



# Reclaiming schools

THE EVIDENCE AND THE ARGUMENTS

**Stand Up for Education**



# **Teachers, parents, academics and other allies who support the Stand Up for Education campaign believe that:**

- **Politicians should listen to parents and teachers**
- **We need a wider vision of learning and achievement**
- **We need more time for teaching – not tests**
- **All children deserve qualified teachers**
- **We need to end child poverty**
- **We need to end the school places crisis**
- **We need to mend the fractured education system**
- **Education should not be run for profit**
- **We need to invest in education**
- **We need teaching to be an attractive profession**

## Introduction



Through the Stand Up for Education campaign, the NUT and allies are building significant momentum behind the case for better education policies.

Teachers and parents want a fairer education system and demand a wider vision of education – one that values every child, and gives teachers the platform to bring out their full potential.

There is extensive academic support for our overarching vision for education. In this pamphlet, academics from a range of universities offer their analysis of the central themes and key recommendations in the Stand Up for Education campaign. The views expressed may not coincide with NUT policy in every detail, but that is not important. What is important is that we connect research, policy and practice in creative and powerful ways to gain impact and achieve change.

The NUT has a long tradition of working with education researchers, and making sure that its policies and campaigns are informed by rigorous research. We produce EduFacts ([www.teachers.org.uk/edufacts](http://www.teachers.org.uk/edufacts)) and publish Expert Views ([www.teachers.org.uk/expertview](http://www.teachers.org.uk/expertview)) on the NUT website to make research evidence and policy arguments accessible to teachers and parents.

The contributing authors of this pamphlet have established a complementary website – *Reclaiming Schools* ([www.reclaimingschools.org](http://www.reclaimingschools.org)).

The website provides short, evidence-based, contributions and is regularly updated with new features. It provides a useful resource for teachers, parents and governors in the ongoing campaign to Stand Up for Education.

I believe it is vital to find new ways to bring teachers and the academic community closer together. I am proud to publish this pamphlet and I invite you to visit the *Reclaiming Schools* website.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine Blower". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Christine Blower**  
General Secretary



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## 1. A historical perspective: how did we get into this state?

It is a common complaint heard from teachers in all sectors: if only we could be left to get on with the enjoyable job of teaching children and not have to spend so much time checking, reporting and writing down what we've done – or what we're going to do – then our lives as teachers would be blissful. How have we reached the stage where finding interesting ways to get young people to learn has, for some teachers, become almost the last thing they think of as they prepare their working day?

It is worth starting by saying that there has never been a golden age of teacher independence. However, it was only as far back as 1976 that a leader in *The Guardian* could confidently proclaim that 'no principle has been more hallowed by British governments than the rule that they should not interfere in the curriculum of state schools'. That was 12 years before the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 introduced us to the National Curriculum, age-related testing in the form of SATs and the marketization of schools through open enrolment and local financial management – thereby diminishing the role of democratically accountable local authorities. In the following decade, the body charged with inspecting schools, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) was largely replaced by Ofsted – an organization whose whole tone and approach was, and remains, punitive and unsympathetic to teachers. This suite of measures has, over the quarter of a century following ERA, had the effect of making England's teachers (unlike their colleagues in other parts of the UK) among the most scrutinised, controlled and

publicly accountable educators anywhere in the world.

It was in the same year of that *Guardian* leader, 1976, that the Prime Minister of the time, Labour's Jim Callaghan, made a famous speech at Ruskin College. Callaghan – who was one of only a handful of British Prime Ministers since 1850 not to have been to Oxford or Cambridge – acknowledged at the time that he was stepping into the 'secret garden' of education where few politicians before had dared to tread. To read the speech now, at a distance of nearly forty years, is to recognise much of the rhetoric of education policy since. Notions of value for money in straitened times, along with bemoaning a perceived drop in standards, inform much of what is said. Callaghan also seized on an episode in William Tyndale School in London to launch an attack on progressive methods, positing the notion that all of this educational experimentation flew in the face of the common-sense position that it was the job of educators to prepare young people for the demands of a modern economy.

By the time Callaghan's successor, Margaret Thatcher, left office some 15 years later, the apparatus for ensuring greater regulation and accountability was firmly in place, albeit that the NUT in particular continued to fight vigorously against this, most notably with an eventual, if short-lived, boycott of SATs in 1993. Throughout the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and her close allies busily set about the business of applying the principles of the free-market and deregulation to all elements of

social life. Everything was up for sale from council houses to nationally owned companies: the stage was well and truly set for the privatisation of the state education system as well.

When Labour's Tony Blair took office in 1997 with the now infamous proclamation that his three priorities were 'education, education, education', mechanisms were fully in place for the market to work its magic on schools, teachers, pupils and their parents. Test results were used for league tables that were placed in the public domain so that parents could exercise free choice when deciding where to send their children. In reality, this so-called 'choice' was a complete fiction for most people and could be exercised only by a privileged minority. The publication of the outcome of Ofsted inspections helped to further entrench the idea that the quality of schools could be categorised in order to help the 'customers' exercise this choice. By the turn of the new century it was unsurprising that this espousal of market values of competition, 'driving up standards' and customer choice resulted in the first academy schools, thereby irredeemably letting the privatisation genie out of the bottle.

The impact of this unremitting imposition of market values onto the school system has been profound. Test results have become the driving force behind practically everything 'school leaders' demand of their staff. The quest for high Ofsted ratings now manifests itself not just in the frantic scrabbling in the period prior to an inspection, but in competency-led, reductive

lesson observations, at the end of which individual teachers are branded according to their ability to comply with whichever set of priorities enjoy current favour. So-called 'middle managers' in schools spend inordinate amounts of time checking and scrutinising a whole raft of meaningless actions and data as they chase the specious measurable outcomes that can cement their school's market position.

Unsurprisingly, all of this has had an effect on teachers' daily lives. Targets, questionable learning objectives, collection of all sorts of unreliable information and the unrelenting measuring of outcomes and 'progress' mean that many teachers spend their times on mind-numbing routines, drills and rehearsal. Fortunately, thousands of teachers still harbour a strong sense of what is right for young people and do everything in their power to subvert what Finland's Pasi Sahlberg has dubbed the GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement. However, to understand just why those who wield the clipboards have become the demi-gods of the educational world, teachers need to look to a political system that, in a reflection of the wider world, has privileged market forces, privatisation and the so-called measurement of performance. And, of course, teachers will need to join forces with parents, students and others to speak back to those who persist in foisting such unfairness on us all and point out the error of their ways

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#### **Further reading:**

Ball, S. (2008) *The Great Education Debate*. London: Policy Press.

Cox, B. (1995) *The battle for the English curriculum*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Sahlberg, P. (2011) *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.

## 2. What is wrong with the new National Curriculum?

### Centralised control

Most countries have a national curriculum, but they vary in the flexibility they allow and whether teachers have had any democratic involvement in forming it. The current curriculum in England, framed largely by the former Education Secretary Michael Gove, is extremely prescriptive for English, Maths and Science, but threadbare for other subjects. Having ignored his panel of curriculum experts, resulting in their resignation, the new curriculum is based on autocratic decisions by the former Secretary of State.

Broad educational aims (social, cultural, ethical etc) are scarcely mentioned, apart from two vague paragraphs at the start ('spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development'; 'prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'). By contrast, Finland\*, for example, has a democratic vision ('human rights, equality, democracy') recognising diversity ('tolerance and intercultural understanding') and sustainability ('natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability'). Rather than simply teaching young people to fit in, it wants education 'to create new culture, revitalise ways of thinking and acting, and develop the pupil's ability to evaluate critically.'

The new National Curriculum is rigidly divided into subjects, neglecting interdisciplinary learning. Despite recognising that literacy and numeracy are practised in other subjects, themes such as environment, democratic citizenship, global perspectives or human rights are ignored.

### Lacking breadth and balance

It is dominated by three subjects English, Maths and Science – or rather two and half since spoken English is almost absent. This can even be seen in the number of pages: English 87, Maths 45, Science 32, Computing 2, Geography 3, etc. Within English, spoken language has 2 pages, reading and writing 20 plus 25 for spelling and 18 pages of grammar and terminology. Drama has one paragraph; and nothing on modern media.

### Primary schools

Formal schooling in England begins a year earlier than most high-achieving countries. (Finland's 5-7 year olds learn informally at kindergarten.) Stringent premature targets have been set in an attempt to outdo potential competitors, with many demands placed on children a year or two younger than in the highest achieving countries in the world. There is no recognition of children's readiness. Little thought has been given to young children's potential interests, and there is no sense of play even in Years 1 and 2. Extensive scientific knowledge is required in Years 5 and 6, compared with high achieving Finland and Singapore.

There are serious cognitive, and psychological, problems in making demands at too young an age. Examples of premature demands include:

- spell days of the week accurately (Tuesday, Wednesday!) in Y1;
- distinguish *there*, *they're* and *their* in Y2, and *affect* from *effect* in Y3;

- instantly subtract 7 from 16 (Y1);
- $5/7 - 2/7 = 3/7$  (Y3); and
- mental calculations such as 12,462-2,300 (Y5)

Teachers will feel pressured towards rote learning, so poor foundations will be laid. Ironically, battery-farming children in this way is likely to be counterproductive in terms of their long-term development.

### Other subjects

These are seriously marginalised, with ill-conceived shifts of emphasis. Art has a narrower range of activities than before (collage, print making, digital media, textiles, photography have gone), and with a less exploratory tone even at KS1. PE has also lost a sense of exploring movement. Cultural diversity is no longer mentioned in Art or Music. KS1 Geography used to begin with local experiences but is now about accumulating facts: 'name the 7 continents and 5 oceans'. Fortunately Gove was forced to back down from overloading primary History with encyclopaedic details and had to tone down the nationalistic emphasis, but again the recommendation to start with the local and familiar has disappeared.

### Accountability pressures

England's accountability system is set up to fuel competition between schools, with serious consequences for the losers – especially schools serving disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This makes it even more difficult for teachers to steer their own course and relate learning to the children's interests and needs.



Ironically, the new National Curriculum does not apply to academies or free schools, suggesting perhaps that the main reason for its stringent targets might be to label many primary schools as ‘failing’ and drive them to closure and academisation.

In all schools however, new assessment requirements will have a distorting and narrowing effect, and lead to teaching to the test. These include the phonics check (Y1), an overemphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammatical knowledge (Y6), and the removal of many practical elements and coursework from GCSEs.

### **The secondary curriculum**

From 11-14 the curriculum consists of a traditional set of subjects, with no sense of interdisciplinary learning or engagement with the outside world – indeed, no thought about preparing for the challenges future citizens will face such as globalisation, global warming, war or poverty. From age 14, all coherence is lost. Only English, Maths and Science are compulsory, plus a smattering of ICT, PE, Citizenship, RE and Sex Education. Beyond that, everything is geared to maximising GCSE scores.

More academic students are steered towards a narrow “EBacc” which neglects technologies and the creative arts. Sadly Labour’s policymakers, while complaining that this neglects many young people’s needs, have made the socially divisive proposal that the

“non-academic 50 percent” should be segregated into preparation for work (i.e. mainly low paid and routine jobs).

Breadth and balance are out the window. England will be almost alone in Europe in not requiring a broad curriculum up to age 16, let alone beyond. (In Norway for example, vocational students aged 16-18 continue Norwegian, English, Maths, Science and Citizenship.)

All young people should be entitled to a broad curriculum. Work preparation should not wipe out cultural development or citizenship, and there should be ample time for independent projects and practical activities, not just full-time exam preparation.

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### **Further reading:**

An extended version of this chapter and other resources can be found on [www.reclaimingschools.org](http://www.reclaimingschools.org) (Curriculum and Assessment section)

White, J. (ed) (2004) *Rethinking the school curriculum: values, aims and purposes*. London: Routledge

Wrigley, T. (2014) *The politics of curriculum in schools*. Centre for Labour and Policy Studies. <http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/the-politics-of-curriculum-in-schools>

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\* The comparison is made not to put Finland on a pedestal, but to show that high achievement can combine with a worthwhile education based on enlightened values.

### 3. Coherent provision for 14-19: unifying academic and vocational learning

Vocational education was officially established to improve work and employment skills, but few of the vocational courses developed in schools and colleges after the collapse of industrial apprenticeships in the 1970s have offered real opportunities for young people in the labour market. Instead, a succession of new qualifications were introduced, lasted a few years and were then discarded in favour of new ones. Some of the more high profile qualifications, such as the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), claimed to provide real alternatives to A-levels. Others were expensive white elephants like the specialist diplomas championed by New Labour. The most durable have been the BTEC awards.

Even though higher level vocational qualifications have provided opportunities for some young people to enter higher education, the research evidence has continued to show schools have used vocational pathways for the 'less-academic'. Though the more student-friendly pedagogy and less hierarchical classroom relationships associated with the new qualifications were said to reflect the modern workplace and new types of 'soft skills' needed across the growing service sector, they also provided ways for teachers and lecturers to gentle these students along a low status route! More recently, the standing of vocational qualifications has been reduced further as some schools entered entire cohorts for vocational 'equivalents' to improve their standing in GCSE league tables.

Following recommendations in the Wolf Report (2011), the former Education Secretary Michael Gove streamlined the number of vocational courses available at 14, but also demanded more 'rigour'. By this he meant that to qualify as one of the eight subjects on which new school league tables would be formulated, a vocational qualification had to follow certain criteria, could not count as more than one GCSE and had to have more external assessment. Wolf had also recommended that vocational courses should be restricted to 20% of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, something opposed by Kenneth (now Lord) Baker who has continued to press ahead with University Technical Colleges (UTCs) offering vocational specialisms.

But Gove's 'grammar school education for all' approach – despite the defeat of his EBacc – has been equally unsatisfactory as GCSE syllabuses have been narrowed and antiquated assessment methods reintroduced. English and history teachers have led campaigns and won concessions on some of the worst aspects of the new courses. Even though Shadow Education Minister Tristram Hunt has attacked the 'backwardness' of Gove's deluded grammar school approach, he has reaffirmed the Labour Party's commitment to restoring the vocational route for the 'forgotten 50%' not going onto university; Labour will establish a Technical Baccalaureate and open more UTCs.

It's true that countries like Germany have developed

successful vocational and technical routes as well as apprenticeships linked to employment opportunities but these courses have included a much larger general core. In Germany there is now much greater enthusiasm for attending comprehensive schools. Current analysis of the occupational structure also shows the continued disappearance of many of the middle 'technical' jobs which vocational qualifications are associated with. Also significant, regardless of its logic, is the continued employer preference for applicants to have traditional academic qualifications rather than vocational ones, with the A-level still enjoying gold standard status.

Rather than a narrow vocationalism or Michael Gove's narrow academicism, it would be better to provide a good broad education for everybody through a general diploma, which ensured an entitlement to different types of learning, providing high quality technical education and training for those who did desire it – with opportunities for workplace placements. But this should be as one of a number of options not a distinct pathway. Learning about a range of social and political issues associated with work rather than just how to, would also be a mandatory part of a common core.

It goes without saying that this level of change and innovation could not happen all at once and that the first stage would have to be an overarching certificate linking the different types of existing qualifications. If this was to serve as a bridge towards more

radical changes however, then subject combinations would need to be more like directives than New Labour's Curriculum 2000 proposals required, or in the fudged Tomlinson proposals that ultimately did not come to anything after Tony Blair backed the continuation of A-levels. A universal general diploma could eventually provide the main avenue to higher education and employment, as well as being linked to new concepts of 'citizenship' for young people.

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**Further reading:**

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley  
*A New 14 plus* (2008) published by Ealing Teachers Association (Downloadable at <http://radicaledbks.com/download-14-19-diploma-pamphlet/>)

Martin Allen (2007) '*Learning for Labour: Specialist diplomas and 14-19 Education*', Forum 49 (3).

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley  
*The Great Reversal* (2013)  
Downloadable at [www.radicaledbks.com](http://www.radicaledbks.com)

NUT document: *14-19 bringing down the barriers*  
[www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)

## 4. We need more time for teaching with talk, not more tests

As written exams become the dominant mode of testing, there is less time for thought about other modes of teaching and assessment. Re-establishing the importance of assessment through talk – speaking and listening – would not only promote good teaching but also signify a completely different approach to assessment. This approach would empower both pupils and teachers.

Oral assessment has been used in schools for many years. In nearly every lesson a teacher uses questions, at some point, to establish whether or not the pupils understand the topic or concept being taught. Drama teachers use evaluation of role play, improvisation and performance to teach their subject. Modern Language and English GCSEs have also assessed the quality of pupil talk. English assessed speaking and listening at GCSE until the new English Curriculum was introduced and now, although the curriculum still requires teachers to assess spoken language, the oral grade no longer contributes to the final GCSE English grade.

Until recently, the English Literature AQA GCSE also assessed pupils' understanding of literature through talk. The oral response option allowed the teacher to interrogate the pupils closely to ensure they had studied the play or novel at a deep enough level to be awarded a particular grade. Through a presentation or a discussion pupils had to show, for example, their understanding or insight into dramatic action, characters, setting, context or themes. The Media Studies GCSE also has

practical assignments that can include assessment through talk. As a Head of English, I found that pupils enjoyed the challenge of these oral assignments and felt an immediate sense of accomplishment.

Prior to the National Curriculum there was much greater flexibility in the use of oral assessment for all exams. The CSE mode 3 and the Certificate of Extended Education were exams devised by teachers and there was more opportunity to include oral assessment modules in a range of subjects.

The Cox Report which informed the first English National Curriculum did not advocate the kind of rigid, written exams that have been imposed on children and the teaching profession. It suggested that teachers should choose from a bank of SATS. In primary schools, Cox suggested that pupils' responses should be mainly oral or practical. The report suggested that the task should be conducted over an extended period and should reinforce teaching and learning, and not be a bolt-on activity, and also that coursework should be a major input of the assessment process.

What a difference between this and the present testing regime! Why did we move from some reasonably sane educational ideas to the dreadful, dreary exam papers? How come speaking and listening has once again become the Cinderella strand and been downgraded in the new GCSE English exam?

The reason is very simple. Speaking and listening and assessing reading aloud have to rely on teachers' judgements and

no government seems to be willing to allow teachers to make those judgements. Speaking and Listening is the educational casualty of the drive towards centralisation. If you want to raise standards from the centre, using crude league tables to name and shame, you have to have standardised written papers. The political imperative drives the educational agenda, not the needs of the pupils and good teaching practice.

The current English exams remain highly traditional written tests, however, and this, quite naturally, directs the energy of most schools away from oral assessment even if teachers have tried to maintain it as part of their lesson pedagogy. At 7, for example, teachers in the past would listen to children read aloud to make a judgement about their decoding skills, their fluency and comprehension. This is exactly what judgements on reading should be framed around: on accuracy, fluency, and understanding. Which is the most appropriate form for that judgement to be made: a phonics test or reading aloud? The answer is obvious.

At 11 and 14 it would be quite possible to develop teacher assessment based on speaking and listening, drama or group work that tested reading, response to literature and writing. A teacher, after studying a text, might for example choose writing in role as a character, prepared by a speaking and listening activity such as hot seating. This involves assessing all aspects of language in one assignment but it is linked to good practice in teaching the pupils to plan their writing and

will therefore help them to produce their best piece of writing. The assessment is meaningful and integral to the teaching.

The added bonus of this approach is that these types of assessments would tell the teacher a lot more about a pupil's potential and make it possible to give accurate feedback on how to improve. Such assessments stimulate collaborative thinking and encourage originality, evaluation and problem solving. These higher order skills are valued in the workplace and will help pupils to enter the adult world with more social and academic confidence.

There is no reason why every subject could not adopt an oral component as part of the system of assessment. Why not get the pupils to demonstrate their ICT skills through their own presentation of a topic to the rest of the group? Why not arrange a debate on votes for women with pupils in role as Nineteenth Century politicians? Why cannot a particular painting be researched, analysed and introduced to the class by the students, rather than the art teacher? Such activities can create memorable learning moments for students. Students learn more by finding out and teaching others than they do by just being filled with information. Students will listen closely to their peers, particularly when they know that a lot of preparation has taken place beforehand.

Let's start thinking out of the exams box and use our knowledge of what really constitutes good teaching and learning to create more

developmental forms of assessment. Can't we get the pupils talking about what they know rather than always having to write it down? Can't we use good forms of formative assessment whatever we are told to do from above?

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#### **Further reading:**

Cox, B (1991) *Cox on Cox: An English Curriculum for the 1990s*. Hodder and Stoughton

Coultas, V (2009) Creating an oral portfolio. *Teachit* Spring (1) 2009

[www.teachit.co.uk/custom\\_content/newsletters/newsletter\\_jan09.php#6](http://www.teachit.co.uk/custom_content/newsletters/newsletter_jan09.php#6)

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Coultas, V (2013) *English for the Few or English for the Many?* in P Ainley and M Allen (Eds) *Education Beyond the Coalition – reclaiming the agenda*. London: Radicaled

DES (1990) *English in the National Curriculum*. HMSO



## 5. How good is our classroom? Teachers taking back responsibility

Many years ago the inspectorate in Scotland published a series of reports with the title *How good is our school?* It was an invitation to answer that question from the different viewpoints of teachers, parents, children and young people themselves. It did not suggest that any one of these was the 'right' answer but that each made their own contribution to understanding the mosaic of school life.

This did not preclude a view from inspectors with their longstanding experience of visiting schools, but it did acknowledge that a 'visitor's eye view', especially when we are all on our best behaviour, is necessarily limited. What a visitor 'sees' is limited by the expectations and agenda he or she brings with them. It is limited by the weight of authority and the 'passport' they carry with them. It is limited by what can be seen at a given time and place, what inferences are made, what questions are asked and not asked, who speaks and who listens.

*How good is our school?* is a complex and contentious question because it presents critics with plenty of room for disagreement. For a start, 'good' is a value judgment and not nearly as scientific as 'effective'. And then there is the 'how' – on what basis do you make judgments, and how valid is your evidence? And 'our' – whose school is it anyway, who are best qualified to make informed judgments, who are they responsible to?

But it is precisely in these objections that we spot the fallacy of objective measures, of the authority on which

'effectiveness' rests, the narrow approach to what constitutes 'evidence' and a view of achievement which excludes so much more than it includes – the emotionally cleansed world of standards, performance and line management.

It comes as no surprise that Ofsted has been unable to settle on a valid way of evaluating schools, seeking a "New Relationship with Schools" but finding that happy state frustratingly elusive. Well, so have many other jurisdictions but some have approached the issue with a more open mind, with a less politicised agenda and with a belief that there is much to learn from a massive corpus of work on quality assurance, school self evaluation and external review.

The OECD is one such valuable source. Between 2010 and 2012 14 country reviews of assessment and evaluation were conducted by international teams of experts in an attempt to identify leading edge practice. New Zealand was seen as perhaps closest to achieving the balance of self evaluation and external review:

New Zealand has developed its own distinctive model of evaluation and assessment that is characterised by a high level of trust in schools and school professionals... The development of national evaluation and assessment agenda has been characterised by strong collaborative work, as opposed to prescriptions being imposed from above. (Nusche, Laveault, MacBeath and Santiago, p. 132-133)

The secret is out – trust, professionalism, collaboration and ownership lie at the heart of effective quality assurance. In her 2002 Reith lecture *A Question of Trust*, Professor Onora O'Neill argued that the essential qualities in professional trust have been progressively eroded by simplistic accountability measures, encouraging deception and second-guessing as to what may meet with an inspector's approval.

There is nothing as corrosive within an organisation as mistrust, and nothing as destructive as disingenuous game playing. Yet how easy it is to be held captive by external validation, to feel the warm glow of a pat on the head, to celebrate the accolade of 'a good Ofsted'. 'Nothing fails like success' wrote Peter Senge, in 1990. The more 'success' a school experiences within the bounded criteria of exam passes and Ofsted inspections, the less likely it is to question them. 'There is nothing like success to breed complacency or arrogance because being the best means not looking for the inconsistencies or deep seated assumptions which prevent radical change.'

*Self evaluation*, conducted without looking over your shoulder, set within a climate of collegial trust and conducted in a genuine spirit of inquiry, welcomes inconsistencies, explores deep seated assumptions and is always open to doing things better. It moves from a mechanistic process to an exploration of purpose, meaning and impact. The metaphor of self evaluation as a tin opener captures the sense of opening up, in contrast to the closing down

effect of definitive judgements. Too often data and summary judgments, rendered from an authoritarian stance, close down the space for dialogue and the opportunity for learning.

Data is critical. Not the impoverished version of number crunchers but, by dictionary definition, 'an assumption or premise from which inferences may be drawn, a starting point for exploration'. A starting point for exploration. This is what lies at the very heart of both external and internal evaluation. Both complementary forms of inquiry respect diversity. They encompass observations and inferences. They include a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence. They embrace the whole gamut of achievements, written, oral, experiential, individual, social and collaborative – more ambitious and encompassing than tests and examinations – pieces in the larger jigsaw. Professional connoisseurship lies in knowing how all the pieces fit together to render a valid picture of the school or classroom, and the nature of valued learning.

Self evaluation relies on having a toolbox of strategies, put to use by teachers and students on a daily basis. Respect, democracy and reflection are the foundation. This doesn't mean abandoning schools to their own devices, to sink or swim. School self-evaluation is best supported by a well-chosen critical friend from another school, not to mention advice from the local authority and HMI. Unlike Ofsted, their

role is to sustain a spirit of critical questioning, not extinguish it through fear.

So, self-evaluation has to be understood as multi-faceted and problematic, open to changing perspectives, welcoming of the external eye, but seeing it as a formative opportunity to get all of the puzzle pieces into the right place.

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#### **Further reading:**

Hammond, S and Mayfield A (2004) *The Thin Book of Naming Elephants: How To Surface Undiscussables For Greater Organizational Success*. CITY: Thin Book Publishing Company

Macbeath, J. (1999) *Schools must speak for themselves*. London: Routledge

Macbeath, J.; Schratz, M.; Meuret, D. and Jakobsen, L. (2000) *Self-evaluation in European schools*. London: Routledge

Nosche, D, et al. (2012) *Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, PECD Publishing

Onora O'Neill's series of Reith Lectures (2002) can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lecturer.shtml>

## 6. Why universities must be part of teacher education

The Coalition Government's starting point is to view teaching as a craft activity "best learnt as an apprentice" (Michael Gove, 2010) in which, consequently, universities have no place. Worse, they see the involvement of higher education (HE) as damaging: schools minister Nick Gibb blames HE for England's education system slipping down the international rankings. Unlike other parts of Britain, recent policy in England is working to undermine the role of universities in teacher education, suggesting that school-based experience and training are sufficient.

Such prejudice flies in the face of international and national opinion. University-based courses have consistently been highly evaluated by Ofsted which has raised concerns about the quality of training in School Direct (the school based programme). The OECD (2011) concluded that the most successful school systems in the world have a strong commitment both to university-based provision and to practice in schools, each with a valuable contribution to make, yet government policy is actively undermining well-established school-university partnerships.

The Coalition government policy has been to remove the requirement for teachers in academies and free schools to have Qualified Teacher Status, and to promote alternative routes into teaching. In the School Direct programme, for example, schools recruit pre-service teachers with a view to subsequent employment and commission 'training providers' (still mostly universities but

potentially other organisations) to manage their training. Teacher education places allocated to universities have been cut back by 23% between 2012-13 and 2015-16. Some universities, including Bath, the Open University and Anglia Ruskin, have pulled out of postgraduate teacher training already.

The result is a fragmentation and proliferation of training routes of increased variability. In the current context of austerity there is also the danger that schools and aspiring teachers may increasingly opt for routes which are cheaper because they cut out the university element.

It is not just the initial education of teachers but their continuing professional development (CPD) which is under attack. Post-qualifying courses such as MAs have suffered as a result of workload pressures on staff and withdrawal of funding, and university involvement with schools on a consultancy basis has also reduced. Nicky Morgan has recently launched a new fund for CPD to be delivered by 'Teaching Schools', cutting out universities. What CPD remains is often limited to responding to short-term demands from government.

One of the characteristics of the current coalition government is its stubborn refusal to listen to research and expertise that do not fit its own agenda. This has been exacerbated by the willingness of ministers to disparage expert opinion on education as 'the blob' or 'enemies of promise'. Most people understand that universities have an important role to play in researching education and providing

independent evidence which may support or challenge policy, yet this too is being undermined.

Current policy is based on two false assumptions. The first is that there should be a separation of research from practice, which suggests education research can be developed separately, either by universities or private contractors, and the results handed to teachers who are cast as deprofessionalised 'rule-following operatives'. Real teacher professionalism requires teachers with the skills to become actively involved 'in research and enquiry, collaborating with colleagues in other schools and colleges and with members of the wider research community based in universities and elsewhere' (BERA/RSA 2014:7). Teachers should be regarded as 'citizen scholars' both as classroom teachers and by 'contributing to wider public debates about educational purposes, systems and practices' (Sharon Gewirtz). A recent inquiry into teacher education and research by the British Education Research Association found that internationally, enquiry-based (or research-rich) school and college environments are the hallmark of high performing education systems (BERA/RSA, 2014).

The second assumption is that university- and school-based approaches are alternatives (and that the latter is preferable). Yet an interdependent partnership has been a feature of successful relationships between HE institutions and schools, recognising the distinctive and valuable contribution each can make. The very basis of such partnerships is undermined



when the contribution of HE is systematically devalued.

That contribution has been to foster a critical professionalism informed by influential figures past and present who have changed the ways in which we conceive learning. Unfortunately, an all-pervasive discourse in schools and the educational world, focusing on notions of relentless improvement and measurable outcomes, has meant that discussion of the works of Bruner, Vygotsky, Piaget, Freire and other important thinkers on education have become something of a footnote to the pressing business of demonstrating that standards are being met.

Ticking a box to 'prove' that a skill has been mastered and completing a chart to indicate that a topic has been 'covered' – whether this be for the young people or the student teachers themselves – have taken precedence over the complex consideration of whether genuine learning has taken place. Current education policy is shaped by a narrowly technicist approach to education and the education of teachers, promoting a culture of compliance within a system of centralised modes of accountability. Compliance does not guarantee good teaching. Teachers need to be knowledgeable, reflective and critical about the important task they face if they are to sustain their efforts on behalf of learners.

This is not to suggest that teachers qualifying through a school-based route cannot become competent practitioners. The danger is that they will be inadequately equipped to reflect on or research their own

practice, or to think beyond the standard practices they see in their own school. A wider knowledge and deeper, more critical understanding of the sort which characterises university study is needed to enable schools to live up to the challenges of social justice and citizenship in a changing world.

In a recent press release, Schools Minister David Laws is quoted as saying, "Teachers are the single most important resource in our schools. Teaching should and must be on an equal footing with other high-status professions like law and medicine." We couldn't agree more and point to the vital role that higher education plays in the formation of those professions.

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**Further reading:**

BERA/RSA (2014) *Research and the Teaching Profession: Building the capacity for a self-improving education system, Final report of the BERA/RSA Inquiry into the role of research in Teacher Education.*

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## 7. For a new public early childhood education

England has long suffered inadequate early childhood provision, the product of prolonged under-investment and policy neglect. The result: a system split between ‘childcare’, ‘education’ and ‘welfare’, with fragmented, incoherent and divisive services, a mish-mash of nursery classes and reception classes, playgroups and nursery schools, day nurseries and childminders. To make matters worse, England has an unduly short early childhood phase, with most children entering primary school well before their fifth birthday.

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 seemed an opportunity to set things to rights... an administration that treated early childhood as a policy priority and was committed to action. Action there was from the start, an endless flow of initiatives issuing from Whitehall. But even if there was a frenetic feel to policy making, some good things followed. The importance of early childhood was recognised, investment increased, the first steps were taken to integrate care and education, Children’s Centres got the green light.

Looking back, this was clearly an opportunity missed. Rather than building an early childhood system fit for purpose, based on democratic deliberation of alternatives, New Labour went hell for leather after expansion and opted for a strategy that was basically more of the same. The spread of private providers in the day nursery sector left England with a vast for-profit sector.

Provision got more fragmented, incoherent and divisive. Of course, the picture is not all

bleak. Committed and innovative educators and centres still manage to do good things. But this should not distract from the larger picture. After nearly 20 years of policy priority, England still has grossly inadequate early childhood provision. We have a split, incoherent and divisive system; a truncated system that is weak and unable to resist schoolification; a system premised on an exploited female workforce; a system that reduces parents to consumers, educators to technicians, services to businesses and children as – well, objects to be cared for and outcomes to be realised.

We have, on the one hand, provision that emphasises a diversity of providers, competing to win the favours of parent-consumers in a marketplace; and on the other hand, a highly regulated system, with a prescriptive national curriculum, a national inspection system and a national system of assessment of children. Competition and individual choice crossed with rigidly enforced national standards; diversity of providers delivering uniform outcomes.

Neoliberalism can understand and justify public spending on early childhood services only in highly instrumental and economic terms: as ‘social investment’ in ‘human capital’. To ensure supposedly ‘high returns’, very precise ‘human technologies’ need to be applied to ensure outcomes that must be predefined. The (female) technicians to apply these technologies need neither be well educated nor well paid, trained just enough to apply ‘evidence-based’ and ‘tightly defined’ programmes. If the school has

become an exam factory, the early childhood centre is becoming a factory for early learning goals.

Finally, a neoliberal regime depoliticises. It acts as if there are no alternatives, just one right answer that experts can supply, no democratic deliberation about critical questions and policy alternatives; no recognition of the many diverse perspectives and debates in the field; no argument about the question ‘where to?’

My own starting point is that we need to re-think, then re-form. We have to stop thinking about early childhood as a collection of bits and pieces provided by competing mono-purpose services: ‘childcare for working parents’, ‘early education for 3s and 4s’, ‘support for parents’ and so on. Instead we need a holistic concept, such as ‘early childhood education’, in which education is understood in its broadest sense. This is a long-established concept that understands education as fostering and supporting the general well-being and development of children and adults, their ability to interact effectively with their environment and to live a good life. Education, here, is about the realisation of potential, fostering the ability to think and act for oneself and acquiring democratic capabilities. Care is inseparable because it is an *ethic* that should infuse all education, an ethic that requires relationships of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness.

This integrative concept of education provides the basis for a fully integrated early childhood system, including: an entitlement to such education for all children from at least 12 months until 6

years (i.e. a later transfer age to primary school); supply-side funding, with simple and affordable charges combining a free period of attendance with an income-related fee for additional time capped by a maximum payment (perhaps £100 per month per child); a unified workforce based on a graduate-level early years teacher, accounting for at least half of all staff; and, last but not least, delivery through a common type of provision, replacing the present mish-mash.

What should that provision be?

*Children's Centres*, capable of a wide variety of projects, responsive to the needs and desires of their local communities. These would be public spaces, places of encounter for citizens both younger and older, community workshops and sites of democratic practice and experimentation.

Such a provision might be provided by democratically-elected local bodies (e.g. local authorities) and by non-profit bodies (cooperatives, community organisations) able to implement democratic principles and accept public accountability. I see no place for markets or business providers.

Other conditions are equally important. A well educated, well paid and mixed-gender workforce, capable of acting as democratic professionals; active local authorities ('educative communes'), closely involved with services, providing some and supporting all, facilitating cooperation between Children's Centres and between these and other services for children, and with a key role in a system of

democratic accountability for services; and academic researchers working closely alongside early childhood educators, Children's Centres and educative communes. And, last but not least, a national government that creates a broad policy framework, defining entitlements, funding, provision and workforce, and setting broad values, purposes and goals – sufficient to give coherence and a common sense of direction to the national system, without stifling local interpretation, content and experimentation.

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#### **Further reading:**

Moss, P. (2014) *Transformative change and real utopias in Early Childhood Education*. London: Routledge

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## 8. We need to end child poverty

### What is poverty?

*Let's start with some headline data.* Today 3.5 million children are living in poverty in the UK, almost a third of all our children ([www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)). Approximately 63% of the children living in poverty are in working families. These are not 'problem families' – the real problem is that these families do not have enough money to meet their needs. Taxpayers' money is being used to pay working and child tax credits to supplement the low wages paid by employers who don't pay a living wage and therefore sustain high child poverty levels. Barnardo's claims that 'by 2020/21 another 1 million children will be pushed into poverty as a result of the Coalition Government's policies'. The problem is real and it's growing.

*What is poverty and what is it like to live in poverty?* What is meant by poverty is contested. The UK uses an OECD measure that people are poor if they have to live on 60% of the median income. Barnardo's explains that many of the families living in poverty have approximately £12 a week to spend on each family member. This money has to cover food, household bills, travel costs, school visits and activities for children as well as phone bills and electricity.

Polly Toynbee and David Walker (2008, p. 75) talk about the 'hurt of being poor' because of the lack of what 'others enjoy as every day necessities'. Here they mean children who never go on a holiday, who may not even have waterproof shoes or a warm winter coat. That's what poverty means at an individual level. If you want to get an account of

what poverty means to children, for yourself, or to share with your colleagues or anyone you are talking with about the need to end child poverty, you could watch the BBC 2011 documentary *Poor Kids* on YouTube .

If you are a child, being poor can make being at school hard and can produce feelings and experiences of exclusion and oppression. Sam lives in Leicester with his Dad and his sister. His is one of the stories from *Poor Kids*:

"They call me 'ankle boy' because I have ripped trousers that are too small for me," ... His 16-year-old sister Kayleigh admits she is concerned about Sam being bullied. "I worry about Sam all the time – once you're marked, you're marked for life." ... She admits to worrying about money constantly and says poverty is a burden for children.

"Sometimes it does feel like you've got a big hefty secret and you need to keep it hidden. It puts you in that mindset that you're lower than everyone else."

### How does poverty affect education?

A great deal of research has explored the relationship between poverty and educational outcomes. Findings suggest that less than half of all five year olds entitled to free school meals have a 'good level of development' compared to nearly 70 per cent of all other children. Only 36 per cent of children on free school meals gain 5 GCSEs at grades C

and above including English and maths – a benchmark met by 64 percent of children who are not eligible for free school meals. Joseph Rowntree puts it starkly:

There is strong evidence that households' financial resources are important for children's outcomes, and that this relationship is one of cause and effect. Protecting households from low income is unlikely to provide a complete solution to less well-off children's worse outcomes, but ought to be a central part of Government efforts to promote children's opportunities and life chances.

(<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/does-money-affect-childrens-outcomes>)

### What can be done – an anti-poverty strategy

There are lots of things that can be done in schools to ensure that children growing up in poverty are not disadvantaged by in-school practices and policies. Schools can be proactive to possible challenges that face some of their students such as bullying and harassment and can encourage high aspirations through holding high expectations of these students. (see <http://teaching.monster.com/counselors/articles/8164-what-you-can-do-for-students-living-in-poverty>)

In *Stand Up for Education* the NUT has made policy recommendations to support good early years provision such as more funding for nursery education, smaller classes and well qualified teachers. The NUT

has called for a concerted attack on youth unemployment. All these things need to be done.

However, while in-school policies and supportive practices can make a difference, of themselves these tactics are not going to alter the structural conditions that perpetuate poverty and child poverty. That is why educationalists have to advocate for wider social change and political action as well as for change in schools. 'The relationship between poverty and education is unlikely to be disturbed unless fundamental issues of power and interest, advantage and disadvantage are addressed' (Raffo et al., 2007: xiii).

### **Making a difference – really tackling poverty**

- *Ensure the state takes and maintains a formal responsibility for poverty reduction.* Social welfare is becoming the provenance of various venture philanthropists. We cannot leave dealing with poverty to the whims and interventions of charitable individuals however well intentioned or well organised they are.
- *Campaign for a decent living wage while reducing the high costs of living* in essential areas such as heating, transport and food.
- *Support and extend Sure Start Children's Centres.*
- *Campaign for higher taxation* to provide a decent society that protects and supports its members and dismantle tax-avoidance schemes (Toynbee and Walker).

- *Pay women an equal wage;* 'in 2012, comparing all work, women earned 18.6% less per hour than men' ([www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/2013/11/equal-pay/](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/2013/11/equal-pay/)). Many women who are bringing up their children on their own are going to stay trapped in poverty unless this pay gap is addressed.

Basil Bernstein wrote that 'education cannot compensate for society' and it can't. But society can change if there is the political will to dismantle the barriers that prevent our children from living a decent and fulfilling life. We **can** kick poverty out!

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### **Further reading:**

Raffo, C.; Dyson, A.; Gunter, H.; Hall, D.; Jones, L. and Kalambouka, A. (2007) *Education and Poverty. A critical review of theory, policy and practice.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

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## 9. Poverty and education

There are now 3.5 million children in the UK living in poverty. These children are concentrated in particular areas, particularly in inner-city housing estates and rural areas where there is not enough work to go around. Their schools face particular challenges every day.

Schools face the direct effects of child poverty when:

- children are hungry and rely on the school to provide them with breakfast and lunch
- children are unable to participate in school activities because they do not have the money for sports, excursions or extra curricular activities such as music
- children are unable to do their homework because there is no place they can use for study, they have no computer and no access to the internet or to reference books.

Teachers in schools serving high poverty communities know that many of the children they work with have no bedroom of their own, do not have a safe place to play outside and live in housing which is damp and unheated. Some children have to care for parents who are ill. Such life circumstances prevent children from achieving as much as they might. Despite the best efforts of their schools, many children living in poverty can be stigmatized by peers, some unthinking adults, and educational policies which assume that all children have equal access to libraries, health and welfare services, transport and everyday activities such as holidays and trips to the theatre or gallery.

It is often said that because many people who are poor did not do well at school themselves, they are not supportive of their own children's education. This is not true. The vast majority of parents are very keen for their children to do well and understand very well the relationship between qualifications and life chances.

The media is always ready, it seems, to make programmes that portray these children and their families as lazy and feckless, as shamelessly dependent on benefits. But the majority of people living below the official poverty line are working, sometimes stitching together several part-time, insecure and poorly paid jobs. It is estimated that one in five workers is now paid less than they need to maintain a basic but socially acceptable standard of living. The Living Wage Commission says that

Britain's economy is showing sustained signs of recovery after the worst recession since World War II, yet more and more workers are falling into low pay. The juxtaposition between increases in economic output and the worsening problem of low pay is an important one, because it means that economic growth alone will not necessarily solve Britain's low pay crisis. (Living Wage Commission, 2014, p 7)

Some schools are part of the low-wage problem too; they employ people on part-time contracts which only cover term-time.

The vast majority of schools and teachers are committed to

breaking the ongoing nexus between poverty and educational success. Schools with a high proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals know that they are much more likely to be below floor targets than other schools. But changing the statistics is not a simple matter. It is well known and understood in schools with high child poverty that many children are more likely to begin school without the advantages enjoyed by their peers in better off families – their parents cannot afford full-time preschool and the kinds of books and experiences that are congruent with the current school curriculum. The advantages experienced by some children continue all the way through school, right up to the final years of high school, where many parents who can afford to do so employ personal tutors to ensure exam success.

The schools serving the poorest children in the country have to do more with less. They must spend more of their budgets on: health and welfare support; subsidising equipment, materials and excursions; breakfast and homework clubs; and enrichment activities that less cash-strapped families would provide for themselves. Schools in high poverty neighbourhoods have to provide more support for English language learning for new settlers in the country, more remedial support for children whose learning has been interrupted or delayed, and more specialised intervention for children with diagnosed learning difficulties. Teachers in these schools must also work with children whose families are under intense financial pressure and where everyday life is often highly stressed. And cuts to local health

and welfare services have meant that schools serving the poorest communities have had to pick up even more responsibilities.

While additional funds such as the pupil premium are crucially important, they are insufficient to cater for all of the things that need to be done. Schools serving poor neighbourhoods need to be able to focus on their educational work – making progress against the educational odds facing their pupils. Their job would be much easier if there were a coordinated public policy agenda to the question of child poverty – an agenda which covered issues such as the level of wages paid to parents and the provision of regular and accessible public transport, affordable housing and good public community health provision. Parents should be assisted to return to education themselves to gain qualifications that would help them in the labour market.

A government which understood the everyday challenges facing schools serving the most vulnerable children would not punish them when they find it difficult to make a difference. Expertise and support would be provided together with the financial support needed to tackle the serious issues they face. Punitive regimes do nothing to tackle the real issues, and they do much to damage the morale and capacities of schools and teachers working with families and communities which are making the best of a very bad financial lot.

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### **Further reading:**

Education and Social Mobility  
[www.esrc.ac.uk/\\_images/  
education-vital-social-  
mobility\\_tcm8-20069.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/education-vital-social-mobility_tcm8-20069.pdf)

Nelson, J, Martin, K and Featherstone, G (2013) *What works in supporting children and young people to overcome persistent poverty? A review of UK and international literature.* Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

Save the Children (2014) *A fair start for every child. Why we must act now to tackle child poverty in the UK.* [www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

Living Wage Commission (2014) *Working for poverty. The scale of the problem of low pay and working poverty in the UK.* <http://livingwagecommission.org.uk>

## 10. For an empowered, democratised and properly resourced local school system.

The policy document approved at Labour's annual policy conference in September 2014, *Education and Children*, states that 'We will [...] put an end to the fragmented, divisive school system created by this Government.'

### **Bring academies and free schools into a unified local authority system**

The fragmentation is the result of academies and free schools (and of course the question of grammar schools, equally divisive in a different way). But *Education and Children* is silent on whether academies and free schools will be incorporated into the local authority system, or if not what their relationship would be.

Indeed, Tristram Hunt announced on 14 October 2014: 'We want to see a multiplicity of provision – academy chains, single academies, community schools, parent-led academies.' Fragmentation continues, including parent-led academies as just the Coalition's free schools rebranded.

We need to remember that the whole case for academies rests on claims that they, and especially sponsored academies, are more effective in raising standards than local authority schools. All the accumulated evidence shows that this claim is unfounded when you compare like with like. The latest evidence is in the NFER Report on Academy performance (October 2014): 'Attainment progress in sponsored academies compared to similar non-academies is not significantly different over time when the outcome is measured as GCSE points, excluding equivalent qualifications such as BTECs. The evidence is clear that academies make far greater use of equivalents.

So the case for academies collapses, but we have paid a huge price for this ideologically-driven experiment – the lack of accountability of these schools to their local community as represented by elected local government.

The first step forward should be the re-creation of fully inclusive local systems of state-funded schools by the re-integration of academies and the integration of free schools. Academies can be brought back in, funding agreements can be rescinded, as the legal expert David Wolfe has shown.

### **End private sponsors controlling schools**

The second step is to put an end to private sponsor chains controlling schools by appointing the majority of the governors. No state-funded school should be controlled by a private organisation – it's a form of privatisation. The Labour Party's policy statement *Education and Children* says that schools can voluntarily leave chains, but how can that be if the chain has the majority of governors? It has to be the other way round. Governing bodies of sponsored academies should be re-formed to ensure that they have the same composition as maintained schools. If a school then wishes to continue a partnership with an ex-sponsor, as with any external organisation, it should be able to do so, but this does not require any power to be handed over to it from the reconstituted governing body.

### **The role of the new local authorities**

So... a unified local school system accountable to elected local government. In that, what should the local authority's role be? The control of admissions policy and the provision of school places, naturally. Also school improvement, now largely the responsibility of the schools themselves. But without central coordination and funding improvement can be patchy. Some schools are left behind. So there is a vital role for the local authority in identifying schools which need additional support, coordinating and providing direction, and funding it.

The role of the local authority has to go beyond supporting schools in difficulties and raising test and exam scores. It should also develop a local vision in a dialogue with schools and communities, and promote progressive innovation. To do all this local authorities need power and resources. That requires an end to the massive cuts imposed by central government and the restoration of an adequate level of funding. This is not about local authorities 'controlling' schools, it's about their capacity to act in the interests of the whole community they are elected to represent, in a new partnership with schools.

### **Participatory democracy in the local school system**

On the question of local democracy, *Education and Children* says: 'a One Nation education system will deliver a radical devolution of power from Whitehall. Labour will empower local communities to have a greater



say about education in their area'. The question is, what structures and procedures will enable local communities to effectively participate in decision-making in their local school system? On this the policy document is silent.

Instead its focus is on the new position of local Director of School Standards (DSS). According to *Education and Children* the function of the DSS is to 'hold all schools to account, regardless of structure, for their performance and intervene in poorly performing schools.' But how will a local authority 'hold to account' the DSS? Where does the power really lie? Is the DSS subject to local authority policy, or is the DSS in reality the local arm of the Department for Education, a dictator over local authorities?

The role of the DSS is unnecessary and the proposal should be opposed. All of the DSS's functions could be carried out by reformed, resourced and democratised local authorities, with oversight by an independent HM Inspectorate as appropriate. External support, including from government, may be needed for a transitional period to enable local authorities to get back on their feet, but this is not to be confused with the permanent structural division of powers between local authorities and the DSSs proposed by Labour. In addition small local authorities, such as in London, may need to work in partnership to ensure sufficient capacity to fulfil their roles.

Earlier in 2014 the Labour Party had published a *Review of education structures, functions and the raising of standards for all: Putting students and parents first,*

known for short as the Blunkett Review. It contained an innovative and radical proposal for widening participation in policy-making: a local Education Panel with representatives from schools, parents and the local authority who would develop a long-term strategic plan for education. We would argue for membership of the Panel to also include representatives of governors, teachers, school students and – in line with local authority devolution policies – community representatives. We think this sort of authority-wide Local Education Forum is the way forward. But the idea of local Education Panels has been dropped from the Education and Children policy document.

### **Open up the Cabinet and Scrutiny system to participation**

Public participation in discussion of education policy is largely meaningless without the ability to influence local authority policy, and this means opening up the existing structures and processes of local government – the Cabinet and Scrutiny system. This system is largely immune to any direct involvement by headteachers, teachers and governors, let alone parents and other citizens. To democratise the present structures, the local council should establish an Education Committee. This should comprise not just councillors but lay members elected from the authority-wide Forum, thus ensuring direct public and professional participation. Scrutiny committees should also be opened up to participation.

Public participation in policy-making in local school systems does not mean intervening in issues which are properly matters of professional judgement. Nor does it imply that public views are inevitably progressive. In both cases it is a question of deliberation and negotiation between public, professionals and local authorities, and the mobilisation of collective support for progressive policies.

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### **Further reading:**

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Hatcher, R. (2012) Democracy and participation in the governance of local school systems. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 44(1)

David Wolfe (2013) explains how academies can be reintegrated into local authorities in 'Schools: The Legal Structures, the Accidents of History and the Legacies of Timing and Circumstance', *Education Law Journal*, May 2013.

## 11. Education should not be run for profit

Late last year, England's Education Secretary Nicky Morgan made waves through schools by declaring that while she was 'clear about the importance of not-for-profit education', she did not rule out the possibility that schools might become profit-making enterprises. This ignited new public debates about whether running schools for profit is either ethical or effective. While it is easy to have a position, evaluating arguments presented both for and against for-profit learning can be hard. Knowing what profit is, learning to recognise the profit motive in schools and understanding the impacts of profit on education can help guide thinking about this issue.

Schools are run for profit either because this is thought to be more effective than public funding for education, or because they can be harnessed as sources of corporate income. Sometimes these motivations go together, as when corporations are portrayed as public servants who rescue children and communities from 'failing' schools and local governments. This is common where governments reduce public education budgets, leave schools with insufficient resources to function, and then create policies which allow (or force) schools to be placed under private or corporate control. School voucher programmes in Chile, the Free School project in Sweden, and Charter School movements in the United States all emerged from this logic.

While England's academies and free schools are not currently run for profit, these programmes are also part of this trend and there

is reason for concern. This is not because it has been proven that children universally achieve more or less in corporate schools than they do in public ones. Large-scale studies comparing for-profit charter schools, non-profit charters and public schools in the US, for example, have tended to find either small differences or contradictory results. So why, given this lack of definitive evidence of a correlation between profit and failure, should we be critical of privatising learning? And what evidence can opponents of for-profit education draw on to help others understand that there is a problem?

First, for-profit education makes schooling unstable rather than secure. In 2013, for example, the Swedish government was forced to re-evaluate its free schools programme after a large for-profit corporate chain went bankrupt, sold and closed a number of schools, and left hundreds of children without places. Similarly, teachers, parents, students and members of school boards and civil rights organisations in many cities across the US are fighting the closure of public community schools – sometimes by the dozen simultaneously – whose budgets are being redirected to fund corporately-run and often selective charter schools.

Second, for-profit education increases social segregation and inequalities. One of the principles underlying systems of both non-profit and for-profit schools is that they must compete in order to attract students, funding and prestige. Research on competitive school systems in Chile, Sweden and the

US indicates that such competition can both exacerbate and produce class and racial inequalities, and that for-profit schools have little incentive to prioritise socially just policies in student selection.

Third, many for-profit schools still benefit from the accumulation of public money (through accepting government funding for individual students). Even where 'free schools' do not operate for profit, as in England, they can serve as hubs for a range of commercial enterprises, organised by outsourcing work and services, hiring consultants, buying in contracts and materials from private companies (including testing companies) and renting space.

Perhaps the most pressing concern, however, is that the logic of profit itself disfigures learning and teaching and compromises educational relationships. In order to understand this, we must know what 'for-profit education' means and what profit really is. Profit is whatever money is left over after I sell something I have paid to produce. In order to profit from an activity, I have to find a way of obtaining more value for something than it is worth. There are only a few ways to accomplish this: I can invest less money, time and resources into creating something; I can work longer and harder to make more things; or I can improve my techniques to become more efficient.

One of the easiest ways to understand profit is to think about two words that we have come to know well: 'value added'. Teachers are often encouraged to work in ways that

result in better outcomes than might ordinarily be expected, thus ‘adding value’ to teaching, test scores, relationships and school environments. They are expected to do this whilst relying on a constant or dwindling pool of resources; to dedicate more of their personal time and energy to this cause in order to compensate, to ‘innovate’. The added value that is produced, it is argued, is that students have a special advantage on standardised tests or educational opportunities, teachers gain competitive advantages in professional autonomy and pay, and schools gain competitive advantage in league tables and other comparative measures of educational success.

Where the profit motive operates in schools – even in schools that are still officially public – children and young people can become narrowly defined and measured according to this system of value. They can easily become objects which we work on instrumentally to achieve an observable ‘output’ which guarantees our own competitive edge (such as a chart indicating that they have made ‘three levels of progress’) rather than people with whom we can authentically engage.

Unprofitable kids, unprofitable teaching methods, and unprofitable uses of time – including much of what we know works for deep critical learning and for nurturing individuality, diversity and community in schools – become squeezed out of education as the profit motive sinks in. It is not only that schools should remain not-for-profit and in public service and trust, therefore, but that the

deeper logic of profit-making in all aspects of education today must be replaced by alternative principles of learning and care. There are so many ways to begin.

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## 12. Education in a world wracked by crisis

*A different kind of education system could confront inequality and the crises of society.*

In the opening pages of a well thumbed text for sociologists of education, *Schooling and Work in a Democratic State*, Stanford University professors Martin Carnoy and Henk Levin argued that education could ameliorate wider inequalities in US society.

Schools and workplaces are organised in ways that correspond closely. Both are large, bureaucratic, impersonal, and hierarchical and routinised... And yet for all of their correspondences, schools differ from workplaces in at least one important respect. Even though American education is marked by great inequalities, schools do more than other institutions in the way of providing equal opportunities for participation and rewards... In short, schooling tends to be distributed more equally than capital, income and employment status.

Thirty years on, the story is very different. The US and the UK have both become more unequal in the distribution of wealth and income. We face a series of crises – economic, political and cultural – that promise to deliver a future that the next generation do not deserve.

Can the solution still be education? The answer is yes, but only if we confront the causes of the crises facing our education systems and put a strong case for a very different future. Education systems across Europe, and especially in the UK, face five crises.

The first is a crisis of *neoliberal capitalism*. Where neoliberal policies are in place (favouring privatisation, liberalisation and tax cuts for the wealthy), countries have become more unequal. As Warren Buffett – the fourth richest person in the world, with an estimated wealth of \$44bn – stated: “There’s class warfare alright, but it is my class, the rich class that’s making war. And we’re winning.”

This growth in inequality is quite shocking. The top 1% has almost doubled its share of the wealth since the 1950s, and 85 people in the world now own as much as the poorest half of the population.

What could we do with such wealth? The wealthy individuals featured in the Sunday Times’ *Rich List* were worth £519bn in 2014. This would pay for 5.9 years of education in the UK, 3.7 years of state pensions or 4.2 years of public health.

Second, there is a crisis in the *governance model of education*. Policies that favour school choice and individualism exacerbate social inequalities: the worst of the outcomes fall squarely on the shoulders of the poorest segments of the population, who can’t choose or whose resources limit their choices.

Third, there is a crisis in *social mobility*. The next generation is likely to be in a worse, not better, position than their parents. They are bearing the full brunt of neoliberal policies. When Occupy and other protest groups state “We are the 99 percent”, they are making their voices heard regarding policies that have systematically produced inequalities in our societies.

Fourth, there is a crisis of *graduate employment*. In countries

like Spain and Greece graduate unemployment is around 50%. In the UK, graduate unemployment and under-employment undermines the promise of “work hard and you will get a good job” or “take out a loan and invest in your future”.

Fifth, there is a crisis of *imagination* about *what kind of education* we might have, and for *what kind of future*. This is why the NUT’s manifesto for education is so important. The solution must be in education, but it will require us to confront more squarely the causes of the crisis. Education and teacher activism will also need to promote a very different kind of education system, one that could act as the kind of ameliorative force Carnoy and Levin described.

This must be an act of class warfare with the full weight of a different, more imaginative, challenging and socially just agenda that confronts the failure of governments to challenge the vested interests of a small wealthy elite.

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### 13. A real voice for teachers: teacher professionalism and teacher unions

It is increasingly fashionable to talk about the need for the *'teachers' voice'*. This can be described as teachers having a say, literally a *voice*, on the issues that affect them. Some people use the term *agency*, or *professional agency*, to describe something more active than *voice* (after all, it is possible to have a voice but not be listened to). *Professional agency* might refer to teachers having meaningful influence – the ability and autonomy to exercise judgement, make decisions, determine outcomes and shape change.

The calls today for teachers to have a voice reflect the fact that the voice of teachers has been progressively marginalised over a period of very many years. Often the political parties that now claim to want a 'voice for teachers' are the same parties that have previously sought to exclude the teachers' voice from policy debates and to close down the spaces in which teachers could exercise professional agency. Here are some examples of bodies with significant teacher representation but which no longer exist:

- The Schools Council – set up to innovate in the curriculum, with a significant role for teachers and subject associations. *Abolished 1982.*
- Burnham Committee – a negotiating body (set up in 1919) allowing teachers, through their unions, to negotiate pay and conditions with employers, rather than have them imposed by an 'independent' review body. *Abolished 1987.*

- The Social Partnership – established by government and some unions and highly controversial. Promoted the workforce remodelling reforms. However, love it or loathe it – didn't matter. *Abolished 2010.*
- General Teaching Council of England – a body established to promote the professional status of teachers and promote professional standards and professional development. *Abolished 2012.*

As the spaces for teachers to have a voice have been closed down, many other changes have had the effect of reducing teachers' scope to exercise professional judgement. A prescriptive National Curriculum, government control of assessment and testing at all ages, the role of Ofsted and a growing managerialism in schools, have all had the effect of restricting and controlling the spaces in which classroom teachers can exercise professional judgement and autonomy. Democratic debate in schools, and about schools, is being closed down, and the concept of academic freedom (usually associated with higher education, but no less important in schools) is being dangerously diminished.

The consequences of the changes identified above are that teachers are being de-professionalised as their professional opinions are devalued and marginalised. The 'voice of the profession' is increasingly articulated by a small policy elite who are aligned with the trajectory of current policy reforms and who have

little or no democratic accountability. It should not be surprising therefore if teachers become demoralised and despair at the increasing control of their professional lives. The result is growing disaffection and often the loss of many excellent teachers to teaching.

There is a need, therefore, to reinsert the voice of teachers into all levels of the education system – from the individual classroom to the highest levels of policy making (including global bodies 'above' national governments, such as OECD). This needs to be a voice that makes a difference – whereby teachers can claim to have genuine professional agency. Teachers need to reclaim their teaching.

In a contribution to the forthcoming book *Flip the System*,<sup>1</sup> Alison Gilliland and I have argued that teachers should be able to assert decisive influence in relation to three 'domains of professional agency'.

*Shaping learning and working conditions.* This recognises that the working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students and that teachers should not only be able to exercise proper professional judgement in their own classroom but should have meaningful influence in framing the conditions within which they work. One obvious example of this would be the return of national collective bargaining, still the dominant mode of managing employee relations in democratic jurisdictions including high-performing systems such as Finland and Canada.

<sup>1</sup> *Flip the system: the alternative to neoliberalism in education* is edited by two teachers from the Netherlands – Jelmer Evers and René Kneyber. It will be published in 2015 with the support of Education International. See – <http://www.flip-the-system.org/>

*Developing and enacting policy.* ‘Policy’ frames much of what teachers do, whether it comes from government or is policy developed at school level. If teachers have meaningful agency, then they have a voice in determining policy at whatever level it is being developed. Policy should not be imposed but the outcome of genuine democratic processes. There needs to be a ‘re-balancing’ between teachers and ‘leaders’ in schools with the views of classroom teachers, and support staff, given due respect and recognition. Structures should be established in schools that formalise these arrangements.

*Developing professional knowledge and professional learning.* This respects teachers’ professional expertise and their ability to exercise professional judgement. Teachers need the space to engage critically with research, and also to determine their own professional development needs. Too often teachers are told what to do, and are then further de-professionalised by quick-fix professional development programmes that tell them how to do it. As with many other aspects of education, too much decision making in relation to pedagogical approaches and professional development is experienced as top-down imposition, often driven by the perceived demands of Ofsted. Current inspection arrangements are antithetical to notions of professional trust and autonomy, without which there cannot be genuine professional agency.

Alison and I argue that any claim to teacher professionalism must be judged by the extent to which teachers can claim to have genuine professional agency in

relation to each of these three different aspects of their working lives. In many cases it will be quite appropriate that teachers exercise this agency as individuals. For example, teachers should be able to decide for themselves how best to teach their class, and what pedagogical approaches are most appropriate. Too often teachers are denied the ability to make choices over what should rightly be a matter of their own professional judgement.

However, if teachers are to be able to assert real agency, at all levels of the system, but in particular at higher levels where decisive power is exercised, then they must also assert their agency collectively. As Judyth Sachs (2003) argued so persuasively, teachers need to combine together and make their professionalism – agency is asserted by becoming what Sachs called ‘activist professionals’.

This is why, if teachers want a real voice in education, they must be willing to organise and to act together. Teachers already have many organisations in which they work together – subject associations provide an important example. Meanwhile a new body is being proposed to promote the voice of teachers – a College of Teaching. (I have argued elsewhere (Stevenson, 2014) why teachers should be sceptical of this initiative.)

My argument is that if teachers want to make a real difference, and to have genuine professional agency, then the most obvious organisations for them to work through are their unions. Only teacher unions have the independence from government that safeguards them from being used cynically to reproduce current policy. Only unions have

the democratic structures that allow ordinary grassroots teachers to ensure the accountability of their representatives. Finally, only unions have the ability to speak for all of the teaching profession. (Government commissioned research (NFER, 2012) indicates that 97% of teachers are members of a union.) Unfortunately, in England, the voice of unionised teachers is weakened by being divided between many unions, and this is arguably one reason why the attacks on state education in England have been particularly effective. The challenge for all teachers in England is not only to work towards professional unity, but to realise the power within them by participating and engaging in union life and becoming ‘activist professionals’. They would then have a voice that could not be silenced.

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This pamphlet is the work of a network of academics and researchers supporting the NUT's Stand Up for Education campaign. Their website [www.reclaimingschools.org](http://www.reclaimingschools.org) provides further evidence and regular analysis.

Resources and news about the NUT's Stand Up for Education campaign are available at: [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)

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