstances, that it becomes possible to explore the question of what education is for. And this question cannot be addressed without opening up the garden of the curriculum to those who have a direct interest in such horticultural processes, not just in the production targets and quotas that have been set by the polytunnel managers.

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Curriculum design and making

Dave Strudwick

We live in a rapidly changing world and one where social interdependence is fundamental for our children's futures. Parents and teachers want something better for their child than they experienced themselves. We need to create a curriculum that supports this for all, in a manner that makes your success my own. We have a moral obligation to create something of purpose, for the future, which runs way beyond having great GCSE results, which are merely a significant milestone. This story of Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA) is not a case study, or even a scalable model, but a provocation of how a community can make social impact. I hope to raise some questions for communities on doing things differently.

PSCA is a 3-16 mainstream all-through free school, sponsored and founded by Plymouth College of Art (PCA) in 2013. It currently enrolls 750 students aged between 3 and 14, with an eventual capacity of 1,050 in September 2018. It is located in an area that is in the first percentile of need nationally in terms of Lower Super Output Areas. The school is open every evening and every weekend. The building, *The Red House*, does not feel or run like a typical school. The school and College together form a unique continuum of creative learning that runs from early years to Masters level.

In the words of the Principal of PCA, Professor Andrew Brewerton, *'PSCA was established with an emphasis on learning-through-making in and between all subject disciplines, and the learning ethos of the school draws upon and develops the intrinsic motivation of all learners towards understanding and practice.'* Plymouth School of Creative Arts has exercised its curriculum freedoms to make a horse of a different colour. It does not aim to deliver a static model but one which changes with our community over time. Whilst our practices are changing the principles and values that are driving our development stay firm. We are making our school and actively creating community as a part of the process. You are welcome to visit to see how we work and we look forward to hearing your story.

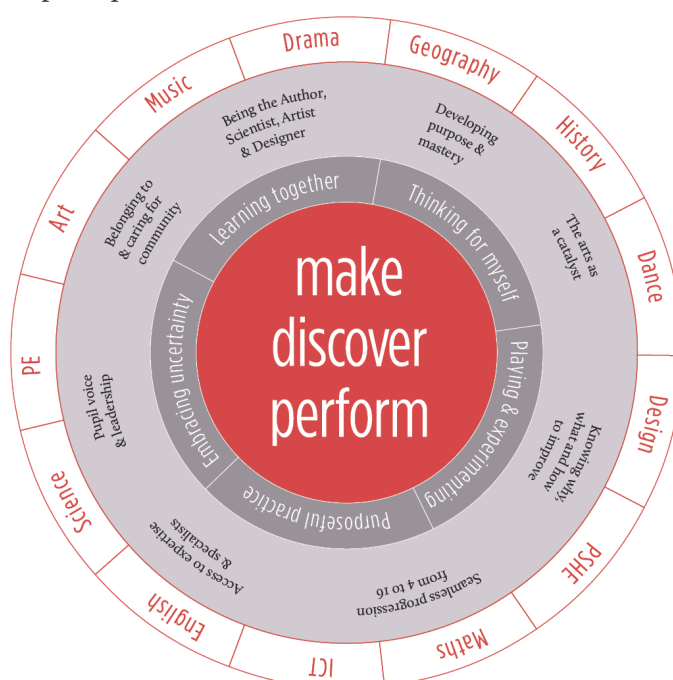
The circular model reflects our curriculum with making at the core. It was derived from a set of principles and values that we didn't want to be compromised. Yes, we have been challenged by the Progress 8 accountability measures but we have decided that it cannot drive the option choices of

students. Why shouldn't you choose a course that, whilst it won't count for us as a school in an accountability measure, would be great for your future? My experience of working with excluded youngsters meant that I knew the significance of relationships in all learning and that with greater vulnerability came a more limited sense of possibility or horizon. I also recognised that these students typically internalised their failures and externalised their successes. A key question then is how can we support this to be different through practices such as *purposeful practice* and recognise that this approach will help every young person?

More recently I have been inspired by the *My Ways* framework from *Next Generation Learning Challenges*. The My Ways framework helpfully supports a curriculum design that not only recognise the obvious need for content knowledge but places this alongside the vital ingredients of Habits for Success, Creative Know How and Way Finding.

If this is placed alongside a pedagogical approach which is blended, we have a better chance of making a difference. There is a place for projects and real world learning as well as direct teaching. Teachers intuitively teach the way they like to learn or to fix an imaginary version of their younger selves. In isolation teachers will always have shortcoming but as a collective with community, parents and students a different model can be co-constructed. This means a different Gestalt, a new student, pedagogy, learning environment, curriculum, assessment, leader... The following principles are core to our curriculum design.

We must look to create an educational model and curriculum that has purpose and integrity. Anna Cutler, from TATE, described our school as looking to develop a new kind of art student. That is one who can take creative thinking and action into making theirs and others lives better. Of course the arts have a part to play but so do all areas of learning. A key question to staff and students is *'what makes you want to get up in the morning?'*. We need to harness this energy, and rather than teachers 'delivering' the head's or government's vision they need to connect to the passion and purpose that is already in themselves and their students. This does suggest there is not one scheme of work!



Dave Strudwick (cont)

Assessment can derail learning if we are not careful. Some of this is the responsibility of government and the culture they create. Michael Gove made clear that he had not been supported effectively at school when he suggested that 'all schools should be above average'. The target culture though must be challenged from within our own habits, especially as leaders. We are pushing for rigour in learning and creativity. Indeed, in maths, we establish the learning needs of children using Artificial Intelligence (*Realizeit*) to create a personal pathway based on their understanding over time. Applying this learning in real context has had a profound impact.

The root of the word assess is to sit beside. We have lost sight of this with summative and formative aspects that can detach learners from their love of learning. The relationship that supports assessment as learning rather than assessment for or of learning is an interesting dimension we are looking to establish. It is challenging for teachers to create new practices out of old habits but we need to ask how integral and useful are our assessment practices in connection to our purpose. It is important to consider that you cannot measure all the things you value and nor should you try to do so. When sitting alongside someone though, providing you listen and are curious, you can hugely aid their sense of possibility and then their learning.



As a school we look for students to lead their own learning when appropriate. If you don't give space for this, for curiosity or for being stuck or making mistakes the very attributes that a four-year-old had as a part of their job description get unlearned through school only to have to be remade at university or in the world of work. How do we hook students into their world? How are they immersed in an experience that allows them to raise a question and then to make something in relation to this inquiry? If we over fill the curriculum we miss the opportunity to create young people who are ready for the future rather than the 1950s. I have had the privilege to see young people skype MIT in the USA and design using thermochromic materials which change colour with heat. These students created a device for parents to put in the bath to help them know if the

water was too hot. They were 11 years old and the best thing that the teacher did was to assess their readiness to play with new software and 3-D

print their ideas into action without him. He kept out of the way only offering encouragement. At PSCA this inquiry involves many forms of community such as the renovation of sailing boats with Cremyll Keelboats or making radio programmes with Red House Radio.

Personal experience and perspective is essential to the learning experience. We are challenging ourselves to move from something which is realistic to something that is real. Having a clear sense of audience and purpose connects further. Project based learning and the use of a digital platform (Hero) allows this to be shared with parents and staff in a very different manner. There was a different kind of motivation when children in Year 4 were designing for Kier Construction a scaffolding wrap for a new building or when students in Year 9 were working with professors and doctorate students around the creation of a digital representation of the emotional state of our collective school community. This gives business, higher education providers and wider community a way to engage; it has a different purpose beyond the transactional. Our way of being is so important and there is a big difference between learning about art and being the artist or curator.

It is so important to turn the horizon into a place to be excited by rather than feared. The curriculum must stretch the sense of what is possible. Andrew Brewerton suggests: as a learner or as an artist, the horizon is surely where your identity will come from. From the horizon and not from the boundary, because that self-limiting 'line in the sand' quickly demarcates the defensive condition of insular confinement.

When students from PCA make films with primary students, there is a possibility of being like Ethan or Christina which through experience has a proximity unlike wanting to be like Stephen Spielberg. After we were visited by primary students from Chengdu in China our parents and students wanted to go themselves. The international dimension is about to be further enhanced through the co-creation of project based learning with students from the USA, South Korea and Brazil.

The horizon feels like a fitting place to end. I hope this provides an opportunity for us all to explore and inspire a new generation of people who want a better society for their children than we have experienced ourselves.

Dave Strudwick is headteacher of Plymouth School of Creative Arts



Dreaming and Subversion - Recreating the Curriculum

Dave Trotman

'Ours is an age of increasing uncertainty, a time when societies are confronted by unprecedented and seemingly intractable problems. Armed conflict, an increased threat of global terrorism, environmental degradation, escalating mental illness amongst young people, suicide, child abuse, corporate greed, electronic surveillance and the proliferation of fake news (which has even directly implicated the President of the United States of America) – all are now part of the contemporary condition. Our best hope of survival, perhaps our only hope of ameliorating or even eliminating many of these problems, is through an urgently needed new approach to education.'

If this sounds familiar, and with only the most minor adaptation on my part, many readers will recognise this from the introduction to Postman and Weingartner's 1969 prescient text *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. Depressingly, it seems that little has changed since their view of troubling times - even the reference to the President of the United States remains unaltered. Equally troubling is their assessment of the American school system - akin to *'driving a multi-million dollar sports car, screaming, faster! faster! while peering fixedly into the rear-view mirror'* (p4).

Sounds familiar too? Meanwhile, in the UK much of the valuable curriculum research and development that had begun at around the same time as Postman and Weingartner were writing has since been lost in an avalanche of what Balarin and Lauder described in the final report of the Cambridge Primary Review as a 'state approved theory of learning'. Nearly fifty years on from *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* the urgency for an alternative educational agenda is as pressing now as it was then. In more optimistic tone, in other Provinces (literally - in Alberta, Canada) recent concern for purposeful curriculum reform has been framed by the imperative to maximise consultation between the widest range of informed parties - students, teachers, parents, academics and other professional groups. If such a policy context was similarly possible in England and the wider UK - and I consider this not to be beyond the political imagination - then what might begin to inform a meaningful curriculum for the contemporary condition?

One approach might be to first (re)consider the intrinsic meaning of 'curriculum' - from the Latin root word *currere* - to 'run the racecourse'. In contrast to the repeated attempts of policy makers to frame and prescribe 'the curriculum' as both fixed and static - a programme of study, the product of our cultural stock, a canon of 'the best that has been thought and said' - *currere*, with its analogues of motion, journey and impetus, represents fluidity, the unpredictable and the indeterminacy of what it is to be in education.

Curriculum in this sense points to the primacy of the playful, the creative and the inventive. Another approach might be to consider the curriculum as essential areas of experience, much as Her Majesty's Inspectorate proposed prior to the 1988 Education Reform Act, involving areas of learning that includes such things as the aesthetic and creative, human and social and the moral and spiritual. Many readers may remember the HMI 'raspberry ripple' curriculum series published in the mid-1980s only to be supplanted by Kenneth Baker's ERA homage to the Education Regulations of 1904. Meanwhile, others have sought to advance the curriculum along the lines of theories of intelligence and learning, the promotion of desirable personal attributes and the intellectual skill sets needed for effective adaption in a future society.



Increasingly, my own disposition to the curriculum has been informed not by abstracted philosophical or psychological theory, but rather by the reported experiences of children and young people - particularly for those whose experience of school, teaching and the curriculum has been less than successful. In recent research with my colleagues Stan Tucker and Linda Enow on the experiences of vulnerable and excluded young people in Alternative Provision (AP) we have had the opportunity to hear compelling narratives from young people about their curriculum experiences and aspirations.

One of the starkest observations from excluded young people is that things often go wrong early in their secondary school careers - typically following what many children and young people describe as a traumatic transition from primary to secondary school. Moreover, the negative legacies of failed school transitions have emerged as a recurrent theme in the accounts of young offenders and prisoners' (see *Does School Prepare Men for Prison?* by Karen Graham, 2014). At the other end of the school continuum is the problem of the polarisation of 'academic' and 'vocational' pathways that

Dave Trotman (cont)

are also heavily gendered, resulting in what some teachers in our research have lamented as the post-16 'hair and bricks' option. In contrast, many young people in our interviews demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their own characteristics and behaviours borne out of their interactions with peers and teachers. Interestingly, few participants were critical of individual teachers with many young people demonstrating an often surprising knowledge of their own personal triggers for inappropriate behaviour and preferences for particular approaches to the most effective means of learning new things. Yet, opportunities for personal innovation and agency were largely absent from post-compulsory education. Amongst those pupils attending AP we also encountered a growing number of young people for whom school was a source of anxiety and depression. Increasingly, this has extended beyond the more common factors of bullying and school refusal to the effects of an escalating performative culture, particularly amongst young people from middle class households.

On the basis of our research and other reportage, it is evident that in the English state school system we have moved from a curriculum that, at best, can be described as unfit for purpose to one that, at worst, is now increasingly detrimental to the well-being of many children and young people. In what ways might this then be readdressed?

Firstly, and most obviously, there is an urgent need to remove the paraphernalia of statutory testing and league tables, which many observers have consistently argued for, but without obscuring necessary public insight into the educational processes of children and young people.

Secondly, the evaluation of education provision needs to be just that – an evaluation of education that demands a far wider and more sophisticated range of procedures and informants than those currently imposed on schools through punitive inspection. At the level of domestic policy, the technologies of pupil and school assessment invariably reside within a wider macro-political and supra-national drive for 'big data' - what has become known as 'datafication'.

The most visible example of this trend is of course the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA). While much vaunted and misappropriated by Government ministers, concerns about PISA have been forcibly expressed - see Mayer and Benavont's critique *PISA, Power, and Policy* as a good example. Amongst the many concerns relating to PISA is that it makes vivid the problematic nature of narrow assessment on an international scale. Typically, those features of the

curriculum that can be made amenable to blunt and cheap assessment are afforded privileged status, while those activities requiring more sophisticated means of educational evaluation are relegated to the margins as an 'enhancement' luxury, paid for out of hours by those parents who can afford to do so.

For Postman and Weingartner, their response to the social ills of 1960s were framed, not surprisingly given their own subject interests, in terms of personal enquiries, media literacies, collaborative exchange and gaming – activities that are entirely congruent with the pursuit of *currere*. In his recent book *Foucault as Educator*, Stephen Ball proposes that education must necessarily re-focus on what he calls the aesthetics of self-formation. In calling for a 're-signification' of students, teachers and their interactions, Ball persuasively argues for an education that is reframed as site for self-creation through an advanced ethics of practice. Educational environments, he contends, should then be ones that encourage experimentation, an awareness of self in terms of culture and historical time, combined with key dispositions - such as scepticism, detachment, tolerance and (presumably when confronting such things as racism and sexism for instance) intolerance.

Sharing similar interests to Postman and Weingartner's thesis, Ball's analysis of education offers a fundamental reclaiming of the subjective self and the lifeworlds of young people as the overriding focus of the curriculum. Researching with colleagues in AP has reaffirmed the urgency of both restoring the subjective self and the dismantling of the worst impediments to this. Amongst my own curriculum interests, I count imagination and creativity as vital constituents. Despite attempts by successive governments to misappropriate creativity into the exclusive service of entrepreneurialism and business innovation, its intrinsic powers lie in the domains of imagination, sentience, aesthetics and the capacity to humanise.

Writing about the National Secondary Review from the perspective of imaginative education nearly a decade ago, I commented on a poster on the wall of a classroom at a local secondary school. Like many of the now common-place mantras of inspiration found in schools, its quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt read '*the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams*'. Ten years on and I wonder how faded that poster might be.

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Scotland: excellent curriculum, outdated qualifications?

Seamus Searson

Education in Scotland has been run separately from education south of the border and the fact Scotland had its own distinct system is often a source of national pride. The national curriculum was not introduced in Scotland and the idea of giving primary teachers a prescriptive list of topics to teach by particular stages is seen by some professionals as an anathema.

Curriculum for Excellence was developed from a 'National Debate on Education' in 2002. A Curriculum Review Group was established to identify the purposes of education for the 3 to 18 age range and to determine key principles to be applied in a redesign of the curriculum.

Curriculum for Excellence is divided into two phases: the *broad general education* and the *senior phase*. The *broad general education* begins in early learning and childcare (at age 3) and continues to the end of S3 (the third year of secondary school). Its purpose is to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

It is designed to provide the breadth and depth of education to develop flexible and adaptable young people with the knowledge and skills they will need to thrive now and in the future. It aims to support young people in achieving and attaining the best they possibly can. During the broad general education, children and young people should:

- achieve the highest possible levels of literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills
- develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
- develop knowledge and understanding of society, the world and Scotland's place in it
- experience challenge and success so that they can develop well-informed views and the four capacities.

The *senior phase*, which takes place from S4 to S6 in schools, is the phase when the young person can continue to develop the four capacities and build up a portfolio of qualifications. It is the stage of education at which the relationship between the curriculum and National Qualifications becomes of key significance.

There is an entitlement to a *senior phase* which:

- provides specialisation, depth and rigour
- prepares them well for achieving qualifications to the highest level of which they are capable
- continues to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
- continues to provide a range of activities which develop the four capacities
- supports them to achieve a positive and sustained destination.

The curriculum in the *senior phase* comprises more than programmes which lead to qualifications. There is a continuing emphasis, for example, on health and wellbeing appropriate to this phase, including physical activity and opportunities for personal achievement, service to others and practical experience of the world of work.

The Scottish Government believes its responsibility is to provide the framework for learning and teaching rather than to micromanage what goes on in individual schools. Every state school in Scotland is run by the local council. Responsibility for what is taught rests with councils and schools although they have to take national guidelines and advice into account.

The Curriculum for Excellence has brought about significant changes in schools - placing an emphasis on exploiting the natural links between different subjects and putting in place certain over-riding aims which go beyond individual subjects. It does not give teachers a prescriptive list of topics they should teach or when. The Curriculum for Excellence encouraged teachers to put the child at the centre of learning and allowed the teacher to develop programmes to stimulate the learners.

So far, so good. However, the education system had a difficulty in how to assess and evaluate the learning taking place and a reluctance to trust the professionalism of the teacher. A fundamental flaw in the development of the Curriculum for Excellence was not building-in a process of trusting teacher professional judgement and holistic assessment. The government, Education Scotland (the improvement agency which includes the Inspectorate), local authorities and schools themselves were put under pressure to assess, evaluate and evidence the success of *broad general education* and the *senior phase*. This promoted the continuation of traditional methods that measured what could be easily measured rather than addressing the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities of the four capacities. The pressure led to

Seamus Searson (cont)

the micromanagement of inputs of individual teachers and outputs of individual schools. As a consequence excessive teacher workload and accountability has become the order of the day.

The introduction of a new National Qualification regime that should have been built upon the 'brave new world' of the *broad general education* was rushed and relied on the traditional discrete subject lines to meet the demands of higher education. The new national qualifications system relied upon both continuous teacher assessment and external exams that are over bureaucratic for both pupils and teachers, and crucially did not enhance the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. The National Qualification system undermines and devalues the good work and the direction of travel of the curriculum and *broad general education*.



However, the OECD review in December 2015 'Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective' is pointing a way forward. The review focused on *broad general education*, and importantly, 'was not an evaluation of CfE as the evidence is not available for such an evaluation'. The review went on to say:

There is a great deal to be positive about in such a review: learners are enthusiastic and motivated, teachers are engaged and professional, and system leaders are highly committed. There has been intensive activity to create suites of support materials and a drive to address excessive bureaucracy.

Scottish schools are inclusive. Scottish schools do very well on measures of social inclusion and mix, along with Finland, Norway and Sweden. Scottish immigrant students achieve at higher levels than their non-immigrant peers, and Scotland enjoys one of the smallest proportions of low performers among its immigrant students.

There are clear upward trends in attainments and positive destinations. Over 9 in 10 of school leavers entered a positive follow-up destination in 2014, and nearly two-thirds of school leavers continue on in education.

The large majority of Scottish students feel connected to their school environment and hold positive attitudes towards school. At least three in four Scottish students say that they get along with their teachers, teachers take students seriously, and teachers are a source of support.

Implementation of CfE is at a 'watershed' moment. There has been a decade of patient work to put in place the full curriculum programme. That programme implementation process is nearing completion and this represents a prime opportunity boldly to enter a new phase. There is need now for a bold approach that moves beyond system management in a new dynamic nearer to teaching and learning. Schools, teachers and leadership Scotland has an historic high regard for education, and the trust towards teachers' professional judgment is very welcome.

Education International, the world organisation of education unions, has stated that education reforms need to be contextually relevant and, therefore, education policy dialogue needs to start at the classroom level with education unions at the centre as social partners. Administrators and bureaucrats should be prevented from taking the lead in identifying education policy issues and new solutions. Those who do the work on the ground - teachers and education support personnel - need to be empowered and actively involved before, during and after changes to education policies.

The Curriculum for Excellence has not reached its conclusion and nor should it. It should be flexible and changing to meet the needs of the learners in addressing the changes to come. The evaluation of learning needs to be developed by teachers and needs to challenge the norms set down by tests and examinations. This regime stifles learning and the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. However, without addressing the measures for success and the changes necessary for third level education Curriculum for Excellence is unable, yet, to put education beyond the reach of politicians and back into the hands of teachers.

Seamus Searson is the General Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association

SEA meets the Welsh Government Minister

Barbara Street, Mike Newman, and Chris Newman

A delegation from SEA Cymru recently met the Lib Dem Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams. This was against the background of a resolution submitted to the Welsh Labour Conference which was not discussed because it was ruled non-contemporaneous. It raised concerns about trends in testing and accountability and called for:

- ending crisis-based micromanagement of schools;
- assessing national standards by sampling rather than publishing school by school results;
- implementing curriculum reform on the Donaldson model;
- supporting and training teachers in assessment skills, based on day to day work rather than high pressure tests;
- developing moderation within and between schools;
- respecting, trusting and supporting schools and the people who work in them.

SEA Cymru outlined the amount of overlapping accountability, including PISA, Estyn, Regional Consortia, LEAs and school management. This results in a heavy workload, stress, panic and often confusion in the teaching profession. High stakes testing of children and young people results in increased levels of anxiety and unhappiness. School categorisation by colour (green is good; red is bad) does not help matters.

The Minister responded by stating the key issues were accountability, challenge and support. The introduction of Regional Consortia was a 'fudge'. She acknowledged there needs to be greater clarity about roles and responsibilities between LEAs and the Consortia and their challenge advisors. On schools categorisation, the OECD is saying it is an improvement. She felt the Welsh Government has introduced some moderation to get consistency of approach from the Consortia. She acknowledged that there is a lot of challenge and that needs to be matched with support. 'We need to explain to teachers what is going on.' She was conscious of the unintended consequences of any accountability system and would review it, as measures were the driver. She wanted to co-develop an accountability regime with the teaching profession. The Minister acknowledged that the teaching profession has been devalued and wanted to raise the standing and appreciation of teachers. 'We don't do teacher assessment very well.'

The Minister was interested in individual progress and a system to measure that. SEA Cymru asked about Donaldson's suggested testing a sample rather than compare on a school by school basis. The Minister stated that there will be a move away from all-class

testing at primary level by 2018 to a more individualised online adaptive test. She sees this as a tool for what the teacher will do next with the pupil. It would be a collective diagnostic tool, an individual resource not collected nationally.

With reference to teachers themselves she referred to the new leadership Academy and the intention to radically reform teacher training. Pay and conditions would be coming under devolved powers. When asked about how she saw the ability of teachers to move around the UK if training and other issues are different in Wales, the Minister didn't see any obstacles to that.

The Minister was made aware of the poor reputation of New Directions for both training and staff exploitation of supply teachers. She was also very concerned about other agencies which are even worse. She was disappointed by the report from the Task and Finish Group as there were no solid recommendations and had not given the Welsh Government anything new on the table. Supply teaching was an issue of teaching standards and she was looking at it again.

Turning to the curriculum, the Minister reiterated that parts would be available by 2018 and it is all supposed to be in place by 2021. She said that if this couldn't be achieved to the right standard then the timetable would be lengthened, and admitted that progress was behind schedule. For example, Experience Groups should have started last September but were only up and running in January. However she pointed out that the Digital Competence Framework was out in schools and had received praise from OECD. There was a crucial role for support; Trinity St David University and Education Scotland were partnering to bring in more expertise, and OECD would be looking at best practice in social pedagogy. The Minister concluded by repeating that she would delay the introduction of the new Curriculum if it wasn't fit for purpose.

The SEA delegation concluded that in general the discussion was amicable and there was a measure of agreement. The Minister seemed to understand and want positive engagement with the teaching profession. She was committed to an accountability regime but acknowledged that teachers had lost confidence in its present form. However, on the same day that she met us, Kirsty Williams was quoted as saying '*Come Pisa 2018, if nothing changes, my concern is pressure coming from all sides is to throw everything up in the air and start again. It's the reality of the situation*'. We hope that she will not be blown off course by press pressure (and the civil service) into ignoring those principles which we agreed to be right.

Six myths of social mobility

A review of the Social History Society Lecture by Dr Selina Todd

The brilliant social historian and feminist Selina Todd is currently working on a history of social mobility in 20th century Britain. Her keynote lecture at the annual conference of the Social History Society illustrated, with copious examples, just why the current use of ‘social mobility’ in social policy misrepresents its nature and importance. Dr.Todd identified six myths about social mobility, without denying the obvious truth that in class societies some individuals move during their lives from one to another class. After all, such movements are a popular theme in the arts; but they are worthy of note by artists precisely because they are unusual. Neither does the ‘rags to riches’ story reflect people’s experience. Most social movement is short-range – from a class fraction to one adjacent – and limited in frequency. The period 1945-1980 was unusual for producing net upward mobility; the more normal flow is of upward and downward movement roughly in balance.



The first myth is that *‘Social mobility is an individual project personified in the self-made man.’* Historical records tell us that for most people self-employment was not a choice connected with status. It provided autonomy from unfair employers but was insecure and seen as temporary; indeed their children tended to move into work for large firms. The small minority of the working class who became clerks in the first half of the century (often the second son, with the first working to augment family income) continued to see themselves as part of their extended working class family. The few who were concerned with status were often the offspring of downwardly mobile parents.

The second is that *‘Selective education has enabled social mobility’*. The story was that the 1944 Education Act, with its incorporation of grammar schools into the state system, created equality of opportunity. The truth was that despite the high aspirations of parents from both middle and working classes, only a small minority of the latter reached grammars. The post-war spike in

mobility, a very large and rapid increase, was actually due to changes in the labour market: the disappearance of unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs, and the expansion of clerical, administrative and professional non-manual jobs; the new welfare state required more nurses, technicians and teachers.

The third is connected: *‘Lack of aspiration or cultural capital prevents working class people from rising up the social ladder’*. In truth, this hides defensive responses by middle class institutions to the upward mobility that is normally accompanied by downward mobility. Higher professions employed entry criteria such as preference for the children of the professionals or for Oxbridge graduates which blocked working class entry. Those who had occupied middle class positions for more than two generations were particularly prone to try to hang on to their privileges. Although in the fifties opposition to the 11+ became widespread, politicians only started to respond when the middle classes complained that their children were failing to get into grammar schools. More recently, this defence has more often been wrapped up in a neo-liberal rhetoric of ‘the undeserving’. Now, most private school scholarships are awarded to middle class parents (who may have fallen on ‘hard times’).

Dr.Todd did not mention, but is undoubtedly aware, that not the whole working class has always knocked at the door; she herself has implied (see *Education Politics* 129 p13) that some of her comprehensive school contemporaries were much less committed as well as much less successful. There is evidence that certain fractions of the working class embrace a rejection of educational advance, or did so during the 20th century. Oral history provides stories of parental rejection of the values of school and the behaviour of teachers. In modern societies, class cultures are complex and intercut with gender, regional, ethnic, and age cultures.

Myth four is *‘Getting up the ladder means imitating those a few rungs up’*. Dr.Todd said that there remains a strong adherence to the belief in inherited ability. The middle and upper classes are portrayed as innately brilliant (she might have digressed to the role played in this by Oxbridge, with its inculcation of ‘effortless superiority’). In contrast, successful people from the working class are described in terms of their diligence.

It is also a myth that *‘Social mobility takes place before the age of 35.’* This is particularly untrue for women, who may progress their careers after child-rearing. It is also common for the downwardly mobile, such as immigrants or the victims of unemployment in an economic recession.

Selina Todd lecture review (cont)

View the lecture at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39UvyAbEy1U>

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it is a myth that '*Social mobility is a social good*'. As suggested above, a pervasive idea is that the working class has neither culture nor experience, and that the mobile benefit from a better way of life. Working class women moving into middle class work in the post-war economy were used to manipulating their appearance and character, and found shared bonds arising from gender discrimination; but they regretted the lack of space to talk about their past lives. Men did not find the transition as easy, and many experienced inner turmoil and breakdown. Whether they had attended grammar school or not, these people ascribed their mobility to the labour market rather than their education. Those born later, in the seventies, were less attracted to public sector work because of the political attacks on the welfare state. Instead many looked higher, to the older professions, only to find the blockages of social contacts and the rest.

Dr.Todd then discussed socialists, who have consistently questioned the notion of social mobility, seeing its opposition to equality and demanding opportunities for all. Between 1900 and 1930 there was a controversy within the labour movement, to join elite organisations or to form their own, but it did provide opportunities for progression, including within the Parliamentary Labour Party. Then, as Diane Reay has

argued, following generations developed a sense of entitlement and rejected 'grateful quietism'. While organisations like CASE argued for broader access to educational opportunities, the WEA and OU were crucial in providing them.

Dr.Todd concluded that some argue that the gains of a tiny minority of the working class justify all the injustices of hierarchical capitalist society. In a profoundly unequal society, however, others see how limited the gains of meritocracy are. The respondents to opinion surveys by Mass Observation give unprompted clues to the huge social transformation we need. They suggest free education through to post-graduate level, local non-selective schools, a more socially diverse Parliament, and pay and pension rights with pay based more on experience and less on qualifications. It is time to listen to those who argue not for mobility but for equality.

This lecture provided a very substantial rebuttal to the political convention, orchestrated by the Social Mobility Commission, that mobility is a worthy policy aim. It should form one basis of a renewed debate within the Labour Party on the tensions between mobility and equality.

MJ

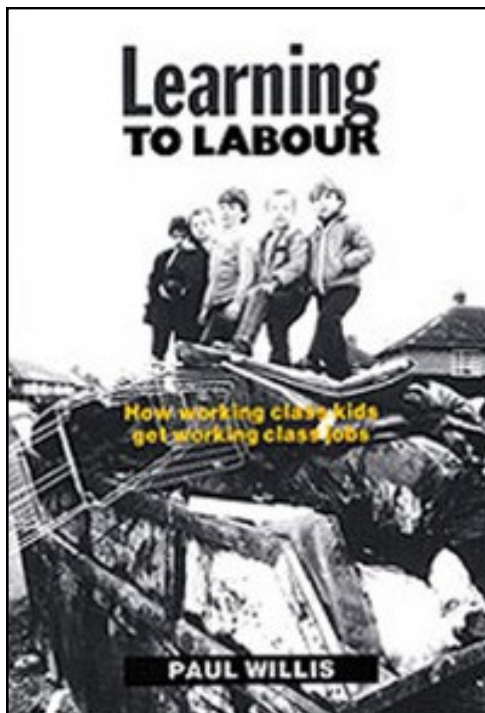
Review of 'Learning to Labour' by Paul Willis

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of a sociology book which has continuing lessons for public policy wonks even though, in part, it now reads as economic and social history. It has much to contribute to the debate on social mobility. Its opening sentences are '*The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves.*' The book provides those explanations.

The young Paul Willis was heavily influenced by the work of Stuart Hall's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Using ethnographic methods he followed groups of schoolboys from a West Midlands industrial town through their transitions from school to work. *Learning to Labour* described very particular sets of attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour – cultures – which hardly exist now because the kinds of work, largely in heavy industry, which were a strong determinant of the cultures, have almost disappeared. Actually, Willis rejected the

Paul Willis (cont)

concept of determination and emphasised social agents '*viewing, inhabiting and constructing their own world.*' In this view, each generation reproduces its culture through choices. Willis showed how a group of teenagers *chose* demanding and unpleasant unskilled manual jobs.



This group, 'the lads' was the main focus, with a group of 'ear'oles' or conformists from the same secondary modern school and others from neighbouring schools for contrast. The lads went to school to 'have a laff' with each other, attempting to minimise boredom and maximise excitement through the range of disruption familiar to any secondary teacher. They were, indeed, inhabiting a school counter-culture, rejecting hard work (mental) while anticipating hard work (manual) and good pay in the freely available factory jobs. This culture featured masculinity, sexism and racism. Their fathers were suspicious of society's formal institutions, including schools, but mothers often were simply resigned to their childrens' fates.

The lads had heard stories about the shop floor, and likened it to the school counter culture. When they got there they discovered higher levels of brutality,

coercion, and a celebration of 'manliness' in addition to the search for the 'laff'. The money was good but the work was hard and newcomers were victimised. After a year, Willis concluded, disillusion was about to set in: '*... as the shop floor becomes a prison, education is seen retrospectively, and hopelessly, as the only escape.*'

This description has many strengths. It rests on a marxist analysis of the relations of production, but shows how the particular circumstances of the local economy and labour market, regional and local tradition, as well as the class fractions and gender, all play into the way people make decisions about their lives, thus transmitting and recreating cultures. We need not rely on the concepts introduced by Willis in the analytical second half of the book, which relate to the real conditions of existence of the working class: penetrations are cultural items which contribute to an understanding of those conditions, limitations confuse and impede such understanding.

So what are the lessons for us now? Perhaps it points to the need for a new cultural map of Britain, which must have developed after de-industrialisation, drawn by ethnographers not superficial pollsters. Perhaps such a map would help Labour to find itself and speak to its natural constituency. But for educationists, *Learning to Labour* contradicts many of the neo-liberal assumptions and doctrines now afflicting our politics. No, pupils do not come to school as empty vessels. Yes, some pupils do resist schooling (Ofsted, are you there?) and occupational advancement while other fractions of the working class seek it, as Selina Todd shows. And yes, attitudes to learning are heavily affected by the perceived nature of labour markets.

This book necessarily shows its age, despite its continuing interest for academics. Reflecting a patriarchal culture, young women are absent except as object not subject. In some ways, schooling has changed a lot, though in others not at all. The first half can be read as a historical description of state education and is a good read. But there can be no doubt that its reputation as a classic of ethnographic cultural study is justified.

MJ

SEA's Education Manifesto

Theresa May displayed a complete lack of consideration for the SEA by calling a general election. She stymied SEA's programme aimed at developing an election manifesto, which was due for launch in September 2017. Now SEA's Executive will review the process and determine a revised timetable.

Progress so far:

SEA Executive agreed a list of key topics that should be covered in an Education Manifesto and a timetable for their consideration.

Three introductory papers were submitted, including 'The Way Forward' by SEA's outgoing President Richard Pring, see <https://sosedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/the-way-forward-richard-pring.pdf>

Three all-member meetings have taken place, in Birmingham, Liverpool and Cardiff, in which papers were submitted and discussion points noted. The topics covered:

Ensuring there are enough good teachers

School accountability

Inequality in education

Child well-being

Papers are at <https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/sea-manifesto-2017/>. All comment is welcome.

Next steps:

All member meetings will continue to discuss other policy topics during 2017-2018. At the end of that process, the conclusions will be brought together into a coherent single document which is likely to be debated at the 2018 SEA conference, ready for launch at the Labour Party Conference in September 2018.

However, the political situation will be kept under review so that in the event of another general election the Education Manifesto can be submitted to the Party.

Forthcoming events

24th June, London: SEA Annual Conference and AGM

25th June, London: SEA Executive

All member meetings take place on Saturday afternoons and details will be notified to members in advance. New attendees particularly welcome.

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