

## **Restore Public Control of Schools TIME TO ABOLISH ACADEMIES**

**John Bolt**, General Secretary,  
Socialist Educational Association

From the very beginning of the programme, SEA has opposed the privatisation and fragmentation of the English education system. Since 2010 it has urged successive Labour shadow ministers to come out in full blooded opposition to the revolution begun by Michael Gove and carried on by his successors. Sadly, Labour found it easy to condemn individual scandals but could not bring itself to pledge a return to a fully public education service.

This does really matter. As an example of why, one Academy Trust has just refused to say how

much it spends on hiring a PR company. And their reason – “it would prejudice our commercial interests”. Just when did state funded schools start having “commercial interests” that are superior to their public duty?

At the Liverpool conference last year, however, there were signs of change. The commitment made there was to *“consult on and establish a new regulatory framework for schools. This would bring schools within the principles of the National Education Service, and ensure that all schools follow the same rules, with schools being regulated by statute, rather than thousands of individual contracts”*.

The follow-up however has

been disappointing. No further flesh has been put on the bones of the Liverpool announcements and the party has done little to make it clear that it is now committed to real change.

The scandals have of course kept coming, highlighted by two damning Panorama programmes. Local campaigns against academisation have continued and have chalked up some successes. At the same time there have been some spectacular failings in the FE sector and the marketisation of higher education has led to real problems in that sector.

So this spring, SEA set about trying to answer the hard questions about reversing



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## About *Education Politics*

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# Editorial

This edition of *Education Politics* is focused on academisation and the privatisation of education. Over the last twelve months there has been a significant increase in opposition to academisation. Strikes action has been taken in a number of places and, alongside industrial action, some very large, vibrant, creative and vocal parent campaigns have been organised.

The number of strike days taken by National Education Union members over the last twelve months in opposition to academisation has been impressive and there have also been marches, lobbies of councils and governing bodies.

There has also been an increase in media coverage of the scandals around academies, exposing a number of issues including the huge salaries paid to executives and the awful practice of 'off rolling' students. This coverage has had an impact and people are waking up to the devastating impact

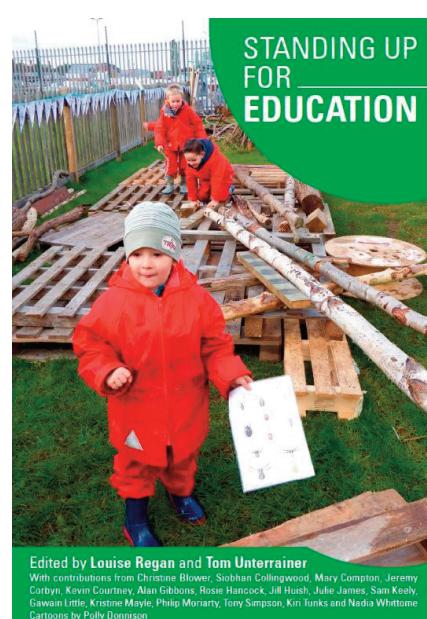
that academies are having.

This edition is being published in the run up to the annual Conference of the National Education Union in Liverpool.

The Socialist Educational Association will be holding a fringe meeting at the Conference to discuss these issues. The increasing action against academisation is something that we must use to drive forward policy within the Labour Party. If you are in Liverpool for the Conference please join us to hear from current campaigners and find out how you can get involved.

It is essential that any incoming Labour Government not only reverses the academies programme but actually does everything in its power to prevent any future government from trying to fragment our system.

We know that to create equality in our education system we must continue to fight for a fully comprehensive system.



## Standing Up for Education

Edited by Louise Regan and Tom Unterrainer

With contributions from Christine Blower, Siobhan Collingwood, Mary Compton, Jeremy Corbyn, Kevin Courtney, Alan Gibbons, Rosie Hancock, Jill Huish, Julie James, Sam Keely, Gawain Little, Kristine Mayle, Philip Moriarty, Tony Simpson, Kiri Tunks and Nadia Whittome.

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# Local control of schools

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academisation. The legalities are complicated and the potential for disruption is real. We have very much appreciated expert inputs from David Wolfe QC, Professor Anne West of the LSE, Kevin Courtney of the NEU and John Fowler from the Local Government Information Unit. We think we are now in a position to offer concrete proposals that a Labour government could – and should – take up.

Initially, a Labour Secretary of State should announce that they will make no new academy orders and will cease the free school programme. That would mean that the responsibility for making proposals for new schools would revert exclusively to local authorities. This would have the effect of freezing the system but would not of itself restore a democratically accountable school system. To do this will require primary legislation.

A new Education Act should then:

1. Repeal the requirement on local authorities to seek academy proposals when planning a new school. The local authority must be the decision maker in relation to all new schools. This is the only way of avoiding the waste and confusion that has bedevilled the free school programme.

2. Remove the power of the Secretary of State to create any new academies. This would

end the DfE run free school programme as well as the conversion of existing schools.

3. Take the power to issue regulations which will have the effect of over-riding the funding agreements of existing academies and multi academy trusts. This would enable the Secretary of State to establish a “common rule book” for all schools regardless of their formal status.

4. Take the power to impose a new governance framework on all multi-academy trusts. The new framework should require MATs to establish representative governing bodies in all schools and to devolve to them powers comparable to those held by maintained school governing bodies – so covering areas such as staffing, finance and curriculum. Schools should have the right to leave a MAT and to return to maintained status.

5. Make the local authority the admission authority for all schools. Currently too many schools use their control of admission criteria to covertly select a more favourable intake. Local authorities should set, after consultation (including with faith authorities), admission criteria for all schools and should be required to use this power to reduce the differences in intakes between schools.

6. Ban all related party transactions. Much of the financial mismanagement and corruption found in some academies relates to commercial deals with businesses connected to staff or

governors. There should be an outright ban on such transactions.

If Labour committed now to this kind of programme, it would transform the whole debate. At present, there is a widespread feeling that even if there were a Labour government, nothing too much would change. The message needs to go out that change is coming and everyone needs to adjust their expectations.

Alongside the legal changes, there will need to be a transformation in relations between central and local government. The last 40 years have seen the steady erosion of local government's capacity and authority. This has reached its peak in the current attempt to manage thousands of schools from Whitehall – something that is patently failing.

Local government needs to be empowered, resourced and trusted. Much of the disillusionment that is to be found in parts of the country far from London comes from the perception that decisions about people's lives are made far away by people who know little about their circumstances. We have an absurd level of centralisation that of necessity shuts out local communities from any say in how their schools are run.

We need to recognise, of course, that local government needs to change. The random muddle of authorities of massively different sizes and powers is a mess. Too many

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councils trying to run education are too small. And they are of course hopelessly under-resourced. Their systems too often don't allow any real public participation. But that is nothing compared to the crony-driven decision making behind closed doors practiced by the current government.

Reversing the tide of privatisation of schools will, then, require big changes in government at all levels. It will need ministers determined enough to challenge the received wisdom of the last 40 years. But if the actions set out in this article were put into effect by an incoming government, they would have the effect of restoring schools as part of the public realm and specifically they would:

- Establish a consistent set of regulations, approved by Parliament, covering all schools.
- Restore the autonomy of schools where this has been lost to MATs and empowering schools to determine for themselves how they want to work together within a national regulatory framework.
- Ensure that decisions about the school system are taken by democratically accountable bodies through open and transparent procedures.
- Modernise and democratise the workings of local government in relation to schools and to education more broadly.

Labour is committed to restoring public control in health and in our great utilities. We must settle for no less in education.

# Education for the Many

Angela Rayner's bold speech to the Labour Party Conference last September has put an end to the era of 'cross-party consensus' on academisation that has dominated the education policy of the main parties for over a decade.

Rayner's speech highlighted many of the problems and gave a glimpse of solutions through creating a democratic and locally accountable National Education Service. She tore into 'fat cat' pay and obscene profiteering. She put the needs of children and their families back centre stage of the debate. It was a genuinely refreshing vision. At last a politician has stepped outside the Westminster bubble and started listening.

Some may worry that there is insufficient detail as yet, but a new direction of travel has been set. Our job is to work together to help build this vision of a National Education Service and to develop a clear road map that will help solve the detailed problems of "de-academisation".

That means challenging every academisation proposal. No school should academise this side of the next general election. It would be a costly, reckless and probably futile decision. The process consumes resources that would be better spent on ameliorating the effects of cuts to school budgets. Governors should refocus on real school improvement and local councils should scrutinise all plans for academisation and propose alternatives.

But it is also time for some introspection from the fat cat CEOs. The likes of Sir Dan Moynihan, Sir Steve Lancashire and other fat cat CEOs should get out of education altogether. Their model of leadership has corrupted public services values in education. We need leaders in our school system who are committed to a National Education Service, who welcome local democratic accountability and who refuse to line their own pockets with exorbitant salaries.

Schools are caught between the hammer of austerity and the anvil of privatisation – a National Education Service must allow us to build a comprehensive, democratic, inclusive, progressive and fully funded public education system for all our children.

Anti Academies Alliance

**For more information on the Anti Academies Alliance visit [www.antiacademies.org.uk](http://www.antiacademies.org.uk)**

# Back to the future!

## *Why LEAs need to be provide effective central services for schools*

**Melaine Griffiths**

In a speech delivered in February 2018 John McDonell declared Labours intention to “properly fund local authorities”, “bring services back in house” and “strengthen local democracy”. No public service would benefit more if these good intentions became reality than education. Deregulation and delegation of funding away from local authorities has led to inevitable abuses. This is particularly obvious in the case of academies, run by unaccountable CEOs and managers, but it is a problem right across the school sector. It has now become obvious that Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and even stand-alone academies are a charter for profiteering and even at times outright corruption, with lucrative contracts handed to family and friends. The result is public money meant for front line educational services finding its way into the pockets of private individuals.

At Labour’s 2018 Conference Angela Rayner announced that there will be a “new regulatory framework for schools” with “community control at its heart and communities given a meaningful say in decision making”. These are welcome statements, but such broad, high level policies require a mechanism to make them a

reality on the ground. The starting point is that schools need to be brought back into the Local Authority and reformed democratic Local Education Authorities re-established. Its time to take back control.

However, the breaking up of MATs and the return of schools to maintained status will not be enough. The privatisation and marketisation of education was not caused by the introduction of Academies. Academies and Multi academy trusts (MATS) are just the culmination of policies encouraging marketisation and privatisation in education begun decades ago by the Thatcher governments.

Let’s go back thirty years to the 1980s. Then there were functioning Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in every local

authority. These LEAs were responsible for overseeing schools. They provided services to schools and encouraged schools in the area to work together, sharing expertise. While there were undoubtedly problems with LEAs and the period was hardly some sort of educational utopia, they nevertheless acted as a framework around which improvements could be built. Above all, there was at least a level of transparency and accountability that does indeed seem utopian when compared to the present arrangements.

Before the 1990s the LEA was the employer of staff both in schools and those staff involved in providing services to schools – teachers, cleaners, cooks,



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advisory teachers, caretakers, educational psychologists, supply teachers, payroll and personnel services, IT support etc. It made sure recruitment practices were fair and staff were suitably qualified. It provided Teachers Centres where staff could go for advice, meetings and training. It provided opportunities for teachers from different schools to meet and share good practice. Schools were not in competition with one another. Schools and staff from within a LEA and sometimes between LEAs worked together.

But in 1988 the misleadingly named Education Reform Act (ERA) took the first steps in trashing this “cooperative” integrated education system and that agenda has been pursued by all governments since. The Education Reform Act transferred many of the powers (including some financial powers) and responsibilities from LEAs to Heads and Governing bodies. It also gave the option for headteachers and governing bodies to go further and turn the schools they manage into Grant Maintained (GM) schools. GM schools got their funding directly from central government, bypassing the LA completely. The funds given to GM schools were then deducted from LA budgets. And that opened the floodgate to privatisation.

Now the headteacher and nominally the governing body had control over the school budget. They decided how and where to spend this money, cut from the LEA budget. Schools could now opt out of using local authority provided services and

either buy services from private companies/individuals or just not buy them at all, saving the money for something else.

This change to the way money was provided for central services had a devastating effect on LEAs. It meant they could no longer provide many of the services they had done as they could no longer be sure of finances year to year.

### ***‘Inevitably, over time central services diminished, teacher centres closed...’***

Inevitably, over time central services diminished, teacher centres closed, central service staff were made redundant. Over the years more and more private companies have filled the gap (often employing staff on poor conditions and poor wages with a CEO raking in the money). Now most services provided to schools are provided by private companies for profit. And in a lot of cases, making vast profits.

So what should a radical reforming Labour government do? One easy win would be to abolish the academy system, which, as we have seen is particularly prone to abuses related to privatisation. But this in itself is not enough, as the root problems can be traced back to the structure of school governance and procurement created by the ERA 1988. In particular, newly empowered and democratically accountable LEAs need to be seen as the default provider of school services within a particular area. But it is also important that any new system allows a measure of flexibility so that schools and even groups of schools, voluntarily cooperating together, can innovate.

However, that said, the working assumption that the renewed LEA is seen as the baseline provider of central services to the schools within its area must remain. Similarly, clear red lines must operate for any services schools



use outside of the LEA. In many ways this should be basic stuff, with relatives of managers not doing work for a school and clear evidence of a proper system of procurement in place. Common sense should also apply as to which central services should automatically be provided centrally, with some obviously better done at LEA level. These would certainly include what could be considered 'housekeeping' functions:

- Bulk ordering
- Ground maintenance
- School meals
- Caretaking
- Providing and maintaining IT systems

In all these cases there are obvious cost saving benefits to be had from bulk ordering and economies of scale. As importantly, the LEA can ensure that workers employed delivering them are on proper contracts and receive decent pay. But again, there would need to be some flexibility that gives school managers the opportunity to act quickly if necessary. For example, approved local contractors can undertake urgent small-scale repairs, broken windows, simple plumbing jobs. The point is not to be too doctrinaire but still maintain the basic principle that a democratically accountable LEA

is best placed to deliver most 'housekeeping' style functions.

This is doubly true for what could be called 'professional standards and operational delivery' functions. I would include here things like:

- Admissions
- Career advice
- School governance
- In service training
- Recruitment and personnel functions
- Quality control
- Advisory teachers

**'it may be that a particular school wishes to develop a strategy around adventurous natural play, forest schooling and growing food.'**

If we assume that a LEA will act as the key oversight body in a given area, showing strategic leadership, setting standards, encouraging positive innovation, skilling up the staff and ensuring that genuine equal opportunities apply in recruitment practices then it must logically be the baseline central service provider. But again, there must be some flexibility here, especially in regard to training and consultancy for some specialist areas.

So, for example, it may be that a particular school wishes to

develop a strategy around adventurous natural play, forest schooling and growing food, but the LEA doesn't have staff with the necessary expertise to provide training. This could therefore require them to contract with providers who aren't directly employed by LEAs on occasion. The system must therefore provide meaningful opportunities for schools to apply to allocate some of their spend on specific alternative projects or items of interest most relevant to them. In such cases, the LEA can agree a framework with local education providers setting out criteria, procedures and any activities deemed to be provided centrally by default. It could even create a pot of money, an 'Innovation Fund' that schools could bid from to incentivise new initiatives. The point is that a dynamic culture of change and improvement must operate within LEAs, schools and throughout the education system.



# The Socialist Educational Association

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# **Saving our schools**

## ***The struggle to stay out of a MAT***

**Anne-Marie Hickling**

September 2017 should have been a happy time. The start of a new school year for a teacher can have greater significance than the first of January, returning refreshed from the summer break, with a new class of children, probably some new ideas and a renewed energy for all the months of teaching and learning ahead.

But September 2017, was like no other in five Edmonton Schools. September 2017 brought with it some disconcerting news – the idea that the headteachers of the schools Brettenham, Fleecefield, Galliard, Raynham and Wilbury, were going to explore the creation of a M.A.T.

It took a little while for the reality to sink in, after all this was not a ‘forced academisation’, but five similar schools, looking to academise in order to work closely together. When questioned, all five headteachers at these schools admitted that anything they wanted to achieve could actually be achieved in some form of federation. In fact, they had been working together recently on training, with joint INSET and curriculum development (with no formal partnership).

It was important to us to find evidence of the real motive for this plan. When the proposed CEO of this academy was quoted in an Ambition School Leadership website, she said, “We are just starting on this journey.

This is the beginning of a long evolution”. One of the directors of the training programme explained that the Executive Educators programme helps the next generation of CEOs leading Multi Academy Trusts – and ‘it’s generally about moving from 3 to 4 schools up to 9 or 10’. The plan to expand had been exposed by a member doing a little investigation online. Alongside this discovery, the business plan, only recently released in a Freedom of Information request revealed that the salary of the CEO will be between £102,00 & £120,00.

We knew from various reports that academisation does not improve the learning outcomes for primary children, or secure additional funding. The fact that there is no accountability to parents, carers and the community, was a revelation to quite a few staff members and the majority of the parents. Additionally, the reality that academies can and do change the terms and conditions of employment for those that work in them, fired us into action. Educating ourselves about the facts was one of the empowering activities and it also gave members more confidence when speaking to people about the campaign.

As the Galliard NEU rep, I started by organising joint union meetings, including NASUWT, UNISON and the GMB. Faced with a choice of doing nothing or

making ourselves heard, we held members ballots for strike action. At the time, I naively thought that we would be offered a chance to negotiate and that there would be no need to take strike action. However, after two meetings, where staff met the governors, it became clearer that those in power had their heads down. The SLT, seemingly in the grasp of the CEO Kate Turnpenney, Head teacher at Wilbury School, could only say that nothing would change in a MAT. They also complained that they ‘would get left behind’ if they didn’t join. Our plan to maintain an open dialogue was just being thrown back at us and this eventually led to our first day of strike action on 17<sup>th</sup> January. UNISON members, who had a 98% indicative ballot in favour of strike action, were frustrated by a delayed move to their actual ballot. Twenty of them joined the NEU and joined the strike action.

Our campaign included a public meeting locally, inviting heads and governors to come along and speak. They didn’t turn up, but 120 members of the meeting came and joined in with a lively and emotional discussion, addressed by Nesil Caliskan, Leader of Enfield Council and NEU President Kiri Tunks. We gained the support of Kate Osamor, the local MP and our local council passed a motion opposing academisation.

Staff petitions were handed in to governors at Galliard and

Brettenham Schools, against academisation and a letter with over 600 signatories was sent to Damian Hinds asking him not to sign the academy orders. Governors were also lobbied as they attended their meetings to vote on the motion to move to academise. The parents set up Edmonton Against Academies, with their own Facebook page and organised two marches locally, each attended by over 100 people, which made local news. The whole campaign was such a massive team effort – we definitely gained strength from the collective action.

Our picket line demonstrations on the strike days – 12 days in all were probably the most memorable and certainly the most visible elements of the campaign. We endured snow,

freezing fog and very high winds with our placards and banners. After the first couple of strike days, we embraced different themes – a teddy bears' picket, funny hat picket, and cheerleading were some of the most colourful. Inspired by striking teachers in L.A., we learned their dance to 'Think' by Aretha Franklin, sang 'Shotgun-Strikers' version' of the George Ezra song and adapted the old Village People classic, YMCA, to 'E.L.E.A.' (Enfield Local Education Authority). As the school remained open for 11 of the strike days ('enrichment' days for classes affected, additional staff were brought in, despite 14 class teachers being on strike), we got to talk to parents. Putting a smile on the faces of our children in the morning, we

communicated the message that we really did care about our school. These were hopeful times and we were often joined by local councillors and NEU Executive members, including Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the NEU, Louise Regan and Kiri Tunks.

Spreading our campaign as wide as possible, we attended other events, including the Day-Mer International Women's Day celebration, the council lobby at the Civic Centre and the Labour Area Meeting. Invitations to speak and to hear messages of support gave us a greater strength and reassurance that we were on the right side of the argument. Receiving messages of solidarity and support on social media and in person, further bolstered our efforts.



Unfortunately, attempts to launch a judicial review were hampered by technicalities, which, given the expense of such actions, meant that we were unable to delay the process by means of a legal challenge. The calls for a real consultation, where parents and staff were listened to and the objections heeded were ignored, despite the dedicated work of Galliard teacher governor Andy Griffiths. He had fought tooth and nail both inside and outside meetings, to try and have a sensible dialogue, proposing the idea of federating the schools to avoid academisation. Likewise, union reps from Brettenham school held meetings with their governors and headteacher, to put forward the staff opposition and suggest a delay or withdrawal from the process.

On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March, we were informed by the office of Kate Osamor that the academy orders had been signed by

Damian Hinds and that from April 1<sup>st</sup>, all five schools will no longer be maintained by the local authority.

So, what now after this devastating news? To say that we are saddened by the loss of five local authority schools to a MAT is the ultimate understatement. Feelings of loss, at a time when the trees are in blossom and there are signs of new life all around, are profound and somewhat sickening. However, our experience has brought with it a determination to share our ideas and move forward to effect change.

We have learned that having representation on governing bodies is so vital and that unfilled vacancies are potentially lost opportunities for support and transparency in our schools. We can share that, whatever we are told by school leaders, a campaign can never start too early. We were often asked why

we were bothering as the 'consultation period hadn't even started yet.' It took over a year of campaigning for Galliard members and supporters and we're still wondering whether we could have done more. We have also realised that there needs to be a change in the law to require that a ballot of all the stakeholders be taken and heeded in cases of academisation. It should not be what amounts to a handful of people making the decision with no regard to the stakeholders' views. Ultimately, we hope that there will be an end to academisation and that changes will be made to bring academies back into local authorities.

The evidence is there, with so many cases coming to light, that the privatisation of education is a disservice to education and to the children, the families and the communities who deserve so much better.



**How to get to the top of the League Tables**  
**Nº 1 . OFF ROLLING**

# Education, experts and evidence

David Pavett

## DOUBTING EXPERTS

Michael Gove earned general opprobrium for himself during the EU referendum by casting doubt on the value of “expert opinion”. Liberal and left-wing opinion was equally dismissive of his view. There is good reason to object to a great deal of Gove's views but appeal to expert opinion as an arbiter between conflicting views is simplistic.

Experts are two a penny on most issues on whatever side of an argument one wishes to select. Whether we consider the virtues or otherwise of PPI, gascooled nuclear reactors, dietary advice for this or that food or the value of quantitative easing in the economy one can find experts lined up on different sides of the argument.

## SEEKING SOLACE IN MAJORITY CONSENSUS

The “general consensus of expert opinion” is often invoked in support of case, but there are clear pitfalls to this approach. It is the approach commonly taken with respect to climate change. That may well lead to the safest view on climate change but is it always so? There are too many cases in which the majority of experts have been wrong for this to be safe.

One only has to think back to the impact of the ideas of Cyril Burt on intelligence testing to realise that taking reassurance

from expert consensus can be, to say the least, unreliable. For years critically minded educationalists like Brian Simon fought an uphill battle against received opinion on intelligence and intelligence testing. The critics' task was made significantly easier when it was revealed that Burt had simply made up some of his key results. The point here is however that this fake data was dutifully reproduced in academic paper after academic paper until Leo Kamin pointed out that the reported statistical correlations on which it relied were simply unbelievable (not notwithstanding the fact that the unbelievable had been all too believable for a whole general of educational psychologists).

## ARE “EVIDENCE-BASED” POLICIES THE ANSWER?

Whatever experts think there is the ultimate test of the evidence – or so one might think at first glance. But, as is sometimes said by philosophers of science “facts don't speak for themselves but only through interpreters”. As everyone actively engaged in understanding complex issues knows, exactly the same facts are very often used to draw mutually exclusive and even diametrically opposed conclusions.

The full force of the Copernican revolution is still to have its effect on popular and even educated consciousness. Does the sun go round the earth? Immediately available evidence suggests that it does. Only a very

sophisticated series of mathematical detours suggests otherwise. The “evidence” can often lead one in entirely wrong directions.

This problem is painfully evident in education. The immediate evidence is that some children are “bright” and some are not. Some have got what it takes and some have not. Most parents and teachers believe this and judge children accordingly. The doctrine of innate intelligence may have received a drubbing in some scientific circles but it still holds sway in the minds of the majority. The complex pathways of development of different children in different circumstances is hidden from view (like the movement of the planets round the sun) and can only be discovered by theoretical thinking. In the absence of such thought direct evidence prevails and is often totally misleading.

## THE BASIS FOR OUR HUMAN POTENTIAL?

What makes us tick? How do humans manage their feats of creativity in the arts and sciences which have no parallel in the rest of the animal world? It is down to our social nature and the fact that human development takes place objectively and accumulatively outside of us as individuals. We are surrounded by the achievements of hundreds of generations before us in the streets we walk in, the buildings

we work and live in, the institutions through which governance is exercised, our judicial norms, our means of communication starting with spoken then written language under the various means of disseminating both.

“The human essence” Marx noted in 1845 “is no abstraction inherent in each isolated individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations”. The truth of this startling thesis is now much more evident than when it was first proposed. Unlike the rest of the animal world we depend for what we are on a historical accumulation which exists outside of each of us as an individual and to which we adapt through our assimilation of existing culture in the process of education, both formal and informal.

### **“CHILD-CENTRED LEARNING”**

Every child is unique and each one follows a unique developmental path. However, to jump from that fact to the idea that a modern approach to education can be adequately characterised as child-centred is based on good intentions but poor analysis. The educative process through which we grow into adult consciousness is largely a vector of the culture produced by preceding generations. That is why describing an approach to education as child-centred is so one sided. As the philosopher John Passmore argued years ago, when child-centred talk was at its height, it misses the point that teaching is a triadic relationship: A teaches B to C. As Passmore explained:

“Another way of failing to do justice to the triadic character of teaching is to describe it as 'childcentred'. The slogan 'we teach children, not subjects' is no doubt useful as a weapon against those who forget that teaching is teaching somebody ... Especially but not uniquely in such well-articulated subjects as mathematics the teacher can easily succumb to the temptation of supposing that if his lessons are academically well organised, orderly, thorough, nothing more can reasonably be expected of him, that if, under these circumstances his pupils do not learn this can only be because they are stupid ... All teaching is pupil-centred in the sense that its object is not merely to expound a subject but to help somebody learn something; it fails as teaching, whatever its logical virtues as exposition, if it does not have this effect. But at the same time the teacher is trying to teach pupils something and it is by no means unimportant what that something is: whether as in Fagin's case it is how to pick pockets or, as in Socrates' case how to think critically. He has to teach both pupils and 'subjects'. Merely to interest the child, merely to respect him as a person, to care for him, to love him – none of these dyadic relations, whatever their importance, is equivalent to teaching him, although some of them may be necessary conditions for doing so.” (The Philosophy of Education)

The comforting thought that one is focusing on the issues of individual children and the warm-

sounding nature of the phrase “child-centred” should not be allowed to get in the way of a sober and critical evaluation of the ideas involved.

### **MUCH OF EDUCATION IS FASHION-DRIVEN**

Anyone who has taught over a period of decades will have felt the pressure of educational fads. Many will remember the short-lived fad (which is still playing out its days in some schools) according to which each child has a learning style based on whether he/she learns preferentially by either a visual, auditory, kinesthetic or tactile “style”. The fact that this approach had no theoretical basis and was subjected to detailed criticism (for example by Professor Frank Coffield and others) did not prevent it from becoming received opinion in many schools – in one at least of which children were made to wear badges to indicate whether they were V, A, K or T learners. Despite all the criticisms VAKT continued to be promoted by the officially funded Learning and Skills Network in the 2000s (See ‘Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority’ by Frank Coffield).

VAKT was promoted by the DfE under the last Labour Government. Its persistence was such that as late as 2017 teachers were being warned to dump the idea (e.g. ‘Teachers must ditch 'neuromyth' of learning styles, say scientists’, Guardian, 13/03/217). VAKT is far from being an isolated case. Baseless theories sweep through education from time to time and are taken rapidly up with enthusiasm only to be subsequently dropped just as

quickly. Even old and long rejected theories can have a second life in education. An outstanding example was the scientific and technical syllabuses introduced by the Technician Education Council in the 1970s and 80s. These consisted of a series of "behaviour objectives" based on the ideas of Skinner's behavioural psychology. Skinner's view was that all teaching could be done by machines and those objectives certainly seemed to embody that approach.

Fads and fashions come and go but in an age when teachers are increasingly treated as educational operatives required to run their classes exactly as school management tells them, the harmful potential of persistent bad ideas is likely to be amplified.

#### SO WHAT PRICE EXPERTS?

I do not want to deny the importance of theory or of educational expertise or educational experts. Rather, my intention is to argue that reliance on expert opinion is, all too often, simply a form of argument by authority. In a field where most expert ideas are contested by other experts, there is no substitute for critical evaluation of the theories and advice coming from expert sources. This, paradoxically, makes it even more important that teachers should get a good grounding in critical discussion of different educational theories. That is something that "learning on the job" is unlikely to provide. It also means that training colleges need to be able to provide such a

grounding and that is certainly far from always being the case.

The philosopher Paul Feyerabend once wrote:

"experts' frequently do not know what they are talking about and 'scholarly opinion' more often than not, is but uninformed gossip." (Farewell To Reason)

That's harsh, perhaps, but also clearly not devoid of truth. The answer to this problem must be never to rely on the authority of experts but rather to use them as a source for ideas which one then tries to assimilate after critical reflection and debate. The fact that ideas may offer support to our preferred policies is not a valid criterion for their truth.

## The wheels fall off the Agnew-de Souza project in Norfolk

It was recently reported widely in the local press that a 'Norfolk academy trust is among the country's best for disadvantaged pupils' (Norwich Evening News 20 December). To say that Inspiration Trust's schools are among the "best for disadvantaged pupils" based on so little and such patchy evidence was quite a claim. There is no mention in the article of which of the Trust's 13 schools feature in the Sutton Trust's report. I would be surprised if all the Inspiration Trust schools are doing equally well in terms of their GCSE English and maths results and

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures. We think now that it safe to assume that the Great Yarmouth Primary Academy was not one of them.

Once again, Warwick Mansell, in an exclusive article, "School in minister's academy trust fails Ofsted inspection", echoed in the local press, reported on yet another scandal to hit Dame Rachel de Souza's Inspiration Trust.<sup>1</sup>

A recent Ofsted report on Great Yarmouth Primary Academy (GYPA) has placed the school in special measures after finding a catalogue of problems, including

pupil disruption, high levels of exclusion, and the fact that, "leaders have not demonstrated their capacity to improve the school....Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is unacceptably low. Around half of pupils leave the school ill-prepared for secondary school... Too often; teachers are ill-equipped to deliver the curriculum effectively. Their curriculum knowledge is not secure".

As noted by Mansell, this is a terrible indictment of a school operated by Inspiration Trust, a MAT that was founded by the

academies minister, Lord Agnew. However, this is more than the failure of just one of the Trusts thirteen schools, since it seriously holes below the water-line a particularly important flag ship of the Agnew fleet, and is damaging to the much-touted educational ideology of the so-called “knowledge-based” curriculum and its glib imitators much favoured by MATs up and down the country. The Inspiration Trust’s curriculum model is limited at best and certainly open to dispute. There is an antidote to the knowledge-based curriculum, which has many shortcomings, but does enable control of the dissemination of knowledge

Let’s go back to the beginning of this school, and run through its history since it was first taken over by Agnew in August 2012.

The right-wing multi-millionaire Sir Theodore Agnew, believing that state education should be serving the interests of the capitalist employer, decided to set up IT and selected as his very first guinea-pig Greenacre Primary, which re-opened as Great Yarmouth Primary Academy in September 2012. The school, his pet project, received his personal attention, and he

sponsored it to the sum of £250,000 over five years and, as he told a reporter, “he speaks at assemblies, presents awards for reading and has come to Saturday school with his own son [noblesse oblige] to help with reading”.<sup>2</sup>

Agnew, appointed by Gove as chair of the Academies Board in the Department of Education, soon gained national publicity for his little school through successive Ministers of Education. The Daily Mail claimed that GYPA had undergone a rapid improvement that was due to the introduction of a controversial nine-hour working day, a transformation that Elizabeth Truss praised as a “brilliant” example.<sup>3</sup> This was not the first, or last time, that the Agnew-de Souza outfit was held up by Ministers as a shining example of how things should be done. But the Yarmouth Primary was already running into problems. In August and October 2014 The Observer published articles claiming that de Souza had passed on to three schools advanced knowledge of the date of future Ofsted inspections, one of the three being Great Yarmouth Primary Academy.<sup>4</sup>

Ofsted appointed the lawyer Julian Gizzi to carry out an

investigation, but was unable to access de Souza’s e-mails at IT since they had been “irrevocably deleted by accident in September 2014”.<sup>5</sup>

William Holledge, Principal of GYPA, sent an e-mail to de Souza on 2 May 2014 in which, Gizzi notes, he “correctly pinpointed” the 13-14 May as the date of the Ofsted inspection. But unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, Mr. Holledge refused to be interviewed by Gizzi.<sup>6</sup>

### **Notes:**

1. Education Uncovered, 28 February 2019.

2. Eastern Daily Press, 9 August 2013 and 15 March 2019

3. Daily Mail, 16 June 2014. Likewise Minister Nicky Morgan, in promoting her Education and Adoption Bill in the House of Commons on 22 June 2015, held up GYPA as a model of school improvement, a proof of how academies were outperforming maintained schools. It appears that part of Agnew’s sponsorship money had helped fund the long-day experiment.

4. During a training day as Ofsted inspector on 31 March 2014, as well as in an e-mail of 4 April, de Souza was given the date of the upcoming Ofsted inspection of GYPA, a school of which she was Chair of Governors and CEO. This was a lapse in procedure that should not have happened.

5. Gizzi Report, p.7.

6. William Holledge later stood down as an IT trustee, but his wife Tessa Holledge, headed another Inspiration Trust.



# The PRU Scandal

Working in alternative provision in south London eight years ago I remember being shocked that the Lambeth primary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) was the size of an average primary school. Labour's analysis underpinned by the findings of SEA branches across the country, shows that the situation is now twice as bad.

The number of primary school children in Pupil Referral Units has more than doubled since 2011. Statistics from the Department for Education show that the number of children aged between 5-10 being placed in pupil referral units has more than doubled since 2011.

Labour analysis of the Department for Education's statistics show that the number primary school child in Pupil Referral Units has more than doubled since 2011.

In 2011, 715 five to ten year olds were in Pupil Referral Units, but by 2018 this had more than doubled to 1,572.

The analysis also found that in 2018 there were 42 under 5s currently being taught in Pupil Referral Units, compared to just five in 2011. Of these 42 children, 28 were aged 2 or younger.

The analysis also found that the number of children placed into local authority alternative provision had increased by over 1,000.

Labour's Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner said: "It is deeply concerning to see such a vast increase in the number of very young children being taught in Pupil Referral Units". She is, of

course, quite right about that. It is also accentuated by the almost decade long context of Tory inflicted poverty and austerity, the increased demand on schools, lack of funding, the encroachment of the MATs even on PRUs and the narrow and mean-spirited Govian curriculu.

The DfE report entitled, 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', based on statistics on pupils in schools in England as collected in the January 2018 school census (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2018>) also states that the same data set also shows the number of 5-10 year olds being placed into Local Authority alternative provision has increased by 1,000, the number of under 5s in Pupil Referral Units has increased eightfold since 2011 and in 2018, there were 28 children aged 2 or under in PRUs.

We know that exclusion at any age significantly impacts on a young person's ability to attain basic levels of qualification. According to the longitudinal 2010 'Youth Cohort Study', drawing on data from surveys on the longitudinal study of young people in England (LSYPE) and the youth cohort study (YCS) found that: "nearly 9 in 10 (87 per cent) young people who had never been excluded from school had achieved their level 2 qualification by the age of 20." (DfE, Youth cohort study and longitudinal study of young people: 2010). "By contrast, only

3 in 10 (30 per cent) excluded young people had achieved these qualifications by the same age."

A study by Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 'Making the Difference: braking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion' (<https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>) reported that "figures show just one per cent of permanently excluded children go on to achieve five good GCSEs". Furthermore, the majority of UK prisoners were excluded from school. A longitudinal study of prisoners found that 63 per cent reported being temporarily excluded when at school. Forty-two per cent had been permanently excluded, and these excluded prisoners were more likely to be repeat offenders than other prisoners.

According to the IPPR research, "55 per cent of 5-10-year-olds in Pupil Referral Units are eligible for free school meals compared to 14 per cent of the pupil population at large".

Angela Raynor says: "for too long, the Tories have sat by idly as some of the most vulnerable young people in our country are falling between the gaps and even out of education altogether" and commits the next Labour government to a National Education Service that "will reform the accountability system and give schools the resources they need to support all pupils."

Ian Duckett

# University title, charitable status and Labour's National Education Service

**Pam Tatlow**

From 2010 promoting a market in higher education has been the name of the game for Conservative Ministers with responsibility for universities in England. The impact of a reduction in teaching grant from £3bn to £637m by 2017, full-time fees of £9250 per annum, the abolition of maintenance grants and the deregulation of student numbers have all played their part in this agenda.

Universities and higher education institutions are now referred to as 'providers' in government consultations while the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) created the (misnamed) Office for Students (OfS) as the sector's regulator in England. Modelled on Ofcom and Ofwat, the OfS is funded by the subscriptions of 'providers' i.e. universities and HEIs and by implication students' fees. Ironically, OfS will cost much

more than the former Higher Education Funding Council for England which received a government grant but which acted as a buffer between the sector and Ministers.

Amid all of these policy moves and funding manoeuvres, Conservative Ministers have long made clear their interest in supporting private providers. For their part, for-profit interests have long seen UK higher education as a good bet with 'university title' regarded as a lucrative passport to trading both within the UK and internationally.

For established universities in the UK university title has been hard-won and much prized. With final approval given by the Privy Council, recommendations for the award of title from the relevant government department were dependent on the award of taught-degree awarding powers (TDAP) based on robust quality criteria judged independently by the Quality Assurance Agency. Until recently all UK institutions with university title were charities – with one exception, the University of Buckingham awarded title during the premiership

of Margaret Thatcher.

Within four months of coming into office in 2010, Conservative Universities Minister David Willetts announced that he was allowing BPP (at the time owned by the US-based Apollo Group) to become a University College – the first private sector university college to be created for 30 years. The warnings of UCU that this was 'the beginning of a slippery slope' proved prescient. Unlike in Scotland and Northern Ireland which have retained the national standards in place in the UK in 1999, the Labour government had modified the rules for TDAP in 2004. However, since 2010 the rules governing TDAP and the procedures for the award of university title have been radically amended.

By 2013, BPP had been awarded university title, again by David Willetts, having registered via Companies House. A few months earlier in 2012, the College of Law had been awarded university title – only to be bought a few weeks later by Montagu Private Equity. The University of Law was sold on to Netherlands-based Global University Systems in 2017 – the same year that the Apollo Group including BPP University was bought by private equity interests in the US. Arden University (originally Resource Development International and subsequently owned by Capella Education) was awarded university title in 2015 and put up for sale by Capella in 2016 and is

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now also owned by Global University Systems. For all Ministers' talk of students needing more information, there are few clues on these providers websites as to their ownership or the fact that they are private institutions run for profit.

As a result of the Tories 2017 legislation, from 1 April 2019 there will be no minimum number of higher education students required for the award of TDAP other than a provider being able to demonstrate that 55% of its total number of students are studying on higher education courses. It will be possible for TDAP to be awarded on a probationary basis. Providers will be able to lodge less than three-years of accounts and the OfS (rather than the Privy Council or Ministers) will award university title including to for-profit providers.

The debasing of university title and taught-degree awarding powers in England have been part and parcel of the promotion and the preferencing of a for-profit higher education sector. They are the privatisation of public assets by the back-door.

Labour should commit to abolish the OfS, restore standards and criteria for taught-degree awarding powers and the award of university title and the role of the Privy Council in England. But this alone will not be enough. Crucially, Labour must also legislate to ensure that all institutions holding or awarded university title in England operate and register as charities. After all a National Education Service should be for the many and not for the profit of a few.

**Anti-Academy Campaigns:**

## Can Labour's community organisers play a role?

**Tom Unterrainer**

Labour's organisational strength, measured in terms of party membership, has seen a significant boost since 2015. Another boost comes from the recruitment of Labour party Community Organisers.

'Community organising' models and approaches have been put to good use by education unions themselves, particularly in the USA but also in Britain. During the 2017 General Election, the National Union of Teachers and ATL - prior to their merger - put an 'organising approach' into action, thereby successfully highlighting issues around school cuts and putting the issue high on the electoral agenda.

A specific 'community organising' approach to anti-academy campaigns, combining the organisational strengths of the Labour party and trade unions with a genuine, organic and - vitally - a determining input from local communities could be an important step towards both stopping the spread of academies under this government and also realising the organising potential of Labour's mass membership.

There are, of course, many pitfalls and hazards to an organisation like Labour adopting such an approach. The first 'hazard' to avoid is the perception that the party is only involved for potential electoral gain, i.e. that we're in it for the short term for our own, narrow, interests.

The second 'hazard' to avoid is to approach community organising on a 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' basis. i.e. to organise solely around the already established 'movers and shakers' in any community at the expense of building real community links.

One outstanding feature of many campaigns against academisation has been the degree to which 'ordinary people' - an unfortunate and inaccurate term, in my opinion - have taken the lead. In many cases, it's been local communities, parents, carers, aunts and students themselves who have been at the forefront.

We might not see these people at branch meetings, canvassing sessions or phone banks but they know more than a thing or two about organising, solidarity and politics.

Let's put community organising to work, to mobilise Labour's membership effectively and to learn from 'ordinary people' how to organise and how to win in our communities.

# **Socialist Educational Association Cymdeithas Addysgol Sosialaidd**

The Socialist Educational Association is a Socialist Society, affiliated to the Labour Party. It began in the '20's as the National Association of Labour Teachers. SEA was renamed and broadened to include all socialists with an interest in education. It played a major role in developing the concept of the neighbourhood comprehensive school in the '60's. The aims of the SEA are:

- To promote comprehensive education, based on equality of opportunity and lifelong access, well resourced, free and under local democratic control.
- To influence development of progressive education policies within the Labour Party and to work with other like-minded bodies.
- To promote an international and inclusive perspective to education.

We have now set up SEA Cymru, a Welsh branch, affiliated to Welsh Labour.

**Since devolution, education in Wales has diverged from that in England, in many ways (except finance) to Wales' advantage. Examples include the Foundation Phase, 14-19 education, the absence of academies, trust and 'free' schools, the Welsh baccalaureate, maintenance of an inclusive, cooperative and comprehensive ethos. We welcome the Donaldson curriculum initiative, the development of Additional Learning Needs policy, and the provision of free breakfasts in primary schools. We need to elaborate a policy for Welsh education that defends and nurtures what has been achieved, but which also specifies what further needs to be done.**

Membership is open to all who have an interest in education and are eligible for Labour Party membership. Individual members are welcome (£25 waged, £12 unwaged pa) (Couples £35 or £18). CLPs and branches, including TU branches, are welcome to affiliate (£30 pa). Membership includes the right to attend meetings and conferences in Wales and of the National SEA, and includes a free copy of the journal for analysis and debate, "Education Politics"

Please contact to Mike Newman 17 Gileston Road, Cardiff, CF119JS. We will forward membership requests to the National Membership Secretary. Or contact via [newmanmike2@aol.com](mailto:newmanmike2@aol.com) (or via 029 20 382 369)

## **Socialist Educational Association**

### **Are you interested in education? Join the SEA**

The Socialist Educational Association is a Socialist Society, affiliated to the Labour Party. It began in the '20's as the National Association of Labour Teachers. SEA was later renamed and broadened so that members now include MPs, MEPs, AMs, school governors, local councillors, teachers, lecturers, students, parents – in fact anyone with an interest in education. It played a major role in developing the concept of the neighbourhood comprehensive school in the '60's. It is concerned with all aspects of education: Foundation Phase, Primary and Secondary schooling, Further and Higher Education and Life Long Learning.

### **The aims of the SEA are:**

- To promote well-resourced and free comprehensive education, based on equality of opportunity and lifelong access.
- To oppose privatisation and the abolition of local democratic control.
- To work with the TUC affiliated Teacher Unions.
- To influence development of progressive education policies within the Labour Party and to work with other like-minded bodies to the same end.
- To promote an international and inclusive approach to education.

Membership is open to all who have an interest in education and are eligible for Labour Party membership.



National Education Union | SEA conference fringe meeting

# ***Restore Public Control of Schools***

Wednesday 17 April | 12.45 - 1.45  
Conference Centre, Upper Level, Room 1b

## **Speakers:**

Thelma Walker MP

Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretary, NEU

Melanie Griffiths, SEA

Alisdair Smith, Anti Academies Alliance

Turabi Ay, Parent campaigner at William Torbitt Primary School

*Plus: promo showing of a film about the academies scandal*



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