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# education review

*A New Vision for Education*



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Winter 2011-2012

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*Education Review* is produced by the Education and Equalities Department of the National Union of Teachers.

**Head of Education and Equalities**

Karen Robinson

**Editors**

Celia Dignan and Lucy Stephens

**NUT Executive Editorial Board**

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Tel: 020 7380 4717

The National Union of Teachers  
Hamilton House  
Mabledon Place  
London WC1H 9BD

Tel: 020 7388 6191

Fax: 020 7387 8458

**Web: [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)**

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## Preface by Christine Blower, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

It has been a difficult few months for teachers. The Government's cuts are biting and education staff are facing redundancies in both local authorities and schools. Vital central services that make a huge difference to the educational experience of some of our most vulnerable young people are being abolished or cut to the bone – services such as ethnic minority language support, education psychology and speech and language therapy. Teachers themselves have had their pay frozen and are facing the prospect of working longer, paying more and getting less from their retirement pension. Schools are being urged or forced to become academies making staff less secure about their employment rights in the long term. Teacher training opportunities are being squeezed for those who want to enter the profession and with massive student loan debts that will soon grow even bigger it is a difficult time for those who want a future in the teaching profession.

Yet, despite everything, teachers continue to demonstrate their optimism, resilience and fighting spirit. The magnificent shows of solidarity from teachers alongside other public service employees in the June and November strike days and October lobby of parliament to defend our pensions demonstrate that teachers are prepared to stand up for decent treatment and a fair deal from the Government. Furthermore, as the articles in this winter 2011 edition of the *Education Review* demonstrate, teachers continue to maintain their vision of a better future for education, one that is inclusive, equitable and which ensures the very best opportunities and outcomes for all pupils, not just a privileged few. As this edition demonstrates, a system of this sort requires high quality teacher training and CPD.

This edition of *Education Review* is entitled *A New Vision for Education* because it seeks to unpick some of the problems we are facing as educators in a system rocked by the global economic crisis and austerity measures and offer some signposts to a better future for education.

In their article Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours explain how the current economic context, together with government policies for education and training post-14, have led to an unprecedented crisis of opportunity for young people. They point out that young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis with nearly one million 16-24 year olds unemployed and the NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate continuing to rise. In addition young people have been hit severely by government austerity measures, including the increase in fees for undergraduate study of up to £9,000 per year and the abolition of the

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). As a direct result certain groups of young people are becoming less convinced that staying on in education and training will provide them with the opportunities and rewards they desire. Drawing on the vision and principles of 'Education for the Good Society', they lay out the dimensions of an urgent national rescue plan for young people that is based on fairness and equality, democracy, sustainability, well-being, creativity and innovation.

I am delighted that Alan Bennett's article on the vital role played by public libraries appears in this edition. The NUT is campaigning alongside authors and library activists to defend public libraries against the tide of closures and cuts that threatens to overwhelm their significant contribution to public education. For many young people, libraries are an extension of their school or college and an essential supplement to it. Where else can young people go in the evenings and at weekends to study in a safe and secure environment if our libraries cease to exist? Many young people do not have the luxury of books, a computer or audio resources at home and those that do cannot hope to have access to the extensive collections, or the specialist support from librarians, that have been established, developed and nurtured in our public libraries since the Victorians had the foresight to build our library network. And of course libraries are not just about books or resources. They are community centres, places where everyone from the very young to the old can meet. The NUT believes passionately that it is every child's right to read for pleasure and that developing a love of reading gives children an educational advantage that will stay with them throughout their academic lives and into adulthood. Each time a library closes or has its opening hours reduced is one book less read, one less life changed for the better.

The NUT appointed a new Head of its Education and Equalities Department earlier this year and I am immensely pleased that Karen Robinson sets out her vision for education in this edition of *Education Review*. Karen asks the fundamental question "what are schools for?" She argues that in order to go beyond their academic function and fulfil the wider role expected of schools – that of supporting young people's development into well-adjusted, independent and successful adults who can contribute positively to both the economy and to society – we must acknowledge that schools cannot meet the complex needs of their students by themselves. Instead of scapegoating schools for society's failings, Karen argues that education must be freed from political interference if it is to offer equality of opportunity for all children and young people. Reforms focused on teaching and learning need time to work their way through the system and become embedded or to show a measurable effect. So in place of quick-fix politicians with their eye on the next election what education needs is an expert group overseeing national education policy which



focuses on ensuring that good practice is recognised and spread, that there is high quality leadership and teaching, sufficient resources, time and space for teachers to collaborate and take an active part in developing pedagogical approaches which meet their students' needs.

Jean Laight raises a number of important issues in her article about teacher education. She examines the context for recent initiatives in teacher training which move away from the idea of teachers as professionals whose pedagogy is grounded in an understanding of child development and educational theory and practice to an apprenticeship model where teachers learn 'on the job' in teaching schools. In order to empower pupils and raise standards of education it is imperative that the status of the teaching profession is raised. Jean explains how expertise in practitioner research and reflective practice could empower the teachers of tomorrow, and that the re-emerging practice of child-initiated learning in Early Years settings might be the key to innovative teaching and learning in the future.

I am very pleased that we are able once again to include an article which draws on the experience of the United States. Linda Darling-Hammond raises some uncomfortable questions for the UK Government about why inequalities in the US school system remain entrenched, and high school graduation rates low, compared with other developed nations. She draws on her extensive experience as one of the country's leading educational experts to highlight the huge disparities of provision for Black and ethnic minority students compared with white students. She demonstrates how the performance of the USA in international education rankings now falls well short of other developing nations and highlights the success of Finland, Singapore, and South Korea which, although very different from one another culturally and historically, have all made startling improvements in their education systems over the last 30 years. Investing in education has catapulted these countries from the bottom to the top of international rankings in student achievement and attainment, graduating more than 90 per cent of their young people from high school and sending large majorities through college, far more than in the much wealthier United States.

As Linda points out, their strategies also have much in common. All three countries fund schools adequately and equitably; organise teaching around national standards and a core curriculum; have eliminated examination systems that had tracked students into different schools and have instead committed to helping all students master the same essential skills and content until the beginning of high school. In addition, all three countries use assessments that require in-depth knowledge of content and higher-order skills; invest in strong teacher education programmes; pay salaries that are equitable across schools and competitive with other

careers; support on-going teacher learning; and pursue consistent, long-term reforms by setting and implementing specific goals. Furthermore these strategies have been undertaken in a systemic fashion, rather than expending energy on a plethora of innovations and changing course every few years.

If only our Government which is so keen to champion the so-called success of the US education model and in particular its charter schools would actually examine the evidence and act upon it we could learn from the mistakes that have been made in that country instead of repeating them. There is now a substantial and convincing body of evidence that school systems that are cohesive, comprehensive and invest in the teaching workforce produce consistently higher standards and more equitable outcomes for their students. Instead of the USA and Sweden, the Government should be studying those systems and learning from countries such as Finland.

Gareth Rees explores the background to the so-called 'crisis of Welsh education' that has provided the basis for the introduction of new policy approaches in Wales over recent months. He argues that there is a danger that simplistic readings of the OECD's PISA international rankings and other external bench-markings of Welsh educational performance are serving to close off debate, rather than to open up new avenues for educational development. In his article, he argues for a more nuanced analysis of Welsh educational attainment. He suggests that policies more centrally concerned with addressing issues of educational inequality may be more appropriate.

No new vision for education would be complete without full consideration of the equalities dimension of education. In their article Tony Fenwick and Sue Sanders share their strategies for educating against prejudice, celebrating equality and developing an inclusive classroom. As they rightly assert, the struggle for LGBT equality is everyone's struggle for equality. There have been significant steps forward in terms of LGBT equality throughout society and this is reflected in the work going on in schools. The NUT is proud of the leading role played by its members in promoting the rights of LGBT teachers, students and parents and in the progressive classroom practice that is being developed and shared.

From inclusive classrooms to inclusive schools – NUT head teacher Nigel Utton paints a picture of a brighter and more inclusive future for schools by showing what has been achieved in his primary school in Thanet. Despite decades of struggle for inclusive education we still have a long way to go before that vision becomes a reality. The latest setback comes in the shape of some of the proposals in the SEN Green paper and specifically the proposal to end the "presumption of inclusion". Thank goodness that NUT members such as Nigel and his colleagues are there to

remind us that we have everything to fight for and that the future really can be inclusive.

Finally, thanks to young teacher Usman Baig-Ali for reminding us that, despite all the challenges of teaching, and the particular pressures facing young teachers, there are still young people entering the profession with talent, commitment and a vision for a better future for education.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Slawer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# Baffled at a bookcase: Alan Bennett returns to the library

## Alan Bennett

Alan Bennett is a playwright, screenwriter, actor and author who has consistently supported campaigns against library cuts and closures.

**Abstract:** *In this article the writer Alan Bennett describes the role that public libraries played in shaping his life and the debt that he owes them. Although they are currently threatened by closures, cuts and the threat of privatisation, the author argues that children today have exactly the same need for, and as much to gain from, public libraries.*

I have always been happy in libraries, though without ever being entirely at ease there. A scene that seems to crop up regularly in plays that I have written has a character, often a young man, standing in front of a bookcase feeling baffled. He – and occasionally she – is overwhelmed by the amount of stuff that has been written and the ground to be covered. “All these books. I’ll never catch up,” wails the young Joe Orton in the film script of *Prick Up Your Ears*, and in *The Old Country* another young man reacts more dramatically, by hurling half the books to the floor. In *Me, I’m Afraid of Virginia Woolf* someone else gives vent to their frustration with literature by drawing breasts on a photograph of Virginia Woolf and kitting out E.M. Forster with a big cigar. Orton notoriously defaced library books before starting to write books himself. This resentment, which was, I suppose, somewhere mine, had to do with feeling shut out. A library, I used to feel, was like a cocktail party with everybody standing with their back to me; I could not find a way in.

The first library I did find my way into was the Armley Public Library in Leeds where a reader's ticket cost tuppence in 1940; not tuppence a time or even tuppence a year but just tuppence; that was all you ever had to pay. It was rather a distinguished building, put up in 1901, the architect Percy Robinson, and amazingly for Leeds, which is and always has been demolition crazy, it survives and is still used as a library, though whether it will survive the present troubles I don't like to think.

We would be there as a family, my mother and father, my brother and me, and it would be one of our regular weekly visits. I had learned to read quite early when I was five or six by dint, it seemed to me then, of watching my brother read. We both of us read comics but whereas I was still on picture-based comics like the *Dandy* and the *Beano*, my brother, who was three years older, had graduated to the more text-based *Hotspur* and *Wizard*. Having finished my *Dandy* I would lie down on the carpet beside him and gaze at what he was reading, asking him questions about it and generally making a nuisance of myself. Then – and it seemed as instantaneous as this – one day his comic made sense and I could read. I'm sure it must have been more painstaking than this but not much more.

Having learned to read, other than comics, there was nothing in the house on which to practise my newly acquired skill. My parents were both readers and Dad took the periodical *John Bull*, the books they generally favoured literature of escape, tales of ordinary folk like themselves who had thrown it all up for a life of mild adventure, a smallholding on the Wolds, say, or an island sanctuary, with both of them fans of the naturalist R.M. Lockley. There were a few volumes of self-help in the house but the only non-library book of autobiography was *I Haven't Unpacked* by William Holt, who had got away from the dark, satanic mills by buying a horse and riding through England.

The Armley library was at the bottom of Wesley Road, the entrance up a flight of marble steps under open arches, through brass-railed swing doors panelled in stained glass which by 1941 was just beginning to buckle. Ahead was the Adults' Library, lofty, airy and inviting; to the right was the Junior Library, a low dark room made darker by the books which, regardless of their contents, had been bound in heavy boards of black, brown or maroon embossed with the stamp of Leeds Public Libraries. This grim packaging was discouraging to a small boy who had just begun to read, though more discouraging still was the huge and ill-tempered, walrus-moustached British Legion commissioner who was permanently installed there. The image of General Hindenburg, who was pictured on the stamps in my brother's album, he had lost one or other of his limbs in the trenches, but since he seldom moved from his chair and just shouted it was difficult to tell which.

Such veterans of the First War were much in evidence well into the

1950s. As a child one encountered them in parks, sitting on benches and in shelters playing dominoes, generally grumpy and with reason to be, the war having robbed them of their youth and often their health. The luckier and less disabled ones manned lifts or were posted at the doors of public buildings, a uniformed and bemedalled conciergerie who were more often than not unhelpful, making the most of whatever petty authority they were invested with. And so it was here, the commissionaire's only concern to maintain absolute silence, and not at all the companion and friend novice readers needed on this, the threshold of literature.

Of the books themselves I remember little. Henty was well represented and Captain Marryat, books which whenever I did manage to get into them only brought home to me that I was not an entirely satisfactory version of the genus boy. I suppose there must somewhere have been Enid Blyton, but since she too would have been backed in the same funereal but immensely serviceable boards she passed me by. As it was, the books I best remember reading there were the Dr Dolittle stories of Hugh Lofting, which were well represented and (an important consideration) of which there were always more. I think I knew even at six years old that a doctor who could talk to animals was fiction but at the same time I thought the setting of the stories, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh, was a real place set in historical time with the doctor (and Lofting's own illustrations of the doctor) having some foundation in fact. Shreds of this belief clung on because when, years later, having recorded some of Lofting's stories for the BBC, I met his son, I found I still had the feeling that his father had been not quite an ordinary mortal.

Other mysteries persisted. What, for instance, was a cat's meat man? I had never come across one. Was it the meat *of* cats or *for* cats? We didn't have a cat and even if we had with Dad being a Co-op butcher it would have been well catered for. And again it was when I was reading the stories on the radio and happened to mention this mysterious personage in my diary in the *London Review of Books* that the small mystery was solved. A cat's meat man toured the streets (though not our street) with strips of meat suspended from a stick to be sold as pet food. One correspondent, her mother being out, remembered the stick of meat being put through the letterbox where she retrieved it from the doormat and, it being wartime, scoffed the lot.

In 1944, believing, as people in Leeds tended to do, that flying bombs or no flying bombs, things were better Down South, Dad threw up his job with the Co-op and we migrated to Guildford. It was a short-lived experiment and I don't remember ever finding the public library, but this was because a few doors down from the butcher's shop where Dad worked there was a little private library, costing 6d a week, which in the children's section had a whole run of Richmal Crompton's William books. I devoured them, reading practically one a day, happy in the knowledge that there

would always be more. Years later when I first read Evelyn Waugh I had the same sense of discovery: here was a trove of books that was going to last. I wish I could say I felt the same about Dickens or Trollope or Proust even, but they seemed more of a labour than a prospect of delight.

The butcher for whom my dad worked also ran a horsemeat business, the meat strictly for non-human consumption and accordingly painted bright green. In his cattle truck Mr Banks would go out into the Surrey countryside to collect carcasses and sometimes, by dint of hanging around the lorry, I got to go with him. I would watch as the bloated cow or horse was winched on board and then we would drive to the slaughterhouse in Walnut Tree Close just by Guildford Station. While the carcass was

**A library has no honours board and takes no credit for what its readers go on to do but, remembering myself at 19, on leave from the army and calling up the copies of *Horizon* to get me through the general paper in the Oxford scholarship, I feel as much a debt to that library as I do to my school.**

dismembered I would sit in the corner absorbed in my latest William book. Richmal Crompton can seldom have been read in such grisly and uncongenial circumstances.

It wasn't long, though, before we ended up going back to Leeds where we now lived in Headingley, with the local public library on North Lane, a visit to which could be combined with seeing the film at the Lounge cinema opposite. I went to Leeds Modern School, a state school at Lawnswood (and now called Lawnswood). I spoke there a few months ago and, unlike Ofsted, was much impressed by it, its current disfavour a presumed punishment for its admirable headmistress, who is still managing to resist the siren charms of academy status and the wiles of Mr Gove. In those circumstances I am happy to boast that the school library has been named after me.

When I was in the sixth form at the Modern School I used to do my homework in the Leeds Central Library in the Headrow. At that time the municipal buildings housed not only the lending library and the reference library but also the education offices and the police department, which I suppose was handy for the courts, still functioning across the road in the

town hall with the whole complex – town hall, library, courts – an expression of the confidence of the city and its belief in the value of reading and education, and where you might end up if they were neglected. It's a High Victorian building done throughout in polished Burmantofts brick, extravagantly tiled, the staircases of polished marble topped with brass rails, and carved at the head of each stair a slaving dog looking as if it's trying to stop itself sliding backwards down the banister.



*Armley Public Library, Leeds, Alan Bennett's first library.*

The reference library itself proclaimed the substance of the city with its solid elbow chairs and long mahogany tables, grooved along the edge to hold a pen, and in the centre of each table a massive pewter inkwell. Arched and galleried and lined from floor to ceiling with books the reference library was grand yet unimposing. Half the tables were filled with sixth-formers like myself, just doing their homework or studying for a scholarship; but there would also be university students home for the vacation, the Leeds students tending to work up the road in their own Brotherton Library. There were, too, the usual quota of eccentrics that haunt any reading room that is warm and handy and has somewhere to sit down. Old men would doze for hours over a magazine taken from the rack, though if they were caught nodding off an assistant would trip over from the counter and hiss, 'No sleeping!'

One regular, always with a pile of art books at his elbow, was the painter Jacob Kramer, some of whose paintings, with their Vorticist slant, hung in the art gallery next door. Dirty and half-tight there wasn't much to



distinguish him from the other tramps whiling away their time before trailing along Victoria Street to spend the night in the refuge in the basement of St George's Church, where occasionally I would do night duty myself, sleeping on a camp bed in a room full of these sad, defeated, utterly unthreatening creatures.

With its mixture of readers and its excellent facilities (it was a first-rate library) and the knowledge that there would always be someone working there whom I knew and who would come out for coffee, I found some of the pleasure going to the reference library that, had I been less studious, I could have found in a pub. Over the next ten years while I still thought I might turn into a medieval historian I became something of a connoisseur of libraries, but the reference library in Leeds always seemed to me one of the most congenial. It was there, on leave from the army, that I discovered they held a run of *Horizon*, the literary magazine started by Cyril Connolly in 1940, and that I eventually did get a scholarship to Oxford I put down to the smattering of culture I gleaned from its pages.

**Arched and galleried and lined from floor to ceiling with books the reference library was grand yet unintimidating. Half the tables were filled with sixth-formers like myself, just doing their homework or studying for a scholarship; but there would also be university students home for the vacation, the Leeds students tending to work up the road in their own Brotherton Library.**

In my day, it was a predominantly male institution with the main tables dividing themselves almost on religious or ethnic lines. There was a Catholic table, patronised by boys from St Michael's College, the leading Catholic school, with blazers in bright Mary blue; there was a Jewish table where the boys came from Roundhay or the Grammar School, the Jewish boys even when they were not at the same school often knowing each other from the synagogue or other extra-curricular activities. If, like me, you were at the Modern School – and there were about half a dozen of us who were there regularly – you had no particular religious or racial affinities and indeed were not thought perhaps quite as clever, the school certainly not as good as Roundhay or the Grammar School. The few girls who braved this male citadel disrupted the formal division, leavened it, I'm sure for the better. And they worked harder than the boys and were seldom to be found

on the landing outside where one adjourned for a smoke.

It had glamour, too, for me and getting in first at nine one morning I felt, opening my books, as I had when a small boy at Armley Baths and I had been first in there, the one to whom it fell to break the immaculate stillness of the water, shatter the straight lines tiled on the bottom of the bath and set the day on its way.

Of the boys who worked in the reference library a surprising number must have turned out to be lawyers, and I can count at least eight of my contemporaries who sat at those tables in the 1950s who became judges. A school – and certainly a state or provincial school – would consider that something to boast about, but libraries are facilities; a library has no honours board and takes no credit for what its readers go on to do but, remembering myself at 19, on leave from the army and calling up the copies of *Horizon* to get me through the general paper in the Oxford scholarship, I feel as much a debt to that library as I do to my school. It was a good library and though like everywhere else busier now than it was in my day, remains, unlike so much of Leeds, largely unaltered.

The library closed at nine and coming down in the lift (bevelled mirrors, mahogany panelling, little bench) the attendant, another British Legion figure, would stop and draw the gates at the floor below and in would get a covey of policemen and even the occasional miscreant en route for the cells. One of the policemen might be my cousin Arnold, who belonged to what my mother always felt was the slightly common wing of the Bennett family. Loud, burly and wonderfully genial, Arnold was a police photographer and he would regale me with the details of the latest murder he had been called on to snap: 'By, Alan, I've seen some stuff.' The stuff he'd seen included the corpse of the stripper Mary Millington, who had committed suicide. 'I can't understand why she committed suicide. She had a lovely body.'

To someone as prone to embarrassment as I was, these encounters, particularly in the presence of my schoolfriends, ought to have been shaming. That they never were was, I suppose, because Cousin Arnold was looked on as a creature from the real world, the world of prostitutes found dead on waste ground, corpses in copses and cars burned out down Lovers' Lane. This was Life where I knew even then that I was not likely to be headed or ever to have much to do with.

There is no shortage of libraries in Oxford, some of them, of course, of great grandeur and beauty. The Radcliffe Camera seems to me one of the handsomest buildings in England and the square in which it stands a superb combination of styles. Crossing it on a moonlit winter's night lifted the heart, though that was often the trouble with Oxford – the architecture out-soared one's feelings, the sublime not always easy to match. There are in that one square three libraries, the Bodleian on the north side, on the east

the Codrington, part of Hawksmoor's All Souls, and James Gibbs's Camera in the middle. There is actually another more modest library, neo-Gothic in style, and built by George Gilbert Scott in 1856. It's over Exeter's garden wall in the north-west corner of Radcliffe Square, but you can't quite see that. This was where I worked, though it was possible if one was so inclined to get to study in the much more exclusive and architecturally splendid surroundings of the Codrington, and a few undergraduates did so. They tended, though, to set less store on what they were writing than on where they were writing it and I, with my narrow sympathies but who was just as foolish, despised them for it.

Staying on at Oxford after I'd taken my degree I did research in medieval history, the subject of my research Richard II's retinue in the last ten years of his reign. This took me twice a week to the Public Record Office (PRO) then still in Chancery Lane and in particular to the Round Room, galleried, lined with books, a humbler version of the much grander Round Room in the British Museum. Presiding over the BM Round Room in his early days was Angus Wilson whereas at the PRO it was Noel Blakiston, friend of Cyril Connolly, hair as white as Wilson's and possibly the most distinguished-looking man I've ever seen.

Though I made copious notes on the manuscripts I studied (which were chiefly records of the medieval exchequer) I would have found it hard to say what it was I was looking for – imagining, I think, that having amassed sufficient material it would all suddenly fall into place and become clear. Failing that, I hoped to come upon some startling and unexpected fact, a very silly notion. Had it been Richard III I was researching rather than Richard II, it might have been something as relatively unambiguous as a note in the monarch's own hand saying: 'It was me that killed ye Princes in ye Tower, hee hee.' Historical research nowadays is a dull business: had I any sense I would have been collating the tax returns of the knights I was studying or the amount they borrowed or were owed, or sifting through material other historians had ignored or discarded; it is seldom at the frontier that discoveries are made but more often in the dustbin.

The Memoranda Rolls on which I spent much of my time were long thin swatches of parchment about five feet long and one foot wide and written on both sides. Thus to turn the page required the co-operation and forbearance of most of the other readers at the table, and what would sometimes look like the cast of the Mad Hatter's tea party struggling to put wallpaper up was just me trying to turn over. A side effect of reading these unwieldy documents was that one was straightaway propelled into quite an intimate relationship with readers alongside and among those I got to know in this way was the historian Cecil Woodham-Smith.

The author of *The Great Hunger*, an account of the Irish Famine, and *The*

*Reason Why*, about the events leading up to the Charge of the Light Brigade, Cecil was a frail woman with a tiny bird-like skull, looking more like Elizabeth I (in later life) than Edith Sitwell ever did (and minus her sheet metal earrings). Irish, she had a Firbankian wit and a lovely turn of phrase. 'Do you know the Atlantic at all?' she once asked me and I put the line into *Habeas Corpus* and got a big laugh on it. From a grand Irish family she was quite snobbish; talking of someone she said: 'Then he married a Mitford ... but that's a stage everybody goes through.' Even the most ordinary remark would be given her own particular twist and she could be quite camp. Conversation had once turned, as conversations will, to fork-lift trucks. Feeling that industrial machinery might be remote from Cecil's sphere of

interest I said: 'Do you know what a fork-lift truck is?' She looked at me in her best Annie Walker manner. 'I do. To my cost.'

Books and bookcases cropping up in stuff that I've written means that they have to be reproduced on stage or on film. This isn't as straightforward as it might seem. A designer will either present you with shelves lined with gilt-tooled library sets, the sort of clubland books one can rent by the yard as decor, or he or she will send out for some junk books from the nearest second-hand bookshop and think that those will do. Another short

cut is to order in a cargo of remaindered books so that you end up with a shelf so garish and lacking in character it bears about as much of a relationship to literature as a caravan site does to architecture. A bookshelf is as particular to its owner as are his or her clothes; a personality is stamped on a library just as a shoe is shaped by the foot.

That someone's working library has a particular tone, with some shelves more heterogeneous than others, for example, or (in the case of an art historian) filled with offprints and monographs or (with an old-fashioned literary figure for instance) lined with the faded covers and jackets of distinctive Faber or Cape editions, does not seem to occur to a designer. On several occasions I've had to bring my own books down to the

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theatre to give the right worn tone to the shelves.

In *The Old Country* (1977) the books (Auden, Spender, MacNeice) are of central importance to the plot. I wanted their faded buffs and blues and yellows bleached into a unity of tone that suggested long sunlit Cambridge afternoons, the kind of books you might find lining Dadie Rylands's rooms, for instance. Anthony Blunt's bookshelves were crucial in *Single Spies*, the look of an art historian's bookshelves significantly different from those of a literary critic say. All this tends to pass the designer by. One knows that designers seldom read, but they don't have much knowledge of Inca civilisation either or the Puritan settlement of New England and yet they seem to cope perfectly well reproducing them. An agglomeration of books as illustrating the character of their owner seems to defeat them.

When I first bought books for myself in the late 1940s they were still thought to be quite precious and in poor homes books might often be backed in brown paper. Paper itself was in short supply and such new books as there were often bore the imprint 'Produced in conformity with the Authorised Economy Standard'. The paper was mealy, slightly freckled and looked not unlike the texture of the ice cream of the period. It was, though, a notable period in book design and perhaps because they were among the first books I ever bought (one was C.V. Wedgwood's *William the Silent*) the books of that time have always seemed to me all that was necessary or desirable – simple, unfussy, wholesome and well designed.

They were not, though, to be left about at home. 'Books Do Furnish a Room', wrote Anthony Powell, but my mother never thought so and she'd always put them out of the way in the sideboard when you weren't looking. Books untidy, books upset, more her view. Though once a keen reader herself, particularly when she was younger, she always thought of library books as grubby and with a potential for infection – not intellectual infection either. Lurking among the municipally owned pages might be the germs of TB or scarlet fever, so one must never be seen to peer at a library book too closely or lick your finger before turning over still less read such a book in bed.

There were other perils to reading, but it was only when I hit middle age that I became aware of them. *Me, I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf* was a television play written in 1978 and though it doesn't contain my usual scene of someone baffled at a bookcase the sense of being outfaced by books is a good description of what the play is about. 'Hopkins', I wrote of the middle-aged lecturer who is the hero, 'Hopkins was never without a book. It wasn't that he was particularly fond of reading; he just liked to have somewhere to look. A book makes you safe. Shows you're not out to pick anybody up. Try it on. With a book you're harmless. Though Hopkins was harmless without a book.' Books as badges, books as shields; one doesn't think of libraries as perilous places where you can come to harm. Still, they

do carry their own risks.

I have been discussing libraries as places and in the current struggle to preserve public libraries not enough stress has been laid on the library as a place not just a facility. To a child living in high flats, say, where space is at a premium and peace and quiet not always easy to find, a library is a haven. But, saying that, a library needs to be handy and local; it shouldn't require an expedition. Municipal authorities of all parties point to splendid new and scheduled central libraries as if this discharges them of their obligations. It doesn't. For a child a library needs to be round the corner. And if we lose local libraries it is children who will suffer. Of the libraries I have mentioned the most important for me was that first one, the dark and unprepossessing Armley Junior Library. I had just learned to read. I needed books. Add computers to that requirement maybe but a child from a poor family is today in exactly the same boat.

The business of closing libraries isn't a straightforward political fight. The local authorities shelter behind the demands of central government which in its turn pretends that local councils have a choice. It's shaming that, regardless of the party's proud tradition of popular education, Labour municipalities are not making more of a stand. For the Tories privatising the libraries has been on the agenda for far longer than they would currently like to admit. This is an extract from my diary:

*"22 February Switch on Newsnight to find some bright spark from, guess where, the Adam Smith Institute, proposing the privatisation of the public libraries. His name is Eamonn Butler and it's to be hoped he's no relation of the 1944 Education Act Butler. Smirking and pleased with himself as they generally are from that stable, he's pitted against a well-meaning but flustered woman who's an authority on children's books. Paxman looks on undissenting as this odious figure dismisses any defence of the tradition of free public libraries as 'the usual bleating of the middle classes'. I go to bed depressed only to wake and find Madsen Pirie, also from the Adam Smith Institute for the Criminally Insane, banging the same drum in the Independent. Not long ago John Bird and John Fortune did a sketch about the privatisation of air. These days it scarcely seems unthinkable."*

That was written in 1996. It's hard not to think that like other Tory policies privatising the libraries has been lying dormant for 15 years, just waiting for a convenient crisis to smuggle it through. Libraries are, after all, as another think tank clown opined a few weeks ago, 'a valuable retail outlet'.

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# The role of schools in society: A future vision of education

**Abstract:** *This article considers the basis on which education policy is formulated and its relationship with wider society. It argues that education should be seen as a public good and questions the direction of travel for some key aspects of current Government initiatives. The author concludes that education should be freed from political interference if it is to offer equality of opportunity for all children and young people.*

**A**sk the question “What are schools for?” and you are likely to get a bewildering array of answers, depending on who you are talking to and their personal experiences of education. Part of the problem is that everyone considers themselves to be an expert, because everyone has been to school themselves and many will have children who have or do attend. Whilst it is certainly true that this can give valuable insights into how the education service is perceived, in no other profession would these views be given such weight and credence.

The current Secretary of State has stated publically that changes to the National Curriculum are needed because his daughter was confused by the way that history was taught – can you imagine such personal anecdotes being used to justify new Government directives on how doctors should treat their patients? Yet this is precisely what has happened for education policy under successive governments in England for many years, with politicians’ own prejudices and preferences dictating the development of the national education service. The recent emphasis on traditional academic subjects, for instance, is only the latest in a long line of ‘personalised’ policy making.

Education is far more important and deserves far better than that. Going to school is about more than just gaining an academic education. As the major public institution in the lives of children and young people, schools also have a responsibility to contribute to their development into well-adjusted, independent and successful adults who can contribute positively to both the economy and to society. In light of this broader role,

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## Karen Robinson

Karen Robinson has been the National Union of Teachers’ Head of Education and Equalities since April 2011. She joined the staff of the NUT in 1999, as a Professional Assistant working on privatisation issues and was subsequently appointed Principal Officer – Primary in 2001. Previously, she taught English and Drama in Oldham for 13 years.



the social aspect of schooling is just as important as the academic one.

This is particularly important given that society is changing at an unprecedented pace. Technology, global recession, changes in the nature of the family and unsettled political climates both at home and abroad all have an impact on our students. It is likely that these changes will continue and may even accelerate in the years ahead. Schools both respond to change in society and are themselves agents of change. The way in which schools educate children influences the role that those children will play in the world of tomorrow.

Today's education system seems to bear the brunt of the task of producing a well-rounded child – we expect schools to teach our children everything. When they fail, society, politicians automatically blame schools and, especially, teachers. Is this an effective way to look at the really fundamental questions: what part does the role of society, the role of parents, and the role of the child play in a child's education? Where does all this responsibility lie and when should it overlap?

Crucially, we have to understand that schools are both a product of, and reflect, society. Whilst education may have facilitated social mobility, for instance, it has not increased social fluidity. The expansion of professional jobs and the contraction of manual labour may have enabled a large number of working class children to enter professional and managerial occupations, but the gap between social classes in terms of their chances of entering top level occupations is as strong as ever. This is because the influence of class in

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society is not completely mediated by education.

As the Chief Executive of the Children's Society, Bob Reitemeier, concluded in the Society's 2008 inquiry into what constituted a good childhood: "Social mobility cannot simply be delivered by a fair and equitable education system. Learning needs to address poverty and parenting as well as academic achievement" (Comprehensive Future, 2009). To a large extent, our schools' performance both nationally and internationally, a source of much political indignation and hand-wringing, reveal more about the efficacy of governments' social and economic policies than they do about individual schools.

Schools are certainly a significant influence on a student's outlook on life and on their ability to achieve, but without participation from parents and society, he or she will not have the wherewithal to become a truly well



rounded individual. Education transcends the classroom. Not every subject lends itself to classroom instruction. Many of life's lessons are learned outside a school environment. Parents cannot expect schools to teach all of these – they are part of the parenting role as well and, at best, must be a responsibility shared with schools.

Too often, however, that responsibility is abrogated, yet schools are expected to be able to compensate for this and turn out students who achieve and behave equally well, regardless of their personal circumstances. No politician has been able to admit that schools can only do so much, despite the overwhelming evidence. If children do not have a stable and loving home, for example, attempts to teach respect and acceptance can be unsuccessful. Instead, the default position has become to blame teachers for their low expectations of such children and to assert that through working harder, they will be able to ensure that everyone does better.

If we truly want every child to benefit from their education in its widest sense, we have to acknowledge that schools cannot meet the complex needs of their students by themselves. Schools do not have the time, financial resources, or professional expertise to do all of the things needed or expected of them. The previous government did recognise this and through initiatives such as extended schools, Every Child Matters and children's trusts, had begun to draw services together to meet the needs and characteristics of students, whether those be educational, socio-economic, emotional, cultural or health-related.

All of that work, and the resources and energy which were expended on making 'joined up' services for children and young people a reality, has been denigrated by the current Government as a 'diversion' or 'distraction' from schools' core purpose and the funding and programmes designed to support it quickly removed. It does not want to acknowledge that national education policies have to create the right conditions for students to learn and be able to achieve, by treating children as individuals and addressing their needs holistically, as part of wider social and economic policies. If a child does not have the appropriate attitudes or dispositions, the 'emotional resilience' which provides the self-motivation to persevere, then they will not be able to achieve either their academic or personal potential.

Instead, we have a Government which has turned to a combination of high stakes accountability and structural reform, ignoring the evidence that greater choice and competition between schools means that there must be winners and losers, with disadvantaged children being the least likely to benefit, or that league tables have distorted the real worth and purpose of education.

A school system should not be simply about standards and exam results but about values – what sort of people we want our children to be and what sort of society we want them to grow up in. I believe that a truly

comprehensive school system, educating children of all backgrounds together, provides the best example of the kind of society many of us would like to live in. Unfortunately in many towns and cities we still have a system that divides and discriminates against children in a multitude of different ways, 'comprehensive' in name only.

Currently, around 90 per cent of children are educated in schools that are nominally comprehensive. However, successive governments, while pledging no more selection, have created a range of subtle ways for schools to manage their own admissions and select pupils both overtly and covertly under the banner of 'diversity and choice'.

More affluent and knowing parents can work the system to their advantage and successive studies of the social composition of some of the most successful comprehensive schools illustrate clearly that a combination of backdoor selection, league tables and sharp elbowed parents have contributed to greater social and educational segregation, not less.

There is no excuse for this. The significance of segregation in terms of differing social intakes between schools is well known and evidenced in both national and international research, including by successive reports of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). On each occasion it has demonstrated that countries with more divided school systems perform less well in terms both of overall standards and the spread of attainment than those which are based on a more integrated and comprehensive approach. In other words, integration, equity and excellence tend to go together.

So if we want a 'world class' education system in the future, we already have the model to achieve it – comprehensive education. The task is to ensure that it works as well as it could and in the way it was intended. That means reforming the Code of Admissions, in particular, questioning whether any school should be allowed to control the children it admits and if that is compatible with a socially cohesive society.

It also means strengthening the powers of local authorities to manage admissions for the benefit of every child in a given area. Local authorities have been demonised for exerting too much control over schools, for being bureaucratic, monolithic institutions which stifle innovation and creativity because of their own vested interests and for draining vital resources away from the 'front line' where they are really needed. While it is true that not all local authorities are as good as they could or should be, it has been a long time since they had 'control' over schools, either financially or in any other way.

As a democratic institution directly accountable to their localities, local authorities are far better placed to act in the interests of all children and young people than either individual schools or central Government. They have the ability to bring about collaboration between schools which can benefit all students, not only through equitable admissions and making

sure every school takes its fair share of challenging students, but through facilitating professional networks which develop teaching and learning, economies of scale in purchasing or brokering services on behalf of schools and through their relationships with and direct knowledge of their schools, which can detect institutional problems at an early stage before they become entrenched.

Unless there is a detour from the current direction of travel, local authorities as we know them will cease to exist in future. Control of schools will come from the centre or, even worse, from private organisations which have had those civic responsibilities transferred to them. We can already catch a glimpse of that future in areas where the majority of secondary schools have become academies. In those places, parents who have been unable to resolve concerns or complaints with their child's school can no longer appeal directly to their town hall or local

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councillor. They have to try to navigate their way through a labyrinth of bureaucracy to find someone, whether at the Department for Education or at an academy chain's head office, to talk to about their anxieties. The need for schools to serve students and their families, indeed the whole concept of education as a public good, is being reversed.

Academies, together with the new kid on the block, free schools, represent the de-nationalisation of the state school sector. Schools will become private enterprises leading not to more autonomy and higher standards but more dictatorial and top heavy management approaches based on the corporate model which will do nothing to improve experiences or facilities for children in the classroom. Schools will be operating in an increasingly deregulated education marketplace, competing with other schools for students and trading on test and exam performance. The outcome of such a system cannot be a good local school for every child, since competition and markets necessarily create a hierarchy with a minority at the top and the rest at the bottom.

In the short to medium term, once the financial advantage of becoming an academy has been removed, education funding cuts will really begin to take effect. Government will find it easier to cut school funding in future, as has been the case with other 'autonomous' education institutions such

as universities and FE colleges, because it can conveniently blame head teachers for the inevitable cuts. The refrain “it is for schools to decide how to spend their budget” will become the default justification for every loss or contraction of provision.

In the longer term this will have two consequences. The first will be pressure on schools to seek other, private sources of funding, opening the door to corporate influence and control and creeping privatisation. Academies are already sourcing more services from private companies; if we want to gaze into the future and see how English education will develop if it continues on its current trajectory, we need only look at the United States, where the development of Education Management Organisations (EMOs) is openly compared to the earlier emergence of Health Management Organisations (HMOs) as potentially lucrative investment opportunities.

Hard-up schools in the US, including charter schools, which have been used as models for academies and, especially, free schools, have given space, time and curriculum opportunities to businesses seeking captive markets for their advertising and products. Academies in the UK open up similar opportunities for the subsidy and colonisation of public space by private companies in one of the few places where young minds should be protected from such intrusions. It should come as no surprise that the organisation with which the Secretary of State has had more meetings than any other Cabinet member is News International, which is currently developing its education management services arm in the US and is reported to be interested in setting up its own free schools in England – if they are allowed to make a profit.

The second, longer-term consequence will be pressure for the introduction of charges and fees, just as we have seen for university students. Enrichment activities such as music or sport, access to ICT or additional learning resources could all become add-ons which have to be paid for separately. The lease of school land and buildings, once publicly owned assets, to the new private academy trusts is for an extraordinary period of time, 125 years and will make these ‘reforms’ irreversible for generations to come.

So what is to be done? How do we ensure that this country has the education service it deserves and needs?

The starting point must be to decouple education from the politicians – it is far too important to be used as a political football. Few have been able to break away from the ill-informed, partisan prejudices or ‘quick fix’ solutions which have characterised policy making in the past. Reforms focused on teaching and learning need time to work their way through the system and become embedded or to show a measurable effect. As politicians must always have their eye on the next election and show how they are better or different from the opposition, is it any wonder that the profession’s experience and expertise is at best marginalised, at worse held

in contempt as 'vested interest'?

By utilising the skills and knowledge of those who work in education, whether they are engaged in research, have strategic responsibilities for provision across an area, lead a school, are a classroom teacher or are a parent or pupil, we could begin to utilise the excellent practice which we know already exists in schools in England and to learn from practice in other countries, rather than cherry pick those elements which are politically expedient.

The real path to improvement lies in ensuring that excellent practice is recognised and spread. It is about attention to the fundamental elements which make for good schools – high quality leadership and teaching, sufficient resource, time and space for teachers to collaborate and take an active part in developing pedagogical approaches which meet their students' needs. These things seem too small for the politicians, they do not grab the headlines in the way a new type of school may do, yet the small things are the most important in education – get these right at the school level and the system as a whole will flourish.

The idea of an expert group overseeing national education policy may seem far fetched, but I have yet to meet an education professional who is not driven by the desire to do their best for the children and young people with whom they work. After over twenty five years, first as a teacher and then working with the NUT, I am still waiting to meet a teacher who wants their children to fail or wilfully sets out not to teach well, although if you believed the politicians and the press which generally reports their words uncritically, every school is full of them.

The Ipsos MORI Veracity Index measures the public's trust in a number of professions. Its most recent survey, in June 2011, reported that eight in ten (81 per cent) trust teachers. This poses a stark contrast to the 19 per cent who say they trust journalists or the 14 per cent who trust politicians (Ipsos MORI, 2011). Maybe the public does know best and a school system free from political interference is not quite so far fetched a vision for education in the future after all?

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# Soaring Systems

## Linda Darling-Hammond

Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, where she is co-director of the Stanford Center of Opportunity Policy in Education and the founding director of the School Redesign Network. She is a former President of the American Educational Research Association and a member of the National Academy of Education.

**Abstract:** *Despite policies aimed at improving educational performance in the United States, disparities in the school system remain entrenched and high school graduation rates are static and low compared to those of other developed nations. This contrasts dramatically with sustained and equitable improvement in other countries. In her article Linda Darling-Hammond draws out the achievements of Korea, Singapore and Finland where education policies are characterised by equitable funding, a shared curriculum and investment in quality teaching. She argues that in order to secure individual and societal success, education policy should be focused on reducing the opportunity gap and improving access to a rich, challenging curriculum delivered by valued and highly trained teachers.*

**N**ow more than ever, high-quality education for all is a public good that is essential for the good of the public. As the fate of individuals and nations is increasingly interdependent, the quest for access to an equitable, empowering education for all people has become a critical issue.

No society can thrive in a technological, knowledge-based economy by depriving large segments of its population of learning. But at a time when three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require post-secondary education, just over one-third of young people in the United States receive a college degree (Douglass, J.A., 2006 and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007a). Meanwhile, in many European and Asian nations, more than half of young people are becoming college graduates.

At a time when high school dropouts are unlikely to secure any job at all, the high school graduation rate in the United States – stuck at about 70 per cent – has dropped from first in the world to the bottom half of industrialised nations. At a time when children of colour comprise a

majority in most urban districts in the United States, and will be the majority in the nation as a whole by 2025, (Aizenman, N.C., 2008) we face pernicious achievement gaps that fuel inequality, short changing our young people and our nation.

Recent analyses of data prepared for school equity cases in more than 20 states have found that on every tangible measure—from qualified teachers and reasonable class sizes, to adequate textbooks, computers, facilities, and curriculum offerings—schools serving large numbers of students of colour have significantly fewer resources than schools serving more affluent, white students. (Darling-Hammond, L., 2004) Many such schools are so severely overcrowded that they run a multitrack schedule with a shortened school day and school year, lack basic textbooks and materials, do not offer the courses students would need to be eligible for college, and are staffed by a parade of untrained, inexperienced, and temporary teachers (Oakes, J., 2004).

Although many United States' educators and civil rights' advocates have fought for higher quality and more equitable education over many years—in battles for desegregation, school finance reform, and equitable treatment of students within schools—progress has been stymied in many states over the last two decades as segregation has worsened, and disparities have grown. While students in the highest-achieving states and districts in the United States do as well as their peers in high-achieving nations, our continuing comfort with profound inequality is the Achilles' heel of American education.

These disparities have come to appear inevitable in the United States; however, they are not the norm in developed nations around the world, which fund their education systems centrally and equally, with additional resources often going to the schools where students' needs are greater. These more equitable investments made by high-achieving nations are also steadier and more focused on critical elements of the system: the quality of teachers and teaching, the development of curriculum and assessments that encourage ambitious learning by both students and teachers, and the design of schools as learning organisations that support continuous reflection and improvement. With the exception of a few states with enlightened long-term leadership, the United States, by contrast, has failed to maintain focused investments in any of these essential elements.

The result is that the United States is standing still while more focused and steadfast nations move rapidly ahead. Our inertia is not due to a lack of handwringing or high-blown rhetoric. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* decried a "rising tide of mediocrity" in education and called for sweeping reforms. In 1989, then-President George H. W. Bush and the 50 governors announced a set of national goals that included ranking first in the world in mathematics and science by the year 2000.



However, by 2006, on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a test conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States ranked 21st of 30 OECD countries in science, and 25th of 30 in mathematics—a drop in both raw scores and rankings from three years earlier (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007b) When non-OECD members from Eastern Europe and Asia are added to the list, the U.S. rankings drop to 29th out of 40 developed countries in science, sandwiched between Latvia and Lithuania, and 35th out of 40 in mathematics, between Azerbaijan and Croatia.

### Learning from Others

One wonders what we might accomplish as a nation if we could finally set aside what appears to be our de facto commitment to inequality, so

profoundly at odds with our rhetoric of equity, and put the millions of dollars spent continually arguing and litigating into building a high-quality education system for all children. To imagine how that might be done, one can look at nations that started with very little and purposefully built highly productive and equitable systems, sometimes almost from scratch, in the space of only two to three decades.

Consider three very different nations—Finland, Singapore, and South Korea—that built strong education systems,

nearly from the ground up. None of these nations was succeeding educationally in the 1970s, when the United States was the unquestioned education leader in the world. All created productive ‘teaching and learning systems’ by expanding access while investing purposefully in ambitious educational goals using strategic approaches to build teaching capacity.

I use the term ‘teaching and learning system’ advisedly to describe a set of elements that, when well designed and connected, reliably support all students in their learning. These elements ensure that students routinely encounter well-prepared teachers who work in concert around a thoughtful, high-quality curriculum, supported by appropriate materials

**These disparities have come to appear inevitable in the United States; however, they are not the norm in developed nations around the world, which fund their education systems centrally and equally, with additional resources often going to the schools where students’ needs are greater.**



and assessments. These elements also help students, teachers, leaders, and the system as a whole continue to learn and improve. While none of these countries lacks problems and challenges, each has created a much more consistently high-quality education system for all of its students than has the United States. And while no system from afar can be transported wholesale into another context, there is much to learn from the experiences of those who have addressed problems we encounter. A sage person once noted that, although it is useful to learn from one's own mistakes and experiences, it is even wiser to learn from those of others.

Although Finland, Singapore, and South Korea are very different from one another culturally and historically, all three have made startling improvements in their education systems over the last 30 years. Their investments have catapulted them from the bottom to the top of international rankings in student achievement and attainment, graduating more than 90 per cent of their young people from high school and sending large majorities through college, far more than in the much wealthier United States.

Their strategies also have much in common. All three:

- **Fund schools adequately and equitably**, and add incentives for teaching in high-need schools. All three nations have built their education systems on a strong egalitarian ethos, explicitly confronting and addressing potential sources of inequality. In South Korea, for example, a wide range of incentives is available to induce teachers to serve in rural areas or in urban schools with disadvantaged students. In addition to earning bonus points toward promotion, incentives for equitable distribution of teachers include smaller class sizes, less in-class teaching time, additional stipends, and opportunities to choose later teaching appointments (Kang, N.H. and Hong, M., 2008). The end result is a highly qualified, experienced, and stable teaching force in all schools, providing a foundation for strong student learning.
- **Organise teaching around national standards and a core curriculum** that focuses on higher-order thinking, inquiry, and problem solving through rigorous academic content. Working from lean national curriculum guides that have recommended assessment criteria, teachers collaborate to develop curriculum units and lessons at the school level, and develop school based performance assessments – which include research projects, science investigations, and technology applications – to evaluate student learning. In Singapore, these are increasingly part of the examination system. In Finland, the assessments are primarily local but are guided by the national curriculum, which emphasises students' abilities to reflect on, evaluate, and manage their own

learning. Unlike in the United States, narrowing the curriculum has not been an issue. Take South Korea: it devotes the large majority of instructional time in every grade to a liberal arts curriculum that includes social studies, science, physical education, music, fine arts, moral education, foreign language (English), practical arts, and a range of extracurricular activities and electives (Huh, K.C., 2007). Curriculum offerings are similarly comprehensive in Singapore and Finland.

- **Eliminated examination systems that had once tracked students** into different middle schools and restricted access to high school. Since adopting national curriculum guidelines, these nations have been committed to helping all students master the same essential skills and content until the beginning of high school – not to devising watered-down versions for some students.
- **Use assessments that require in-depth knowledge of content and higher-order skills.** All three countries have matriculation exams for admission to college. These are the only external examinations in Finland and South Korea. In Singapore, examinations are given in the sixth and ninth grades as well as at the end of high school. These exams have open-ended questions that require deep content knowledge, critical analysis, and writing. Although the matriculation exams are not used to determine high school graduation, they are taken by nearly all students and they set a high bar for high school coursework. In Finland, where there are no external standardised tests used to rank students or schools, most teacher feedback to students is in narrative form, emphasising descriptions of their learning progress and areas for growth (Sahlberg, P., 2007). Like the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States, Finland uses a centrally developed assessment given to samples of students at the end of the second and ninth grades to inform curriculum and school investments. The focus of these open-ended assessments is to provide information to support learning and problem solving, not to allocate sanctions and punishments.
- **Invest in strong teacher education programmes** that recruit top students, completely subsidise their extensive training programs, and pay them a stipend while they learn to teach. In all three nations, teacher education programs were overhauled to increase teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, on top of a deep mastery of the content areas they will teach. Finnish teachers' preparation includes at least a full year of clinical experience in a model school associated with a university. Within these model schools, student teachers participate in problem-solving groups, a

common feature in Finnish schools. All teachers are trained in research methods so that they can “contribute to an increase of the problem solving capacity of the education system.” (Buchberger, F. and Buchberger, I.). Their problem-solving groups engage in a cycle of planning, action, and reflection/evaluation that is reinforced throughout teacher education and is a model for what teachers will plan for their own students, who are expected to engage in similar kinds of research and inquiry in their own studies.

- **Pay salaries that are equitable** across schools and competitive with other careers, generally comparable to those of engineers. Teachers are viewed as professionally prepared and are well respected. Working conditions are supportive, including substantial participation in decision making about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.
- **Support on-going teacher learning** by ensuring mentoring for beginning teachers and providing 15 to 25 hours a week for all teachers to plan collaboratively and engage in analyses of student learning, lesson study, action research, and observations of one another’s classrooms, which help them continually improve their practice. All three nations have incentives for teachers to engage in research on practice, and all three fund on-going professional development opportunities in collaboration with universities and other schools.
- **Pursue consistent, long-term reforms** by setting goals for expanding, equalising, and improving the education system and by steadily implementing these goals, making thoughtful investments in a high-quality educator workforce and in school curriculum and teaching resources that build the underpinnings for success. This has been made possible in part by the fact that these systems are managed by professional ministries of education, which are substantially buffered from shifting political winds. Frequent evaluations of schools and the system as a whole have helped guide reforms. In each nation, persistence and commitment to core values have paid off handsomely, as all three are ranked in the very top tier of countries on international assessments and have among the most equitable outcomes in the world.

All three nations have undertaken these elements in a systemic fashion, rather than pouring energy into a potpourri of innovations and then changing course every few years, as has often been the case in many communities in the United States, especially in large cities. And while these three small nations – each comparable in size to a midsize U.S. state – have conducted this work from a national level, similar strategies have

been successfully employed at the state or provincial level in high-scoring Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and regions such as Hong Kong and Macao in China. They demonstrate how it is possible to build a system in which students are routinely taught by well-prepared teachers who are given time to collaboratively reflect on and refine the curriculum, supported by appropriate materials and assessments that foster learning for students, teachers, and schools alike.

### **Core Content and Key Skills for All**

In the United States, enormous energy is devoted to discussions of the achievement gap. Much less attention, however, is paid to the opportunity gap—the accumulated differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school. These key resources include high-quality curriculum, good educational materials, expert teachers, personalised attention, and plentiful information resources.

In contrast, nations around the world are transforming their school systems to eliminate opportunity gaps; they are expanding educational access to more and more of their people, and they are revising curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet the demands of the knowledge economy. Today, there is very little curriculum differentiation until high school in the education offerings for students in high-achieving jurisdictions, such as Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea, which have sought, as part of their reforms, to equalise access to a common, intellectually ambitious curriculum (Eckstein, M.A. and Harold J. Noah, H.J., 1993).

In the last two years of high school, there is often differentiation of courses by interest, aptitude, and aspirations, but all courses of study offer high-quality options for later education and careers. By comparison, countries like France and Germany that have continued their tradition of sorting students much earlier are, like the United States, lagging in international assessments.

This is not surprising, as a substantial body of research over the last 40 years has found that:

- The combination of teacher and curriculum quality explains most of a school's contribution to achievement; and
- Access to a rich curriculum is a more powerful determinant of achievement than initial achievement levels.

That is, when students of similar backgrounds and initial achievement levels are exposed to more or less challenging curriculum material, those given the richer curriculum ultimately outperform those given the less challenging curriculum (Alexander, K.L. and McDill, E.L., 1976, see also Gamoran, A. et al, 1990, 1987, 2000 and Oakes, J. 1985, 1990).

These efforts to reduce tracking have been supported by social policies that reduce childhood poverty and allow students to start school on a level playing field, and that give their teachers much better training and much more non-instructional time to plan and collaborate. In addition, over time, as all children are exposed to similar high-quality lessons, the variance in their knowledge and skills decreases. Ensuring access to a more common curriculum supports greater equity, and ultimately makes teaching all students easier.

Finland provides an excellent example. Although there was a sizeable achievement gap among students in the 1970s, strongly correlated to socioeconomic status, this gap has been progressively reduced as a result of curriculum reforms starting in the 1980s – and continued to diminish in the 2000, 2003, and 2006 PISA assessments. By 2006, Finland's between-school variance on the PISA science scale was only five per cent, whereas the average between-school variance in other OECD nations was about 33 per cent (Sahlberg, P., 2007).

This small variability is true even in schools in Helsinki and elsewhere that receive large numbers of previously less well-educated immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. (Large between-school variation is generally related to social inequality, including both the differences in achievement across neighbourhoods differentiated by wealth, and the extent to which schools are funded and organised to reduce or expand inequalities.)

Today's expectation that schools will enable all students, rather than a small minority, to learn challenging skills to high levels creates an entirely new mission for schools. Instead of merely 'covering the curriculum' or 'getting through the book,' this new mission requires that schools substantially enrich the intellectual opportunities they offer while meeting the diverse needs of students. This demands not only more skilful teaching, but also a coherent curriculum that engages students in learning essential concepts in ways that develop strong thinking skills.

The path to our mutual well-being is built on educational opportunity. Central to our collective future is the recognition that our capacity to survive and thrive ultimately depends on ensuring for all of our people what should be an unquestioned entitlement— an inalienable right to learn.

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# The new 'crisis of opportunity' for young people: Why we need a national rescue plan

**Ann Hodgson  
and Ken Spours**

Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours are both professors of education and co-directors of the Centre for 14+ Research and Innovation at the Institute of Education, University of London.

**Abstract:** *In this article the authors argue that the current economic context, together with government policies for 14+ education and training, have led to an unprecedented crisis of opportunity for young people. Drawing on the vision and principles of 'Education for the Good Society', they lay out the dimensions of an urgent national rescue plan for young people.*

**C**an education change society? This question has been around for decades. Some cite Basil Bernstein's socially pessimistic remark that "education cannot compensate for society" (Bernstein, 1970). Others, particularly politicians, assert that education is the answer to everything, hence Tony Blair's slogan "education, education, education". Our response is, yes, education can play a fundamental role in changing society, but only under certain conditions.

At least three conditions have to be fulfilled. First, education has to be led by fundamental values and a long-term vision because without these it is easy to lose our way. Moreover, the vision has to be about more than education, it needs to be about the features of a society we seek to create in the future and to experience in some way during our own lifetime.

Second, this vision has to address the most acute problems of the period. In the case of 14+ education, training and employment it is the growing 'crisis of opportunity' facing young people. We make no apology for using the word crisis, with nearly one million 16-24 year olds experiencing unemployment, graduates set to carry an unprecedented level of university debt and many contemplating a future in which they may be worse off than their parents. A third and related point, is that any changes in education need to be part of wider systemic reforms in the economy, because education acting in isolation cannot change society. We will,



therefore, argue for the creation of a comprehensive strategy that constitutes a national rescue plan for young people.

### **Education for the Good Society**

Over the past 30 years, despite improvements in post-16 participation, examination results, infrastructure and resourcing, there has been a deepening of educational divisions, a narrowing of educational vision and a loss of optimism about the power of education to bring about positive change. This process, the outcome of a neo-liberal era, began in the late-1970s and continued under Thatcherism, New Labour and now the Coalition Government.

We suggest that the concept of 'Education for the Good Society' (Lawson, N. and Spours, K., forthcoming) can act as a response to this

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narrowing of the vision of education by connecting its meaning to the kind of society we want to build for the future. The vision has to be morally courageous yet thoroughly grounded. Moreover, it has to reject constant politically motivated change from above and promote slower and more participative and deliberative reform from below. Education for the Good Society should be rooted in a recognition of old truths and beliefs that need to be treasured – faith in the educability of every person over the life-course; the joy of learning; the importance of inspiring teachers and a belief that education can transform lives – but applied to the age in which we live and to the future we seek to create.

As part of this wider vision we suggest a number of related principles that both act as the pillars of the 'Good Society' and provide the means of getting there – fairness and equality; democracy; sustainability and wellbeing (Lawson, N. and Spours K., forthcoming):

- **Fairness and equality** is about promoting social justice and a sense of togetherness, in which greater equality benefits all. In 14+ education and training this could mean a renewed accent on comprehensive provision and collaboration to support those learners most affected by the deep crisis of opportunity.
- **Democracy** is about developing the collective capacity of the people to be able to govern themselves. This suggests: a stronger voice for learners and professionals; recognition of the interdependent relations between educators and their students; and devolving powers to the local level so that providers and communities have the tools to positively change their localities.
- **Sustainability**, a relatively new theme, suggests that education has a pivotal role in promoting awareness of the need for a sustainable future as we test the limits of the natural environment.
- The concept of **wellbeing** is a complex combination of individual resilience, optimism, agency and the resources available to young people to develop positively and to progress from education to work and adult life (Schoon, 2010). It is also integral to a more learner and community-centred education (Seaford *et al.*, forthcoming).
- Finally, we would like to add a fifth pillar of Education for the Good Society – **creativity and innovation** – because it is these qualities that mark us out as human. Education should be about fostering our ability to reflect, to relate theory and practice, to seek out and solve the most pressing problems and to create things of beauty.

### The new 'crisis of opportunity' facing young people

These ideals help us understand the depth of the crisis now facing young people. What they confront is neither fair nor equitable and threatens both to squander the talents of our young people and to undermine the cohesion of society. It has been widely recognised that these citizens have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis since the banking crash in 2008. Nearly one million 16-24 year olds are unemployed and the NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate is rising fast (DfE, 2011). But young people have also been hit by government austerity measures that followed the crash, including the increase in fees for undergraduate programmes of up to £9,000 per year and the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Taken together, these factors fundamentally change the opportunity landscape for 16-24 year olds. At the same time, some also warn of the effects of a social recession (e.g. Lawson 2010). A "turbo-charged consumerism" fills the lives of young people with the message that life is defined by what you buy, not how you participate in society, study or work. Combined with the poverty and a sense of hopelessness experienced by many young people (Hayward and

Williams, 2011), this has been a significant contributing factor to the summer riots in English cities.

The cumulative effects of economic and social recessions and austerity policies serve to undercut the value of education for certain groups of young people, who are becoming less convinced that staying on in education and training will provide them with the opportunities and rewards they desire.

At the same time, the policies of the Coalition Government will adversely affect large sections of the cohort beyond the NEET category. Under the previous government the 'middle attainers', notably those who were on the threshold of five GCSE A\*-C grades at Key Stage 4, benefitted from the inter-related effects of a greater role for broad vocational courses and the generous equivalences given to these. The subsequent rises in measured attainment boosted the desire of the majority of the cohort to study post-16 and to progress to university (Hodgson and Spours, 2011a). Rising aspirations were not only helped by the EMA, but also by policies to widen participation in university, such as Aim Higher.

Arguably, all this is under threat from government policy. Measures such as the English Baccalaureate and changes to assessment and modularity will narrow general education and make it more selective. The Wolf Report on 14-19 vocational education (Wolf, 2011), with its focus on Apprenticeship, could downplay the role of broad vocational awards and the provision that lies between the academic and the work-based routes. Moreover, the looming cost and potential contraction of higher education will narrow options at 18+. As general education becomes more selective, the apprenticeship system is unable to expand at a sufficient rate because of the recession, and the progression pull of higher education weakens, policy threatens to overlook the needs of learners in the middle.

Radical organisational reform exacerbates the situation. With the Government encouraging greater institutional diversity, the 14+ educational landscape will become more competitive and less collaborative. The greater choice of institutions will result in less choice of provision (Fletcher and Perry, 2008), as schools and colleges vie for the most able students. The erosion of a co-ordinated, area-based approach to 14-19 provision, and the effects of funding cuts in further education are likely to adversely affect the more vulnerable groups – particularly 16-19 year olds on courses at or below Level 2 who have traditionally been badly served by the system.

These fundamental factors – the economic and social recessions; the effects of expenditure cuts on higher education; Coalition policy on curriculum, qualifications and assessment and its approach to institutional arrangements – threaten to act as a mutually reinforcing syndrome. They could serve to reduce individual motivation and

aspiration to progress in education and training for all but the most confident, well-resourced and high-performing learners in the academic route, or the small minority lucky enough to win a coveted, high quality apprenticeship place.

### **A national rescue plan for young people**

Given the scale of the problem, we need no less than a national rescue plan for young people comprising actions in the economy and labour market, curriculum, learning and civic engagement and institutional organisation.

### **The economy and the labour market**

A different way of running the economy has to lie at the centre of this plan. It will require a conception of economic growth that creates more high-value-added jobs, that utilises skills and that creates a sustainable future in which there may not be high levels of growth. What has been referred to

by some as Plan B (Compass, 2011) or a Green New Deal (New Economics Foundation, 2008-2011) – the establishment of a British investment bank, proper reform of the City, new taxation policies and the creation of jobs and green jobs in particular – would work for young people as well as for adults. To rapidly affect young people, a national rescue plan would have to include some additional strategies – the more rapid expansion of high quality apprenticeships based on greater degrees of labour market regulation, licence to practise and incentives for employers to take on more younger workers. We would also want to see an expansion of

higher education, particularly its vocational aspects, to provide higher study for those in work and in work-based learning. This approach to higher education would require the integration of economic innovation and regeneration strategies co-ordinated at the regional and sub-regional levels in what some refer to as high-skill eco-systems (Finegold, 1999; Hall and Lansbury, 2006).

An economic strategy of this type will take time to develop. In the meantime, we will have to think how we might assist young people into employment, involving the public, private and voluntary sectors. We need

**Meeting the diverse needs of all learners requires choice and specialisation, but this openness and flexibility will have to be balanced by a strong common core of learning that provides the basis for social cohesion and individual progression.**

to go beyond the raising of the participation age, which in some respects simply defers the problem of unemployment. It will be important to focus on what happens to young adults between the ages of 19-24 because it is during this period that they will need support to take the first steps in working life and to break the cycle of worklessness that has dogged many communities.

We would go as far as to suggest a national entitlement for all young people – providing they have meaningfully participated in education and training up until the age of 18 – to a guarantee of some form of employment or work experience as their first step into the labour market. We do not under-estimate the challenges that such a guarantee would pose, but we cannot simply leave the fate of young people to the vagaries of the market. Such a measure would require, amongst other things, the reversal of some or all of the planned public sector cuts. Not to undertake a measure of this type would only heap the costs of unemployment onto the state and erode the hopes of a generation of young people.

### **Curriculum, learning and civic engagement**

If we are expecting all young people to actively engage and succeed in education and training up to the age of 18, we need to consider what kind of knowledge, skills and experiences they should develop during this period. Based on the principles outlined earlier in this paper, the 14+ curriculum and qualifications system has to actively promote fairness, equality, democracy, sustainability, wellbeing, creativity and innovation. This suggests, for example, a more holistic and unified approach, which ensures that all learners experience a new synthesis of skills and knowledge to equip them for working and adult life as well as for further study. Meeting the diverse needs of all learners requires choice and specialisation, but this openness and flexibility will have to be balanced by a strong common core of learning that provides the basis for social cohesion and individual progression. Part of this core should include engagement with the world of work through a rich variety of entrepreneurial, technological, work-based and practical activities for all learners regardless of their level of attainment, institution or progression trajectory. A major priority should be to open up 'horizons for action' for the most disadvantaged and deprived learners.

While the work-related curriculum is no stranger to schools and colleges, the teaching profession has been somewhat detached from the economy, having had their attention fully occupied by examination results and a plethora of performance measures. Teachers and lecturers will have to take far more interest in the economy and how they help their students to progress into work, as well as into higher education.

However, this is not something that teachers and lecturers can do on

their own. It is through their participation in local networks that focus on 14+ progression, where they will meet with colleagues from further and higher education, employers and civil society organisations, that they will gain a greater understanding of the wider issues of transition at 18+. Through deliberation they will become more aware of the contribution they can make in the school/college curriculum that will make a difference to the progression of all young people.

Elsewhere we have suggested that the formation of 14+ Progression Boards at the local or sub-regional levels and involving all the post-16 providers and social partners will facilitate this learning process (Hodgson and Spours, 2011b). These new forms of organisation will not only have to cement their relationships with employers, but also sink their roots more deeply into local communities so that they can make a contribution to civic leadership and renewal.

We see this type of engagement as part of what Michael Fielding refers to as “democratic fellowship” (Fielding, M. forthcoming), in which learners are given a stronger voice in co-constructing the curriculum, but are also expected to take responsibility for their own learning and to engage more actively in the public realm. In this way, a generation of young people are seen less as victims and more as active contributors to a movement for societal change. Organisations such as the UK Youth Parliament are already paving the way.

### **Institutional organisation and a ‘local learning eco-system’**

In an era of increasing institutional diversity we have to find ways of binding people together in localities to provide the 14+ curriculum and progression pathways and the economic opportunities that will form part of the national rescue plan for young people. Our vision here is of a ‘local learning eco-system’ (LLE) that is led and nurtured at the local and sub-regional levels through, for example, 14+ Progression Boards that involve democratically elected representatives as well as a wider range of social partners.

This kind of collaboration at the local level will stress the interdependence between key stakeholders if they are to support the successful progression of 100 per cent of the learners in a locality. The concept of an eco-system spans political and administrative boundaries and is much more closely aligned with the provision of greater economic, social and cultural opportunities for young people (Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., 2009).

The driving force behind the formation of ‘high opportunity LLEs’ would be not only a common set of values, with the learners’ well-being at the centre, but also the result of national support and incentives. Our vision here is of a rebalanced education state in which local initiative and

resolution are supported by strong national frameworks that provide the social partners with the powers and resources to implement a national plan in the most creative way for their LLE. This we refer to as a form of “democratic localism” (Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., 2011; Spours, K. forthcoming).

## Conclusion

We have argued for a national rescue plan based on new ways of running the economy, a more holistic approach to curriculum and qualifications, a more expansive role for educational professionals and a step change in collaboration and community participation at the local level, focused around 14+ progression and transition opportunities for young people. In a climate of unprecedented economic instability, this national rescue plan is a recognition of the depth of the crisis. It has to provide a rallying call for all parts of society to come to the aid of all young people, as part of the wider aim of inter-generational justice.

Finally, we return to the question of whether education can change society. Our earlier answer was that it had a fundamental role to play, but only under certain conditions. A national rescue plan for young people, inspired by the vision of the Good Society, lays the basis of a way forward because it unites forces for change within and outside education.

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# Teacher education: Is the glass half-full?

## Jean Laight

Jean Laight is a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University and Course Leader for the Early Childhood Education, BA (Hons) (leading to QTS) four year route. She is currently studying for a PhD synthesising her research interests in teacher professionalism, trade unionism and gender.

**Abstract:** *This article examines some of the main developments in teaching and the impact they might have on the future of teacher education. The author argues that many of the current initiatives are not necessarily new or the right way to attract teachers to the profession. She explains how expertise in practitioner research and reflective practice could empower the teachers of tomorrow, and that the re-emerging practice of child-initiated learning in early years settings might be the key to innovative teaching and learning in the future.*

**T**eacher education faces many challenges; not least the constant changes that have occurred since the coalition Government came to power in May 2010. One of the most significant and detrimental effects has been that the Government continues to allow unqualified staff to take whole classes, resulting in fewer qualified teachers being employed in schools. Qualified teachers are seeing a reduction in their opportunities for work, whether full-time, part-time or fractional, and many are being forced to leave their chosen profession because they are not able to secure paid teaching work (Blatchford et al, 2011). How, then, can we recruit and retain students when we expect them to pay exorbitant fees, study for up to four years to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and a good honours degree, stay for a further year to secure a Masters' degree, and then expect them to join an employment lottery to establish themselves in their new professional career?

According to Gunter and Rayner (2007), the proposed transformation of the school workforce in England at the beginning of the 21st century is reminiscent of the performance-driven policies of the Thatcher Government. Subsequent New Labour governments built on this by emphasising elitist school leadership. This resulted in a widening gap

between those who had been trained for the main purpose of senior management, and other teachers and failed to take into account the need for consultation and reflection. They argue that the nature of the transformation appeared to be optimistic, in that some teachers' work would be reallocated to other adults, such as clerical staff and teaching assistants. In reality, it began to destroy teacher professionalism. Gunter and Rayner (2007) also argue that learning, teaching and pedagogy were not taken into account when the changes to the workforce were considered.

### **The erosion of professional identity**

In 2005, Tony Blair's Labour government presented the *Remodelling the School Workforce* document as a response to the stated problem of excessive workload that had been imposed upon teachers (Office for Standards in Education, 2005). This arose from the prior document, *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) which was signed by the Government and the unions, with the exception of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The document identified a seven-point plan to alleviate the burden of increasing

**Teachers have become disillusioned, frustrated and find it difficult to locate themselves within the new roles they have had to take on in order to accommodate the changes.**

workload for teachers, endeavouring to provide a work/life balance. It is argued (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010) that teacher professionalism began to be eroded by the employment of unqualified staff to teach whole classes, thus bringing the status of the teaching profession into question; the roles and identities of teachers have changed significantly.

Due to the rapid changes taking place, teachers found that their professional identity was becoming uncertain. This fits well with research by Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter (2010) who acknowledge these changes, stating that teachers' perceptions of themselves changed significantly with the onset of the remodelling agenda. Teachers no longer identified themselves as autonomous and responsible professionals; the introduction of social accountability and consumerism forced them to

question their professionalism and sense of purpose. Teachers had become disillusioned, frustrated and found it difficult to locate themselves within the new roles they had had to take on in order to accommodate the changes. Many teachers had left the profession through resignation or early retirement in order not to experience further alienation in their chosen profession.

There is further confusion as to the role and identity of the teacher where certain aspects of teachers' work have been brought into question. Gunter and Rayner (2007) suggest that the remodelling agenda was not necessarily a response to excessive teacher workload, but rather a means to deregulate the teaching profession. Busy teachers may not have been fully aware of the sub texts and challenges of the remodelling process and therefore accepted the changes at face value. By allowing other adults to take over what had traditionally been seen as teachers' work, teachers may have been parting with core work which could not be retrieved.

**Reflective practice allows teachers to regain confidence and take control of their own teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom.**

The language used by recent New Labour governments also underpinned the erosion of teacher professionalism. Denis Hayes (2011) considered the further de-professionalisation of teachers by the use of the term "teacher training" rather than "teacher education". He defended the use of the word education as a broad term to describe an academic discipline, rather than the notion of skill-based training. He also made the point that education is disappearing as a professional

subject, making way for "education studies". Furthermore, Hayes highlighted that, under the last New Labour Government, the word 'education' was missing from the title of the Government department for which it was responsible, the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This reflects the reality of the continual erosion of teacher professionalism and autonomy over the past 20 years. He compares the narrowness of the current standards-driven teacher training model with the breadth of teacher education, warning that the present government should be mindful that trained teachers rather than educated teachers will not be able to deliver education to children in school.

So what is the future of teacher education? Where is the hope for the future? Currently, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide the central source of teacher education in partnership with schools. Students – referred to as trainees – are prepared in HEIs to undertake school experience placements, through learning appropriate theory, pedagogy and

subject knowledge to support and enable them. Tutors from HEIs and teachers from the partnership schools work together to ensure that trainees are successful in their placements and that theory and practice synthesise to support and enrich the pupils' learning.

However, initiatives such as Teach First and School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) have been introduced to encourage the use of partnerships between schools and HEIs in the delivery of teacher education in a different way. Teacher education, therefore, is being presented as an apprenticeship model where schools become the focal point of the trainees' learning and HEIs supplement their practical experiences of teaching by supplying theory. Whitehead (2011) suggests that such employment based routes (EBR) do not provide the best means to high quality teacher education, citing the findings of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2010), which show that HEI led partnerships delivered outstanding provision compared to SCITT and EBR. Furthermore, she brings into question the motivation for these initiatives. Are they built on an evidence base or are they merely ideological? Although there may be opportunities for innovation within these initiatives, it is debatable whether they alone will help to improve government standards and increase the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

### **New initiatives, old ideas**

New initiatives, particularly on the scale we are currently witnessing, are unsettling, demotivating and stressful. However, it has been this way for many years. The Troops to Teachers initiative, for example, is not a new idea. After the First World War, a similar initiative was presented to enable ex-servicemen to gain employment; using the skills of discipline they had learned in the army to enforce discipline in schools. This initiative was strongly contested by the National Union of Teachers. At the NUT Annual Conference in 1919, there was concern that "the Executive be requested to ensure that the educational record of disabled soldiers and sailors as candidates for the teaching profession should be of some recognised standard, and that such candidates should show some aptitude for teaching before being entered for the profession" (NUT, 1919). Resonating with current debates, the following issues were considered at the same conference: "Freedom of the teacher", which discussed the problem of "the interference with teachers' private affairs"; and the need for "Certified teachers paid as such if recognised".

Similarly, the NUT raised concerns over a potential shortage of qualified teachers when the school leaving age was raised to 15 in 1946. It was estimated that 13,000 extra teachers would be needed to teach these extra pupils, resulting in a call for an Emergency Training Scheme to be

established. The NUT called for Training Colleges and University Training Departments to be established as quickly as possible to provide the educational and professional training needed to ensure that both pupils' learning and the integrity of the teaching profession did not suffer. The Minister for Education at the time was offering a "one-year course of training" to unqualified staff who as "uncertificated teachers .... had completed not less than five years' service in the capacity of an uncertificated teacher" (NUT, 1946). At the same time, experienced teachers were still serving in the Second World War, and the NUT made "continuous consideration and persistent representation" to government ministers to allow the early release of these teachers to relieve "the acute staffing shortages in the schools" (NUT, 1946). It was estimated that there would be "22,000 serving members returning from the forces" (NUT, 1946). This situation is uncomfortably reminiscent of the present time: qualified teachers are being forced into unemployment or casual work through private sector supply teaching agencies because teachers' work is being done by unqualified staff. In addition, initiatives which offer financial incentives to teach are supplanting the recognition that teaching is a vocation where a passion to teach is a greater driver than money alone.

With so many new initiatives, mixed messages and the demise of several agencies since the coalition Government came into power, the current state of education appears to be full of contradictions and confusion. However, teachers and teacher educators continue to steer a straight course towards enabling pupils to reach their full potential through creative and innovative learning opportunities. Not only will pupils be empowered, but in this way standards of education will be raised. In order to achieve this it is imperative that the status of the profession that delivers education is raised. The terms 'professional' and 'professionalism' have been misused and are commonly employed to describe a wide variety of occupations, thus further diluting the professional status of teachers. According to O'Neill (2011), "a profession is not a skill". She goes on to state that "trust has been replaced by accountability" and suggests that "we need to regain the ground and responsibility for quality control". Teachers and teacher educators need to regain the public's confidence, but in order to do this they need to regain their own confidence in their ability as professionals.

## **Conclusion**

How, then, can teacher education function in the future as an optimistic means to equip and welcome Newly Qualified Teachers into a thriving, productive and respected community of practice? According to Wrigley et al (ch 1, 2012), attitudes to teaching need to change. The buildings, the curriculum and the concepts regarding the transfer of knowledge still have

roots languishing in the industrial age. I would suggest that rather than trying to patch up a long-broken framework based on the myths of a bygone age, we must look forward to the reality of the changing global needs and dimensions in which we live. Student teachers need to see hope in the reality of teachers' lived experiences so that they, in turn, can provide hope for education and the future. Instead of witnessing teachers whose creativity is being stifled, whose individuality is being crushed and whose autonomy is shackled, students should be working towards the goal of being part of a "research-informed and research-informing profession" (Lingard and Renshaw, forthcoming). A lack of trust and an assumption that teaching is a "craft-based occupation" (Lingard and Renshaw, forthcoming) conspire to maintain control over a teacher's every move, making it more and more difficult to allow them to make a difference to the lives of children. Teacher educators must continue to recruit students whose passion to teach has the potential to break through the barriers that put constraints on teachers' work.

Reflective practice allows teachers to regain confidence and take control of their own teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom. Practitioner research enables and empowers teachers to develop personally and professionally. I believe that these are the tools to take teaching and teacher education forward rather than a 'painting by numbers' approach in which it is assumed that learning can be boiled down to lessons and that lessons can be simmered to the point of evaporation. Reflective practice informs good quality teaching and subsequent learning, setting a new cycle of reflection, planning, teaching and assessment in motion. Practitioner research goes hand in hand with reflective practice as one is constantly informing the other. The dominant political discourse needs to be questioned and debated, and only teachers who are informed by current research, and are part of a research-informing community, will be able to argue the case for a better quality of education in England.

According to Wrigley et al (2012, ch 16), rather than knowledge being perceived as the property of the teacher to be imparted to the pupil, there needs to be an understanding that the pupil already has a knowledge-base which can be used to inform learning. Recognising this point may improve pupils' learning, enable high quality teaching and, furthermore, engender appropriate behaviour in the classroom. Students of Early Childhood Education already see this approach in Early Years settings as the child-initiated approach to learning has re-emerged. Students experience for themselves the high levels of engagement from the children when they are actively encouraged to engage with the decision-making process and are able to learn through self-motivating, experiential learning. There is a gulf between current practice and this organic way of organising professional work, which cannot be easily transcribed and delegated. It will take time

for child-initiated learning to become embedded in the curriculum for pupils beyond the early years. However, deep and honest conversations leading to whole-school reflective practice will enable this practice to become a reality.

As a teacher educator, I am constantly delighted, amazed and inspired by my students. My hope rests with them in my new vision for education. I firmly believe that a passion for teaching and a desire to make a difference to the lives of children are the paramount, universal drivers which continue to draw students into the profession, in spite of the difficulties and challenges faced on a daily basis.

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# The future *is* inclusive

## Nigel Utton

Nigel Utton is a Union activist, Vice Chair of Kent Primary Head Teachers, teacher of Re-evaluation Counselling and Chair of Heading for Inclusion. In what time is left he is Head Teacher of Bromstone Primary School in Thanet. He is a contributory author of *Education, Disability and Social Policy* (2011) London, Policy Press

**Abstract:** *In this article Nigel Utton offers a critique of current Government policy which he believes is leading to greater social divisions. He argues passionately for a new compulsory and inclusive state education system, the main purpose of which is the creation of participatory, self-regulated, democratic world citizens who are driven by a deep rooted moral purpose.*

*DEAR TEACHER, I AM THE SURVIVOR OF A CONCENTRATION CAMP. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses and women and babies shot and burned by high school graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students to become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human (Guinot, H.)*

**F**or over four years I worked as teacher-in-charge of provision for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in a mainstream primary school near Portsmouth. The children were all statemented for their behaviour and emotional state. Their behaviour was extreme – sometimes violent. Despite insufficient resources most of the children were effectively included in mainstream classes for most of the time. All of the children were from socially deprived backgrounds, many of them had been physically and/or sexually abused, and yet all of them had retained a sense of their own power. This was quite frightening when used against others – and was often the reason the child had been statemented and excluded from previous schools. It was, however, inspiring when used for the good of all. One of the boys (whose family had been life-threateningly affected by the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland) was consistently elected as his class school

council representative because his classmates knew he would be assertive in putting forward his views.

In our technologically rich, global society people all around the world are beginning to realise their power in combating inequality and exploitation. This is a serious threat to the status quo. My goal was for the young people to become self-regulated, participatory citizens. We achieved it by treating them ‘normally’ – with the expectation that they would be ‘normal’ children. They needed to cry and shout and scream about what had happened to them – they sometimes needed to physically fight a punch bag to get out their intense anger at the way they had been mistreated; they needed to know that this was ‘normal’. (All teachers and head teachers would benefit from being able to release their pent up emotions in this way). They did not need to be locked away in a special school with dozens of other children with the same intense feelings. They needed to be supported in their local school with local friends playing a central role in their community.

In my current school we include children with a wide range of physical, sensory, learning and emotional impairments. Ofsted rated our school ‘outstanding’ for the social, moral, cultural and spiritual aspects of

## **They did not need to be locked away in a special school with dozens of other children with the same intense feelings.**

learning. (The inspector for special needs said that our inclusion was “second to none”). One child works 1:1 with an adult, only joining his class occasionally; a small group of children like to work in a small nurture group with high adult-to-child ratios; one child has a sign language interpreter (currently all staff and children are receiving deaf awareness and British Sign Language training) – another has assistants to help him learn Braille. Many of our children are not white English and yet racist incidents (amongst the children) are practically non-existent. (That is not necessarily the case amongst some of the parents).

I know first-hand that inclusion works – I see it every day. Works, in that, by including all the children from a local area and by thinking globally and acting locally – we are helping the whole world to become a better place to live. We are breaking down social barriers and helping all people to feel a part and to find their place.

### The future for religious schools

For a year I was a member of the NUT's working party on faith schools. It was a fascinating body to be part of. It heard evidence from, and posed questions to, representatives of different faith groups, humanists and the Secular Society. Having worked in Church of England schools I had an insider's perspective. Since their revolution the French have kept religion strictly out of education. My experience in helping to form Hampshire's concept based approach to *learning about* religion starting from the child's experience and ending with their application of new knowledge to their

own lives, taught me the value of religious education as a crucial element of developing an understanding of world history, politics and ethics. I personally would give that a more *central* role in the curriculum.

I agree with the French, however, in that the state should play no part in religious teaching. There are opportunities for parents with a religious belief to teach their children about their particular religion *outside of the normal school day*. Because many of us in England were brought up as default Christians we accept that religious songs, Easter celebrations and Christmas plays are a

harmless part of a child's education. This is a cultural arrogance which needs to be challenged and replaced with a questioning respect for all beliefs. I never again want to hear of children having to stay out of whole-school assemblies because the 'broadly Christian' nature of the assembly does not fit in with their world view. Children from any belief system should be able to attend all activities in their local school without fear of ridicule or feeling excluded.

### Heading for inclusion

I set up the organisation Heading for Inclusion with disability activist and author, Micheline Mason. It is an organisation for head teachers and senior school leaders "dedicated to the promotion and provision of inclusive education". Our aim is simple – "every child to go to their local school". Adding the word 'state' would clarify my personal position further. Taken to a logical conclusion this would require a revolutionary change to the provision of education in England – and indeed the world.

As members of a global society all children have a right to a free, state, comprehensive education along with their peers regardless of their sex, race, physical, sensory or intellectual impairment – and certainly regardless of the economic status of their parents. If we are to create a

**We cannot allow an opt-out from society. Participation in the neighbourhood school needs to be compulsory.**

world where all people are equal then we need to start life in our neighbourhood school. Clearly with the social inequalities that currently exist, this will not result in an immediate end of social injustice – it must, however, be the long term goal of any educational system which hopes to be fit for purpose in the post-capitalist, post information-revolution world.

I know that some parents currently choose to educate their children 'other than at school', and many parents pay for their children to go to elite schools which keep out children from less affluent backgrounds. We cannot allow an opt-out from society. Participation in the neighbourhood school needs to be compulsory.

My vision is for all schools to follow the pioneering example of A.S. Neill's Summerhill (Neill, A.S., 1953) where children learnt to be democratic, respectful world citizens able to contribute to their local communities and the wider world.

Our new schools need to be fully state funded, fully inclusive and resourced to meet the needs of the individual children. We now know so much about how children learn best – different learning styles, different rates of progress, different personality types, interests and paths along the learning journey. We need schools to be 'pioneering', experimental, courageous, inspirational. We need them to challenge stereotypes and prejudice not by giving half hour lessons in citizenship, democracy, happiness, kindness, social responsibility – but to truly live those values. On one of the days I visited Summerhill, staff and pupils, with equal voice, were voting on whether there should be a half term holiday – they decided not to have one. That is the kind of school which our children deserve.

### **How we got where we are today**

"...the position of England as a first-class power depended on sea power and education power." (Curtis, S.J. and Boulton, M.E.A., 1964)

In 1895 the educationist Michael Sadler was given the post of Director of the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports. His remit was to be the intelligence department of the Board of Education – to find out why countries like the United States and Germany were out-distancing England in trade and industry. A hundred years later we are asking the same questions.

Until recently the general direction of educational change in England has been towards a universal, inclusive, comprehensive system. We never reached that Nirvana as even the state system has remained elitist and fragmented with different local authorities applying different methodologies and forms of organisation. In my own County of Kent, children at age 11 are still subjected to stressful high stakes 'intelligence'

tests to determine their 'ability' to go on to an 'academic' grammar school or to the 'less academic' high school. This system ignores decades of evidence that such tests are flawed and biased towards children from higher socio-economic groups but most shockingly ignores the latest research into the development of the brain and the nature of 'intelligences'.

The 'Every Child Matters' agenda of the previous Labour Government started to give schools the space to think beyond league tables and high stakes testing – and *as well* to think about the effect of their organisation on the local community; on the children's attitudes to each other and their relationship to the wider world. Schools saw the beginnings of effective multi-agency working – although not perfect – they were starting to realign their thinking to work more closely with social and health services and the police. Although there was a tangible cynicism concerning the 'community cohesion' agenda it was a step towards an education system which was making positive strides toward social improvement. (The

reality is that the majority of schools were already doing this work without any hope of recognition or reward).

## **We will see an initial flourishing of innovation followed by fragmentation and an increase in opportunity for the rich**

The obsessive emphasis on high stakes testing, competition between schools and a punitive system of school inspection since the 1980s has forced schools, often against the better judgment of the teachers, parents and children, to focus on raising

'standards'. In reality this means teaching children to pass tests. (Tests which continue to be culturally biased towards middle/owning class, white children). This has led to a well documented narrowing of the curriculum and the disengagement by many of our young people. Comparative international studies consistently confirm that English children are not as 'happy' as children in many other countries. This, coupled with the equally well documented inequalities in pay and prospects, is inextricably leading to a crisis point in our society.

On entering office the current Government rapidly distanced itself from any socially oriented policies and practices. The DfE website quickly 'archived' many documents. Instead, despite being in the midst of a world economic crisis, it has chosen to focus significant time and financial resource on fundamentally reorganising the system. Historians looking back will, no doubt, call this the period of privatisation – when private companies took over the role of the state in providing education.

Writing in 2011, it is too soon to foresee the results of such a fundamental realignment. Evidence from Sweden suggests that we will see an initial flourishing of innovation followed by fragmentation and an increase in opportunity for the rich while schools left in Local Authority control – largely in areas of deprivation – will be starved of resources resulting in greater disparity and lowering of opportunity. A simple search on ‘Sweden’ in the Times Educational Supplement website between 2009-10 gives the following headlines: *Taking The Eden Out Of Sweden*, *Swedish Smiles Turn Sour As Rift Widens Where Equity Once Ruled* and *Swedish Warning: Do Not Repeat Our Free School Errors*.

Richard Vaughan in the *Times Education Supplement* March 2010 quotes Ann-Christin Larsson of the Swedish teachers’ union *Lararforbundet* as saying:

“Sweden’s free school movement has increased segregation, encouraged secrecy between schools and given unfair advantages to independents.” (Vaughan, R. 2010)

Our country cannot afford to increase the already unacceptable disparities between rich and poor. A report in 2006 on *Health and Social Inequalities in English Adolescents* repeatedly demonstrated how the relative affluence of parents effects children’s health and happiness: from the rates of life-threatening unprotected sex to the enjoyment of school and even the numbers of close friendships. (Morgan, A. et al. 2006)

### **Institutionalised ...isms**

How is it that in a society of over sixty million people so many members of the current Cabinet went to Eton school? Why do so many children still spend hours in taxis travelling to segregated schooling because of physical, sensory or intellectual impairments? Why do black children, gay young people, Muslims and Jews continue to face constant verbal harassment and physical attack?

For centuries England played a significant and pivotal role in the enslavement of Black people from Africa. Not only was our economic world dominance rooted in this history – our very attitudes and social organisation have been shaped by institutionalised racism. Classism, sexism, anti-semitism, disablism, the oppression of young people and many other prejudices all form the bedrock of our current system. We should also not forget the insidious influence of the Eugenics movement which continues to fundamentally and unquestioningly underpin our current educational thinking:

*“Eugenics appears to account for inequality as an inevitable condition of humanity. It began with the attempt to replace superstition and religion with objective*

*reason based on actual evidence – the scientific approach. Not a bad idea in itself, but unfortunately open to manipulation by the powerful in a class-dominated society to justify their privileged position. For example, soon after the publication of ‘The Descent of Man’ by Charles Darwin, his followers began to misapply his theory of natural selection to race and class.” (Mason, M. 2000)*

In 2009 I led a whole school assembly on respect and kindness and on ending homophobia on Idaho Day (International Day Against Homophobia). Within days I was ridiculed in several national papers; there was a protest outside my school by Christian Voice, and I even received written death threats. It was a very frightening time.

Following the publicity I equally received heartfelt messages of support from across the world, many from gay men who had been constantly bullied when they were in school. For all the prejudice and discrimination that remains there is an equal and opposite push for equality and tolerance.

### **The turning point**

In his book *The Turning Point* (1982), Fritjof Capra, from his perspective as a quantum physicist, proposes an alternative to what he calls the ‘Cartesian’ organisation of the economic, political and education systems which currently dominate much of the world. Capra says:

“According to the systems view, the economy is a living system composed of human beings and social organizations in continual interaction with one another and with the surrounding ecosystems on which our lives depend. Like individual organisms, ecosystems are self-organizing and self-regulating systems in which animals, plants micro-organisms, and inanimate substances are linked through a complex web of interdependencies involving the exchange of matter and energy in continual cycles. Linear cause-and-effect relationships exist only very rarely in these ecosystems, nor are linear models very useful to describe the functional interdependencies of the embedded social and economic systems and their technologies”. (Capra, F. 1982)

Capra’s view, one which I share, is that there is a new post-capitalist world emerging, a form of politics and social organisation which more accurately conforms to the natural order seen in effective ecological and physical systems. Our schools need to change fundamentally, not merely by tinkering with curricula or teaching methodologies – but by truly empowering young people to proactively embrace the challenges of the twenty-first century.



## Ending the oppression of young people.

As Harvey Jackins says:

“It takes a great deal of mistreatment to change a potentially marvellously functioning newborn human into the distressed, poorly functioning adult which our society typically produces”.  
(Jackins, H. 1997)

At best our schools are benevolent dictatorships which treat children with kindness and respect and which give them some of the tools to cope with life outside and achieve economic stability. At worst we treat children with little respect; ignoring their opinions and interests and crushing their dreams. We are training them to be compliant adults – preparing them to accept the status quo without question.

I recently visited an ‘outstanding’ school in a deprived area of London. The head teacher told us that she was meeting with her school council. It was apparently the first time that year (in the summer term) and she was only doing so because she wanted her governors to see the school council in operation so that they could report it in their meeting... so that Ofsted would see that she had sought the views of the children.

The oppression of young people is the tool by which society first teaches passivity. As young people we were all defeated. Most of us remain in a numbed state of perceived powerlessness. Any attempts by young people to assert their authority or make their views known are quickly squashed by the school system. In many schools we line children up in silence – an historical remnant of the military conditioning in our public school system; we forbid them to wear their own clothes; we stop them from playing; we stifle their tears when they are upset or hurt. We order their day into learning blocks which suit us as adults. We dictate what they will learn, when, where and with whom.

There has never been a more exciting time to be an educator. Our knowledge of how people learn is expanding exponentially. As leaders of young people we have the opportunity to shape a new future of schooling. The time has come to remove the shackles of powerlessness; empower our young people to take charge of their lives and work together to build a new post-capitalist world.

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# Teaching out prejudice – celebrating equality

**Abstract:** *In this article the authors examine the potential of the classroom as an agency for change rather than a seat of conformity. They question why some schools are not safe spaces for their communities and look at former and current successes and failures. Addressing The Equality Act and other drivers for change, they argue for a new classroom that eliminates prejudice by celebrating equality and diversity in an inclusive environment. They believe that the struggle for LGBT equality is everyone's struggle for equality. The new classroom will take on that struggle by making LGBT people visible, usual and vital.*

**D**o you want to see a school that has eradicated homophobia and transphobia? Go to Stoke Newington School in Hackney and see the fantastic work that has been done, beginning in 2005 with the school's first celebration of LGBT History Month, through to 2010 when the school became an Equality and Diversity Training Centre (Learner E., 2010). Do you want to see a school where the word 'gay' is never used to mean dysfunctional and where children celebrate the achievements of LGBT people through the ages? Try Prince Henry's Grammar School in Leeds (Lillington C., 2011), where an LGBT week was celebrated by staff and students alike. (Don't worry; it's not a grammar in the tripartite sense). Want to see a same-sex partnership celebrated in a primary school? Go to Jenny Hammond where *And Tango Makes Three* was turned into an opera (Leytonstone, 2009). Look at the pioneering work of *No Outsiders* (No Outsiders Project Team, 2010 and DePalme, R. and Atkinson, E, 2009) and the range of books about the diversity of families that can be read in many a primary school these days. Thanks to the work of pioneers like Elly Barnes, Chris Lillington and John Harold there is some great work out there and we should all be inspired by it. Their children will certainly benefit from what they have learned.

## Tony Fenwick

Tony Fenwick is an English teacher and is co-chair of LGBT History Month and Schools OUT, an organisation which supports LGBT people in education. He is an equalities trainer and is President and Equalities Officer for Luton NUT.

## Sue Sanders

Sue Sanders was a founder member and is co chair of School's OUT and LGBT History Month, which she instigated. She founded CHRYSALIS, which delivers diversity training. She was a member of the NUT working party on LGBT issues and is a member of Southwark Anti Homophobia Forum and a member of the LGBT Advisory Group to the Metropolitan Police.

But pioneering work in equality and diversity in our schools is the exception rather than the rule. There is a surfeit of reports and articles detailing the extent of homophobia in schools. These include: The Stonewall School Report (Hunt, R. and Jenson, J., 2007); the TSN/TES teachers' survey (Teachers Support Network, 2007); and the NUT Prevalence of Homophobia (PoH) Survey (NUT, 2008-2010) that is currently being carried out around the country.

The latest PoH survey, carried out by Luton NUT in summer 2011, revealed that 94.5 per cent of teachers have seen a homophobic incident at least once a term, 87.5 per cent have seen a specific pupil being targeted and 29 per cent of teachers have been on the receiving end of homophobic abuse themselves. Transphobia is not measured so well for a range of reasons; the three most prevalent being that: trans children didn't officially exist in schools until the Equality Act of 2010; Stonewall doesn't cover the T in LGBT; and there is a hierarchy of inequality, with trans people being below LGB people in the pecking order.

Our LGBT teachers are all too often in the closet. Our LGBT post-graduates are eschewing teaching as a career because they anticipate it will be a hostile environment. Moreover, our LGBT children are still committing suicide, self-harming, under-performing and dropping out at an alarming rate. The *It Gets Better* campaign (It Gets Better Project 2010-11, It Gets Better Today Project 2010-11) that developed over the past year is a response to that call for help.

Why is this? Why are we at Schools OUT, together with other equalities activists – including the LGBT Advisory Committee of the NUT – still fighting ignorance and prejudice against LGBT people in schools? Eight years after its repeal, we cannot still be blaming Section 28 (Great Britain, 1988). In any case, a survey held by the BBC in September 2011 found that 66 per cent of schools do not have an everyday act of worship (ComRes, 2011), despite being legally obliged to do so under the 1988 Education Act (the one that brought us Section 28). If only 66 per cent of schools had defied Section 28, which didn't apply directly to them anyway!

We can't keep blaming the National Curriculum. It has been freed up to allow themed weeks and to celebrate diversity in all subject areas. In any case, the current Government is throwing the doors open to free schools; selling the concept largely on the basis that they won't have to teach the National Curriculum. Faith schools have some wiggle room if they wish to shirk their duties but there aren't that many of them.

### **Drivers for change**

The drivers for change include the National Curriculum itself, the General Teaching Council for England's ruling that teachers have a duty to promote equality of opportunity, the Ofsted guidelines that include addressing

homophobia/transphobia, and provision to reduce grades if schools are not fulfilling their obligations to equal opportunities and making sure schools are safe. The part of the Equality Act known as the Public Sector Equality Duty obligates schools to protect their LGB (sexual orientation) and T (gender reassignment) pupils from bullying (among the other seven protected characteristics), to promote equal opportunities and to report back on what they have done and what it has achieved. Ofsted and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) will oversee the duty and ensure that it is met.

More important than these drivers for change however are the human ones. School children are coming out as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans in their teens. They need to know that they will be safe and their schools need to be ready. There are more same-sex and trans parents and they want to see a curriculum and a classroom that represents their family; alongside the hetero and gender normative ones. LGB teachers want to come out and know that they will be protected by their employers if they do so. Trans teachers want jobs. According to the Luton Prevalence of Homophobia Survey, 60 per cent of teachers want whole-school equality and diversity training in their school. Why shouldn't every teacher in the land have equality and diversity training? Every police officer in the land does.

It's time for a new classroom.

## Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristics. They are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- faith and belief
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- sex
- sexual orientation

How many people are in just one characteristic? *Very few* is the obvious answer. A pregnant married (or divorced) woman is immediately in at least three. She may be black, Muslim and be currently disabled. That will bring her up to six. She could be discriminated against on any one, two, three or all of those grounds. One of the main principles of the single equality act is that it recognises that people can belong to more than one characteristic and could suffer from discrimination on more than one set of grounds. The range of equalities legislation that existed previously couldn't do this.

Here is a hypothetical teaser. Let's imagine a lesbian mother who needs to use a wheelchair. She wants to attend a mothers' self-help group. When she enquires about it, she is told it is for married mothers only and that it is held on the first floor of a building that only has stairs. Under how many

characteristics is she suffering discrimination? (Answer: three) Until last year she would have to choose one and ignore the other two if she brought a case. So there is a practical application.

There are still issues. The current legislation will only recognise discrimination on a maximum of two grounds since it is claimed that more than two will over-complicate things. Of more concern is that there are still groups left out of the list of characteristics, such as Gypsies, Romany people and Travellers. Although caste is recognised, social class and economic inequality are not. But overall, the legislation presents a challenge to our institutions to become more inclusive.

### **What being inclusive means**

There is a practical application in the classroom too. Let's teach our children that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans children are also black, disabled, older, have a faith and so on; not just in the PSHE lesson or during assembly, but through the curriculum wherever we can. If we wish to be creative and progressive teachers, that is what we should be doing.

As equalities activists and trainers in Schools OUT we are often asked whether LGBT teachers should come out and, if so, why? Why is it anyone

else's business anyway? There are several answers to these questions. To the first the answer is yes, as long as it is safe to do so, which we know is not always the case. Out and open staff – self identified not just as lesbian gay bisexual or trans, but disabled, Muslim and Christian too – are a crucial part of the fabric in schools.

If members of staff do not feel comfortable in bringing all of themselves in to the school and classroom they are less effective workers and their students lack role models that serve to eradicate and challenge the negative stereotypes that fuel the prejudice and

discrimination. As to the second; if you don't come out as LGBT, people will assume that you are not – and that makes LGBT people invisible in schools.

Consequently, if you do not you are living at least a partial lie – and that is no good for anyone's physical and mental health. So it is nobody else's business. Fair enough. But when we walk through the school wearing a wedding ring we tell the children we are married. When we wear a crucifix, or a particular kind of headwear, we tell them our religion. Through our

**Why are we at Schools OUT, together with other equalities activists ... still fighting ignorance and prejudice against LGBT people in schools? Eight years after its repeal, we cannot still be blaming Section 28**

clothing, symbols and personal artefacts we all tell people something about ourselves. We would rightly object if we were told we had to remove these articles. So do we not have a right to tell people that we are lesbian, gay or bisexual? We have a right and a responsibility to do so.

The school has a responsibility to make it safe for us to do so. Schools need to do more so that members of the protected characteristics feel comfortable being open in the workplace – and much work will need to be done by schools to make it safe for staff to feel they can come out or be open. It is demanded of them by the Equality Act and unions will need to explore how to challenge the informal culture that so often enables able-bodied heterosexuals who share a Christian background – whether they embrace it or reject it – to share their lives in the staff rooms and classrooms with aplomb and ease and express shock when others from other communities try to do so.

Students need to see and hear the diversity of the community through the adults around them; though in many schools they exist but are hidden by both casual and formal culture. Schools cannot send messages of inclusion to their students and their students' parents if they insist that the identity of their staff is unreal.

### **How the classroom works**

We need to make LGBT people visible. A phobia is an irrational fear. When we are hidden and invisible people do not trust us. When we are in the media, in the family and in the community we are known and the fear subsides. When we are in the curriculum and people read about us in textbooks and hear about us in lessons, the fear in schools subsides and LGBT people realise that they are not isolated and alone. That has been the main focus of LGBT History Month since it began in 2004 – to make us visible in the classroom. As the opening paragraph of this piece asserted, there are many schools that are demonstrating this. But too many are not. This is unacceptable and needs to change.

It is essential to assert the sexual orientation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in history. We must say that Carol Ann Duffy is a lesbian. We must say that Frieda Kahlo was bisexual and disabled and that Wilfred Owen was gay. Otherwise children will assume that they are not and that renders us invisible. Worse, if and when they find out the truth they may wonder why we did not tell them. Thus by not informing them we are feeding the homophobia.

Once we are recognised and visible the new classroom can develop through the introduction of a curriculum that weaves LGB and T people into the tapestry of society. This is a process we call 'usualising'. In practice, when we 'usualise' LGBT people we mention them as part of the lesson. So if there is a business studies lesson about a number of firms, we include a

company that is LGBT run or provides a service to the LGB or T community. When we 'usualise' LGBT people in the classroom we are not inviting discussion about LGBT issues because they are not among the aims and objectives of the lesson. We are, if you like, giving LGBT its place at the table.

Some lessons will involve talking about LGB and T people in particular and discussion of LGBT issues. We call this process 'actualising'. When we

'actualise' LGBT people we include them among the aims and objectives of the lesson and seek to increase awareness and knowledge of LGBT people. This could be a part of a lesson; for example, a discussion of the treatment of Alan Turing within a wider lesson on his mathematical and technical achievements.

Or it could be a whole lesson; such as looking at what the push and pull factors for LGB people might be that lead them to settle in large numbers in certain UK cities as part of a scheme of work in geography. This helps to

promote LGBT equality and mainstreams our position in the discourse of the subject being studied. We are, if you like, giving pupils a taste of what it is to be LGBT.

Some lessons or events will involve a self identified member of the community working with the students. It might be an out member of staff, who works every day in the school as a teacher, support worker administrator, maintenance worker or caterer. Alternatively it might be someone from outside, such as a visitor or specific guest or theatre company who have been invited to explore this issue. We call this process 'realising'. This is to some extent the triumphant phase in the method; when a school can assert that it is a safe space, demonstrating it through the use of real LGBT people to talk through and discuss issues with pupils. It is also the moment when schools demonstrate that they are truly inclusive by rejecting the heteronormativity that has previously permeated the walls of the institution.

### **How we got there**

Over the past two years, Schools OUT has developed 'The Classroom', a website with teachers in mind. It contains lesson plans produced by professional LGBT teachers, covering all subjects and all key stages, as well as resources and ideas from other sites. *The Classroom* began as a one stop

**When we are in the curriculum and people read about us in textbooks and hear about us in lessons, the fear in schools subsides and LGBT people realise that they are not isolated and alone.**



shop for busy teachers who wanted to find something about LGBT issues in their subject; something between a reference library and a labour saving device in the face of new legislation. But as we developed it, *The Classroom* evolved into something much bigger: a methodology which positively promotes equality and diversity by embedding us in the education process.

Through 'visibilising', 'usualising', 'actualising' and 'realising' LGBT people – and other protected characteristics – we can challenge prejudice in an active and dynamic way. The project was first envisaged by Sue Sanders, who persuaded the Training and Development Agency to fund it. Many teachers contributed and the secondary and primary content was developed and edited by Tony Fenwick and Stephen Boyce respectively. The graphics, the design and the methodology as described on the website is for the most part the work of David Watkins, a teacher and founder of 'A Day in Hand', whose input, visions and hard work were essential to what you see today.

## Conclusion

There is a word of warning. As this is being written, Ofsted's brief is being changed. Part of the Government's zealous campaign to turn most if not all of our schools into academies and free schools involves the notion that schools will be freed up from LEA influence to manage their own discipline. One newspaper headline has even espoused the return of the cane (O, Grady, S. and Sheldrick, G., 2011).

The current coalition has a lot of LGBT members and a lot of LGBT support. It seeks to eradicate homophobia and transphobia in schools and in sport. We've had the documentation and we've had the charter. But some of us fear it seeks to do that through making it easier to punish the bullies rather than through any pro-active strategy. This would be reactive and regressive.

Sanctions for bullies are, of course, essential. Much bullying is in reality hate crime or even child abuse and its perpetrators must learn to understand that they will not get away with it. But if we see dealing with LGBT issues in schools only as a question of stopping bullies, we will never end homophobia or transphobia. We need pro-active strategies that help us to teach – and educate out all forms of prejudice. *The Classroom* seeks to do that through the LGBT lens. Use it. Comment on it. Keep it as your own and promote it to others. Because there are people out there who wish to destroy it, and we mustn't let them.

## Note

Elly Barnes is a music teacher and member of the Schools OUT Crew. She is a pioneer of LGBT equalities teaching and runs Equality and Diversity training sessions for teachers at Stoke Newington school. Chris Lillington

is deputy Head at Prince Henry's Grammar School in Leeds and John Harold is Deputy Head at Jenny Hammond Primary in Waltham Forest. John helped pioneer the *No Outsiders* project.

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# A young teacher's view of the profession

**Abstract:** *In this article young teacher Usman Baig-Ali explains why, despite all the challenges of teaching, and the particular pressures facing young teachers, he is proud to be a member of the teaching profession.*

## Usman Baig-Ali

Usman Baig-Ali is a primary school teacher with a teaching and learning responsibility for ICT. He has a Masters in the Psychology of Education. He is Vice-President of the Manchester Teachers' Association and an elected member of the NUT Young Teachers' Advisory Committee and Young Teachers' Steering Group.

"Education isn't a matter of life and death it is much more important than that."

*Anonymous.*

**D**FES, SAT, PPA, AST, TTA, SEN, MFL, PPM, MLD, AFL, ECM, SENTA, VAK, TP, Ofsted, TA, SIP, AA, SPLD, ECAR... and counting. As a young teacher I remember being bombarded with a worrying number of acronyms that I had to familiarise myself with.

Before I started teaching, even before I trained, I was saddled with a student debt of tens of thousands of pounds. I was the unfortunate product of a Conservative government in popular retreat and a New Labour Government in power. Had I been a year younger I would not have had to endure the discomfort of tuition fees and student loans, I would instead have enjoyed a student grant, an alarmingly alien concept today.

The present coalition Government is a frightful reminder of that Conservative legacy. There is at least some consolation in being one of the final year group of primary-aged children to have avoided Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs). My generation lives in an era of unprecedented debt and recession with job losses and cuts in services and funding leading to economic woe and political depression. Re-branded by government spin as the 'credit crunch', one would think it was a cereal we were being fed instead of a harsh reality.

The economic context in which I entered the teaching profession is significant as it is far removed from what I perceived to lie ahead of me as a public servant and educator. With retrospect one wonders if my

undergraduate study of law and aspirations of becoming a barrister were a sounder financial pursuit?

My teacher training was organised through the Graduate Teacher Programme, a programme designed for post-graduates and professionals who want to follow an employment-based training programme. Like all trainee and experienced teachers alike, I experienced the difficulty of maintaining a work-life balance. The work load, even for someone who is not long out of his final year at university, was challenging at the best of times and relatively back-breaking most of the time! There was little life outside school and work took its place as the dinner guest from hell! I recall working late after school, then working later in the evening, followed by more work early the following morning. Lunches were replaced by meetings and even grocery shopping trips were marred by thoughts of lesson planning. Sunday became a new work day and school holidays became opportunities to recover from mental and physical fatigue and to do more work.

### **An ever increasing workload**

I came to the frightening conclusion that regardless of the amount of time, there would always be something more to do. Work in this sense seemed to create more work, a strange phenomena... Speaking to young teachers across the North West, workload is a major concern, as it is for most teachers. It affects and disaffects all types of teachers, young and old across all phases and sectors, although for young teachers it is compounded by inexperience and access to fewer support mechanisms. While one could argue that this is a problem common to most professions, when coupled with other pressures specific to teachers, such as the substantial number of observations, often challenging pupil behaviour and constant new initiatives, to name but a few; the unacceptable and scandalous result is the loss of half of all young teachers who leave teaching within their first five years (Carroll, C., 2010).

The average working week for teachers is in the region of 50-60 hours (Gray, S., 2009) and that is a modest projection. This average fluctuates during weeks when there is a parents' evening, report writing, a new initiative to be delivered or a school inspection. Having undergone a full Ofsted inspection whilst writing this article, I calculate that the hours I worked that week were in the region of 70-80.

The reality of a teacher's working week is directly correlated with physical illness (Welsh Government, 2011), mental ill health (Lighthouse, 2011) and strained relationships with significant others and families. Gastroenteritis, stress, flu, influenza, pharyngitis, colds, laryngitis, acute tonsillitis, ulcers, insomnia, migraine... I recall having a snowball of illnesses in my first teaching year as my body came to grips with working

in a public environment. Can having to carry Paracetamol, Ibuprofen, throat lozenges and high doses of vitamin C effervescent in order to carry out one's job be considered a reasonable state of affairs?

"What is good for teachers is good for children, what is bad for teachers is bad for children" is a mantra I have heard time and time again within the corridors of the National Union of Teachers. Perhaps we should argue for

an 'Every Teacher Matters' agenda on the lines of the 'Every Child Matters' initiative! I wonder if the newly-elected government would be interested in teachers "successfully enjoying and achieving, staying safe and enjoying economic well being"; is this a cry too far?

**I remember speaking to one colleague who simply but effectively construed that the best policy to deal with workload was to "just say no", I wondered if this would actually work, are we victims of our own undoing?**

I remember speaking to one colleague who simply but effectively construed that the best policy to deal with workload was to "just say no". I wondered if this would actually work, are we victims of our own undoing? The situation has improved as I have become more organised and confident yet the very

nature and demands of teaching are physically, mentally and emotionally challenging. This compares with few professions but the comparison would certainly include social work and hospital doctors.

### **Culture of blame**

Among the mountain of advice disseminated to an education novice one piece that stands out in my mind was "to love your job, love your class but make sure you have union membership – just in case!" So a teacher must love, and give their life and soul to their career but be prepared to face accusations which undermine their dedication to their profession and trust.

My first experience of this was when an accusation was directed at a colleague. Regardless of the outcome of the enquiry that followed, the manner in which it was handled left the colleague distressed to the point of illness. He/she had no option but to leave his/her post and subsequently the teaching profession. This alarmed me massively.

An ongoing debate within the National Union of Teachers currently is "who is a young teacher?" This discussion has reached the agenda of the Union's annual conference. The Union classifies young teachers as those up until the age of 35, regardless of the number of years of their service. This

means that a new or recently qualified teacher and a deputy head could potentially both fall under the umbrella term of a young teacher.

This is an interesting discussion because whilst most issues, such as debt, gaining a footing on the housing ladder, dealing with disruptive children, bullying and workplace harassment, gaining employment and workload are concerns for all teachers, some, such as student loans or the removal and restriction of first buyer mortgage schemes are more specific to new, young teachers. Clearly there are distinct differences between newly-qualified teachers and those several years into their career as well as between active and newly-active Union members. Nevertheless I feel this discussion needs to be had by young teachers themselves to ensure it is accurate, representative and transparent for the young teachers, who make up a large section of the Union.

Despite the misgiving I have expressed in this article I feel proud and empowered to be a teacher because of the very nature of the profession I have chosen to follow. Partly this is due to the work and experiences I have enjoyed within the NUT, a union which advocates fairness, equality and freedom of education, acts as protector of both teachers and their students and is a defender of collective trade unionism. It is imperative that the NUT remains strong and united, with the ability to support our members. We must be active and vocal within each school and division. We can ensure this by being organised, democratic and by actively campaigning for a free and fair education system, both for our children and for our profession.

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# Urban classroom culture

## Roxy Harris

Roxy Harris is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's College, London. He has worked extensively with teachers on questions of language and education. He is the author of *New Ethnicities and Language Use* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

**Abstract:** *This article describes research that is relatively unusual in that it is based on a careful recording of the everyday classroom life of London comprehensive school students and teachers, complemented by the detailed reflections of teachers themselves on these scenarios. This has produced a teacher training and CPD publication.*

**T**his article reports on part of an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) research project entitled *Urban Classroom Culture and Interaction* (RES-148-25-0042), conducted 2005-2008<sup>1</sup>. Our project was one of 25 national projects within the ESRC's Identities and Social Action Programme.

Though the research concerned many aspects of identity, here I want to discuss what we called "The Teachers' Project". At the outset our perception was that the ordinary classroom teacher's voice, experience and perspective were remarkably absent from public debate and policy-making about schools.

### **Dominant views and the predicament of teachers**

Schools and classrooms in urban areas have, in recent years, been heavily influenced by changes associated with globalisation (e.g. heightened population mobility, ethnic plurality and linguistic diversity, and the ubiquity of popular culture and digital cultural devices). However, the absence of adequate up-to-date descriptions of the realities of classroom life has too often allowed public discourse to depict it as merely the chaotic product of bad teaching. In our view a more realistic apprehension of urban classroom life is overdue. Teachers often have a sharp understanding of these realities, but their opportunities to participate in a sophisticated



debate about them are generally restricted by the terms of official policy (national curriculum, Ofsted) and public debate (ministerial and media statements and assertions).

In this public educational universe there is a strong sense of certainty about what classroom life should be like and what would constitute a “teaching ideal”. A “teaching ideal” has developed as part of the modern nation state’s project of universal compulsory schooling. In this conceptualisation the teacher has a monopoly of knowledge, is the controller and focal point of the classroom and the arbiter of the authorised modes and styles of communication. This classroom “teaching ideal” is represented in the following summary:

*“communication is centred on the teacher. It is he or she who talks and decides who else is to talk, asks the questions, evaluates the answers, and clearly manages the sequence as a whole ... Appropriate participation requires of pupils that they listen or appear to listen, often and at length. They have to know how to bid properly for the right to speak themselves, often in competitive circumstances where a balance has to be found between striving so zealously to attract attention that the teacher is irritated, and volunteering to answer so modestly that their bid is ignored ... In orderly classrooms, the teacher takes turns at will, allocates turns to others, determines the topics, interrupts and reallocates turns judged to be irrelevant to those topics, and provides a running commentary on what is being said and meant which is the main source of cohesion within and between the various sequences of the lesson” (Edwards and Westgate, 1994: 40 (cited in Rampton, 2006: 48)).*

In late modernity, in urban comprehensive schools in London, these assumptions have been disrupted, without the consequent new realities

**In a large number of secondary schools, and for very many teachers, traditional “ideal” pedagogic approaches are extraordinarily difficult to enact for reasons not necessarily under their control.**

being explicitly and sufficiently acknowledged in official discourses. In a large number of secondary schools, and for very many teachers, traditional “ideal” pedagogic approaches are extraordinarily difficult to enact for reasons not necessarily under their control. Even for relatively committed school students the teacher’s voice is often no longer central to classroom

life, nor does it automatically carry weight and authority.

From extensive, long-standing interaction with them, we know that many teachers are highly committed to understanding the social processes in their classrooms. They are also troubled by the routine public representations of their work, which tend to treat contemporary urban classrooms as the chaotic product of incompetent pedagogy, supported by a bankrupt progressivism. This inhibits recognition of good practice adapted to contemporary conditions, and leaves the professionals who work in these schools with little room for anything but feelings of failure or inadequacy. As one of the participants in our Teachers' Project seminars put it,

*“There is a drive towards things like excellence and that drive means that you are measured, teachers are measured, I mean you can talk about pupil performance but teachers are also measured, tested, measured, hung drawn and quartered (laughter) in what we are doing as well. I think this has brought about our need to perform. We have got 20 point lesson plans which are supposed to ensure that we are teaching excellent lessons. We have local inspectors, national inspectors, area inspectors, every type of inspector you can think of... we are scrutinised to the nth degree and I think that has brought about this performance level that we supposedly adhere to all the time” (Isaac – Maths teacher aged 30-40 – nine years teaching experience).*

What follows presents:

- a brief summary of how we conducted our classroom research;
- some of the realities, dilemmas and ambiguities presented by contemporary classroom and school culture, which emerged from our detailed discussions with teachers about our research data; and
- examples of direct commentary by teachers about the wider cultural forces affecting their work.

## **The Research**

*The School (when the data was collected in 2005 and 2006)*

The school participating in the study was an inner London comprehensive with a sixth form attended by approximately 1,000 students. The student population was extremely diverse with a large majority of pupils coming from ethnic minority backgrounds, with South Asian and African-Caribbean ethnicities forming the two largest groups. They also came from a variety of social class backgrounds with both above average numbers on free school meals, and a recent increase in the number of middle class students. The school had recently received a positive Ofsted report and seen steady improvements in its exam success rates.

*Data Collection*

We completed two phases of data collection in two classes, following nine students from Year 9 into Year 10. Each of these students wore a radio-microphone as they proceeded through a typical school day inside and outside the classroom. They did this for two days each in Year 9 and again in Year 10. During the study, the focal students, five female and four male, were 14-16 years old. They were from a range of ethnicities and varied greatly in their academic performance. In total we collected approximately 180 plus hours of radio-microphone recordings, eight focal student interviews, ten (mainly group) playback interview sessions, ten plus hours video recordings, and an observational field diary covering, among other things, impromptu conversations with staff, and assembled supplementary documentation covering Year 9-10 demographics and school performance, staff and parent handbooks, lesson handouts and so on.

*Teachers' Project*

In 2007 and again in 2010 we organised seminar sessions with groups of teachers with experience of teaching in London comprehensive schools to

**The spirit of negotiation which teachers need to apply in their daily interaction with their students in classrooms, and school managements in their interactions with parents, reflects wider cultural developments in society in which parents and students are strongly aware of their rights as quasi-consumers in relation to schools and teachers.**

discuss in detail four audio recordings (with transcripts) of routine episodes of classroom life. It was decided that the episodes presented to the seminar participants should not be sensational ones. Rather, they were as far as possible representative of the prosaic tenor of the classrooms that we had both observed and recorded over an extended period spread over two academic years (2005-06, 2006-07). The selected episodes highlighted a particular aspect of the routine culture of these classrooms. There were: (a) the "troubles" faced by teachers in getting students to participate in a lesson and in eliciting responses from them when they were questioned about curriculum tasks; and (b) the "troubles" surrounding the marking of expected boundaries of formality/informality and authority/deference

between students and teachers.

We organised 11 teacher seminar groups in London, comprising 78 teachers with a combined 973 years of teaching experience – some groups met up to three times. The teachers overwhelmingly stated that the recorded classroom episodes they had listened to and discussed were strongly familiar in their experience of urban secondary school classroom culture. We recorded, transcribed and closely analysed all the seminar sessions.

#### *Unsettled classroom identities*

A strong sense emerged from the seminar groups of widespread uncertainties about three dimensions of identity in schools

1. *Unsettled school identities* (what is school for? how is it different from a social club? what agreed rules of conduct should govern its operations?);
2. *Unsettled teacher identities* (what is a teacher's role? – instructor/authority figure – or enabler/equal/friend? – or entertainer?); and
3. *Unsettled school student identities* (what is a school student's role? – learner/obedient subordinate? – or consumer/socialising youth/young adult with rights?).

Space does not permit a full exploration of these issues here, but a short summary of salient considerations will clarify what appears to be at stake.

**School Identities** – Urban comprehensive schools have been displaced from their former position (in working class and lower middle class communities) as unambiguous centres of learning, monopolising authority over the definition and transmission of agreed legitimate knowledge. These schools are now sites of negotiation rather than sites of authoritarian imposition. Without these practices of negotiation these schools would be sites of chronic unworkable conflict. The accomplishment of these schools and classrooms as mainly harmonious spaces producing relative success for the majority of their students now relies on a negotiated consensual approach. In this environment teachers and senior management are compelled to work very hard to win consent from students and parents for most of what they want to do.

**Teacher Identities** – Teachers in these schools feel that they are under some pressure to be entertainers as opposed to teachers or instructors. That is, they feel themselves to be under pressure from,

and in competition with, a 24 hour digital popular entertainment culture to which their students have instant and constant access and allegiance. These pressures are reinforced by the requirements of the inspection regime of classroom teaching implemented by Ofsted and others. However, a significant amount of the curriculum content of their subject disciplines is not necessarily amenable to being attractively presented in a way which is free of the “pain” of struggling with difficult or unfamiliar concepts or bodies of knowledge.

The spirit of negotiation which teachers need to apply in their daily interaction with their students in classrooms, and school managements in their interactions with parents, reflects wider cultural developments in society in which parents and students are strongly aware of their rights as quasi-consumers in relation to schools and teachers.

The ubiquity of student possession, in classrooms, of a multiplicity of digital technology devices (e.g. classroom computers with internet connection, mobile phones, mp3 players, portable game consoles, etc), has generated a growing problem of regulation and control for urban secondary schools and teachers. This digital technology, strongly linked to the consumption of popular culture, is characterised by the way in which it affords students constant access to sources of information, entertainment and communication in sites remote from the classroom, as well as communicative resources for contact with each other inside the classroom. The capabilities of many of these devices for audio and visual recording add to the complicating factors.

**Student Identities** – In traditional conceptualisations of student identities, school students appear unambiguously as people expected to be learners and receivers of instruction. By contrast students in many contemporary urban comprehensive schools conceive of themselves as quasi-consumers, with rights to negotiate over matters such as teacher instructions, whether or not to participate in curriculum-related classroom activities, and entitled to pronounce openly on their perception and assessment of the quality of the teacher performances they are receiving. This stance is not adopted by students as a self-consciously insolent one, but as a stance which feels natural, normal and in tune with the contemporary process of schooling.

All of these unsettled identities, and the significant ways in which they challenge the traditional culture of the school, have generated major

debates and dilemmas amongst teachers – as the following selection of statements from teachers working with our research data shows.

### Debates and dilemmas: Teachers' voices

#### *Digital Culture, regulation and control*

*"I have seen situations where teachers have confiscated where parents have come into school irate and given the teachers a hard time for taking their phones . . . despite the fact that they weren't supposed to have them in the first place"* (Carol aged 40-50/ MFL & English/ ten years' classroom experience)

*"The parents have to come and actually collect them [mobile phones] they are not allowed to have them unless the parents come in. But you see parents argue with us. They go 'there are security reasons why they should have them they need to be contacted urgently'. So we tend to turn a blind eye because if we don't see them we don't know"* (Deborah aged 50-60/ RE & Humanities/ 20 years' classroom experience)

*"They just use their phones or they'll have um one earpiece which will go up one side and through their jumper and it will just be up here (murmurs of agreement) and um their hair will cover it"* (Jonathan aged 50-60/ English & Media Studies/ 25 years' classroom experience)

*"But my problem was I only confiscated them twice and I locked them in the cupboard in my room and when I came back the cupboard had been burst open . . . but I wouldn't confiscate again for the same reason and then you're personally liable again for the money and the school I work at has made it very clear that if we confiscate something and it goes missing it's our personal money so I wouldn't confiscate"* (Harriet aged 20-30/ English/ three years' classroom experience)

*"If they have to have them [mp3 players] they must be turned off in the classroom. That is sometimes breached and occasionally they are sometimes allowed to listen to music when they are working on writing once the teachers [have] stopped talking you know the kids say 'can I listen to my music sir' some teachers say yes"* (Ruby aged 30-40/ English/ EAL / nine years' classroom experience)

#### *Authority or negotiation?*

*"I don't think that we can maintain discipline in schools any longer simply by us keeping you know laying down the law and you know keeping them under the thumb I think it is consensual (murmurs of agreement) there is a negotiation that*

*has to happen*" (Olive (age n/a)/ Science/ 20+ years' classroom experience)

*"I think it [the relationship between adults and children] has become far less formal you know the idea that you know the adult is right and the students do what they are told has broken down in wide areas of society certainly in my little bit"* (Caroline aged 40-50/ EAL/ 24 years' classroom experience)

#### *Teachers, students and classroom communication*

*"... we need to look very hard at how we educate young people today we cannot do it anymore from standing in front of the classroom I believe"* (Tom aged 40-50/ MFL / (Asst. Head)/ 17 years' classroom experience)

*"You get to a certain stage with certain classes ... for you to be able to stand up in front of them and talk at them for 10 minutes and they will do exactly what you want them to but that is rare and that has only happened a couple of times to me with a couple of classes in my time here"* (Samantha aged 30-40/ English & Media Studies/ five years' classroom experience)

*"I think Ofsted almost demands singing and dancing shows now and I think certainly in the staff room we're all aware of that um we do need to entertain them and it's sometimes a matter of crowd control"* (Laura aged 20-30/ English, Media & Drama/ three years' classroom experience)

*"I think the idea of teachers as entertainers is kind of worrying but there is an onus on teachers, certainly at this school you would be frowned upon if you were to take on a traditional role if you were at your desk for example"* (Gethin aged 20-30/ English/ three years' classroom experience)

#### *Student identities (consumers with rights?)*

*"There are so many areas of potential conflict which we have to negotiate around, it's a minefield ... and you'll be seen as being unfair and you will lose any backing of the parents because they [students] can present a very plausible case that the member of staff is grossly unfair and they're good at that now ... we've taught them about self-respect and how to manage situations. And when they need to they will claim their rights and the responsibility [for their transgressions] just sort of gets shuffled [off]"* (Tom aged 40-50/ MFL / (Asst. Head) 17 years' classroom experience)

*"Children are bright now. You know we have got a whole different climate now. Children know what they are entitled to. Children will tell you "that was a crap lesson, it was boring, you read that story with no feeling". But they are right to do*

*that if we are crap you know whereas I wouldn't have dreamed of saying anything. I would have sat and be bored"* (Deborah aged 50-60/ R.E. /Humanities/ 20 years' classroom experience)

*"There's been a shift um from when I was at school when the teacher had complete authority I think there is a shift in the way in which um young people perceive themselves in relation to adults and they'll all tell you what their rights are"* (Olive (age n/a)/ Science/ 20+ years' classroom experience)

### **Urban Classroom Culture – The Book**

Our research, together with the discussion, debate and analysis in the teacher seminar groups, has culminated in a forthcoming publication *Urban Classroom Culture* (June 2011). It will contain classroom recordings and transcripts; analyses of these episodes; teachers' commentaries and proposals; and supporting material from outside school. It will interest Initial Teacher Educators and CPD organisers. For further information contact Dr Roxy Harris (roxy.harris@kcl.ac.uk).

### **Footnote**

- 1 Ben Rampton (Director), Roxy Harris (Deputy Director), Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Constant Leung, Lauren Small (Research Assistants) [King's College, London], Caroline Dover (University of Westminster).

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# Book reviews

## REMAKING THE CURRICULUM: RE-ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Martin Fautley, Richard Hatcher and Elaine Millard.  
*Trentham Books; 2011 ISBN: 9781858564715*

The very title of this book should be enough to entice secondary practitioners stuck in a daily grind; where teaching has become focused on preparing for the next Ofsted, ensuring that students are meeting their targets and that every minute of their classroom time is accounted for.

The authors, professors of education at Birmingham City University, investigate curriculum projects taking place in two local schools and designed to promote alternative approaches to learning. Using cross curricula themes and a drama-based pedagogy, the aim is to re-engage young people and re-motivate staff. In one there is an 'enterprise' focus, in the other, a cultural studies programme serves as the basis for the new approach. The book shows that even within the limits of the current National Curriculum it is possible to innovate, be creative and to challenge the top-down model of learning. Instead of a teacher 'delivering' the curriculum to students through predefined lesson plans to achieve specific learning outcomes, this book shows it is possible to develop a curriculum that is instead based on negotiation and student experience.

This is not to assume that this is an easy exercise. The case studies describe how the schools had to balance traditional National Curriculum assessment recording and reporting requirements with their new classroom pedagogies. They also had to address the 'conservatism' and insecurities of practitioners. This does not imply these are innate, rather that they are an understandable response to the climate teachers have been forced to operate in. To quote one of the participants in the study "until the exam system takes account of the children learning for themselves and not just regurgitating facts, there's always going to be a problem." This is a statement that many secondary colleagues would concur with. In fact, Ofsted inspectors are reported as welcoming the progress made by students as a result of "inspirational leadership" and a "new, innovative and effective curriculum."

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the book is its discussion of

### Martin Allen

Martin Allen is a part-time teacher of economics at Alperton Community School, Wembley, London. He was Vice-Chair of the NUT National Secondary Advisory Committee until 2011. He is co-author with Patrick Ainley of *Lost Generation? New Strategies for Youth and Education* (Continuum, 2010).

the changing context in which schools are now operating. The authors' citation of the 2010 Ofsted guidelines, which encourage teachers to "guide" rather than "over-direct" pupils and to use role play to encourage creative thinking, suggests that maybe the beast is being tamed? More significantly, the authors also claim that the Coalition government will allow more autonomy for schools and "free teachers to exercise their professional judgement".

I am not convinced that either changes to Ofsted or the increased 'autonomy' that the authors consider schools will enjoy as a result of the Coalition's education policies will allow them to move in the positive direction featured in this study. Nor do I believe that the 2010 *Academies Act*, which allows the creation of free schools, is something that practitioners should welcome!

There are other issues with pioneering curriculum change. When I began teaching on an integrated humanities programme at the start of the 1980s the 'professional space' enjoyed by teachers did indeed allow us to 'innovate.' At the same time many new initiatives, particularly the coursework based CSE 'mode 3' for example, tended to be geared to 'non academic' students – those taking O-levels continued to have a more standard diet. The creation of GCSEs challenged this dichotomy to an extent, but it didn't end it. We have to recognise that today, while supposedly encouraging 'autonomy', Michael Gove is ploughing ahead with a traditional agenda and using English Baccalaureate subjects as a new benchmark for 'success'.

Nevertheless, regardless of any misplaced optimism, this book does try to raise spirits and send a clear message. Providing a snapshot of what secondary education could be like, it deserves to be taken seriously.

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**Helen Hill**

Helen Hill is  
Principal Officer  
for secondary  
education for  
the National  
Union of  
Teachers.

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**SCHOOL WARS: THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN'S EDUCATION**

Melissa Benn

*Verso; 2011 ISBN: 9781844677368*

From the start this book charts clearly the beginning of the comprehensive system of education. From early beginnings in the 1960s, the Labour Party announced that the grammar/secondary modern divide would be officially dropped. The 11-plus examination proved unpopular with the general population and, therefore, swayed the Government of the time to dismantle the tripartite system of education. Change was 'requested' rather than 'required', hence only piecemeal change took place on a school-by-school basis. The grammar school system was maintained at the same time that comprehensive schools were established.

Melissa Benn describes in detail how the comprehensive system of

education has, over time, become an ideological obsession with politicians of all shades of opinion, with changes in school structures and an continued focus on standards, bombarding schools and colleges with little evaluation or review taking place.

Technology colleges, grant maintained status, league tables, specialist secondary schools, voluntary and foundation schools, admission codes, academies and free schools, have all contributed to the fragmentation of the state system.

The author outlines how such changes have been the result of a political determination to break up state education and replace it with a free market system. The book describes how, with the expansion of the academies programme and the establishment of free schools, more selection takes place, as these schools become their own admissions authorities without any external check being applied by the Schools Adjudicator. She states:

*“Ensuring fair admissions, however, is rather like solving an endlessly re-occurring sense of minor crimes. It takes persistence and a fair degree of inside knowledge to work out whether a school is sticking to the letter or the spirit of its admissions policies.”*

This book is a comprehensive analysis of how the state system is on the brink of catastrophe. Governments blindly ignore the international evidence that achieving a sound balance of students between schools, and allocating resources, particularly qualified teachers, fairly across the system, is the most effective way of improving this country's education system. A modern, well-funded, non-selective comprehensive system with a focus on high quality teaching and aspiration, makes a huge difference to children's life chances. Yet social mobility is declining. Benn points out that teenagers from the 20 per cent most advantaged homes in England are seven times more likely to get a place at the most selective universities than those from the poorest 40 per cent.

Benn argues that if we are to avoid a new '14-plus', as described in this book, with an emergence of another tripartite system of education made up of university technical schools, community schools and academies – then the community school, with its ability to build effective partnerships between home and school, must be saved. The ever-increasing marketisation of education has resulted in a battle over the fate and future of Britain's education system:

*“The current clashes over government plans represent the intensifications of a struggle that has been going on in different forms, for nearly fifty years. There has been a long and hard battle between supporters of comprehensive schools*

*and those who want to retain selection in some form, whether through the restitution of the grammar school or through more subtle means.”*

Benn has long campaigned for a well-resourced and democratically accountable system of education that, in a nation as economically and socially divided as ours, must provide hope for all young people, not just a minority. She describes herself as being involved in ‘school wars’. The implication being that current educational reforms are momentous events which will determine the course of history.

This is a book to be read and its viewpoint given careful consideration.

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**Gareth Betts-Davies**

Gareth Betts-Davies worked as a foundation stage teacher for ten years, of which six were in nursery classes and four in reception classes. He spent two years as a children’s centre teacher and is currently an early years consultant in Suffolk. Gareth studied for the MA in Early Years and Childcare at Pen Green. He has been a member of the NUT’s Advisory Committee for the Foundation Stage (formerly the Foundation Stage Working Party) for ten years.

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**THE RECEPTION YEAR IN ACTION: A MONTH-BY-MONTH GUIDE TO SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Anna Ephgrave

*Routledge; ISBN: 0415618509*

Life inside an early years setting can be all-consuming and quite isolating at times. There is nothing better for classroom teachers and early years practitioners than the opportunity to go and visit another setting. Where ‘excellence’ has been recognised, others can compare notes and assess differences with their own situation, circumstances and practices in an attempt to achieve the best possible opportunities and learning outcomes for the children who access their provision. For me, the great thing about these visits is that I always see things I like and things that I don’t. I recognise practice that I could adopt for my own circumstances to improve my provision and see aspects that reaffirm what I already do.

My experience of reading *The Reception Year in Action* is just like going on a guided visit to a setting. But not just any setting. The practice highlighted in this book is the product of a continuity of approach over many years and firm support by the senior management team for the principles which underpin the practice. It reveals the political struggle at the heart of early years education to resist the ‘top down’ curricula pressure and focus on ‘school readiness’, whilst proving that a ‘leap of faith’ from adults enables children to get the most out of opportunities to pursue their interests and learning motivations and prepares them for future learning within the school.

The book does what it says on the cover and unpacks the practice through each month of the school year exploring planning and observation; the curriculum and the provision; the environment and the role of adults within it; induction and transition into year one; and the work with parents and inclusion of home culture. The pages are littered with photos from children’s activity and examples of real paperwork. What

I saw in this classroom was familiar and representative of many reception classrooms up and down the country. Yet it was special because of the depth of development of practice, ensuring that the EYFS provision was of the highest possible quality in the circumstances. In that sense it is a 'warts and all' account, unafraid of revealing the effect of the limitations and compromises made to best suit the situation.

As with any practitioner visit to another setting, it is important to value the opportunity but not to expect perfection; to take the gifts that comparison can offer in terms of reflecting on and improving one's own practice. For this purpose especially, I would recommend the book to other early years teachers and practitioners.

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### YES WE CAN READ

Libby Coleman & Nick Ainley

*Gatehouse; 2010 ISBN: 9781842310755*

*Yes We Can Read* is a phonics-based reading programme which aims to coach reading skills and create reading fluency in as little as six months. The key is regular one-to-one reading coaching.

It is designed to be delivered by anyone who can read fluently with no other qualifications or training being necessary. Whilst the coaching notes are helpful, they are not a substitute for proper qualifications and training. They suggest a number of nice activities and games which will reinforce the learning but this would be most successful if delivered under the direction of a teaching professional. This is especially important when addressing the special educational needs of adults and young people who have failed to gain reading fluency as the issues can be complex and require ongoing diagnostic assessment.

The photo-alphabet is designed to aid the learning of letter sounds with photos corresponding to the shapes of the letters they represent. Some of these could be confusing as they are not immediately obvious.

The text is well spaced on cream paper with coloured overlays available which may be helpful to learners with specific special needs.

Although advertised as being suitable for anyone from eight to 80, it is more appropriate to support adult literacy.

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### Hazel Danson

Hazel Danson is Assistant Head Teacher at Clough Head Junior and Infant School. She has represented West Yorkshire on the NUT's National Executive since 1998 and was an NUT nominee on the General Teaching Council from 2004 to 2006. She has been Chair of the NUT's Education and Equalities Committee since 2006.



# LITERACY *Today*

*Literacy Today* has a cross-sectoral approach to literacy throughout the English-speaking world. It includes articles on literacy policy, research and practice, as well as information on literacy issues raised in parliament, literacy resources, publications and research briefings.

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# Basic Skills Bulletin

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# education review

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Recommended Price: £9