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Education, justice and democracy: *The struggle over ignorance and opportunity*

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Series: A Social State for 2015

December 2012 marked the 70th anniversary of the Beveridge Report, significant not only for its content but also for its context. In the midst of World War II, with a budget deficit and national debt that makes today's look negligible, the Report laid the basis for the radical reforms introduced by the Labour Government in 1945.

If wartime Britain could summon up the energy and hope to build a better world in 1945, this generation certainly can too. Seventy years ago the Beveridge Report announced the pursuit of a new settlement, one that would dramatically change the structure of Britain for the better. With this in mind, this series of work looks at what Beveridge's analysis of society can teach us about the Giant Evils of today and how we use this to chart an alternative course for a welfare state - or *Social State* - fit for a new settlement in 2015. This paper was commissioned as part of the series to address the Giant Evil of 'ignorance' and to propose new policy priorities for education after the next election.

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Executive summary

The history of English education is very much a history of social class. The 1944 Education Act, the wartime government's response to the great evil of ignorance, did little to interrupt that history. Rather it brought about a very modest loosening of the relationship between social class and educational opportunity. This was partly in relation to the raising of the school leaving age and partly by allowing some working class students access to grammar schooling via the 11+ examination system.

Despite the shortcomings, 1944 was a significant moment in state education in so far as it represented the clearest, although still equivocal, commitment of the state to responsibility for compulsory educational provision. An educational 'settlement' was set in place for the period 1944-76 but it was a shaky and unstable settlement. This made thoroughgoing comprehensive reform difficult, if not impossible.

Both the New Labour (1997-2010) and Coalition Governments have worked to unpick the idea of direct responsibility for the delivery of educational services. The current system of education in England is beginning to resemble some aspects of the pre-1870 system of education. The distribution of responsibility for the solution of social problems is changing and now philanthropy and business are essential parts of the delivery and policy processes of education.

The Conservative Governments of 1979-97 and Labour and Coalition Governments have all been keen to displace the participation of teacher associations, trade unions and local authorities from the policy process. Furthermore, the introduction of new kinds of schools has enabled a gradual dismantling of national pay and conditions agreements for teachers and a concomitant move towards individual contract arrangements for teachers and other school workers.

The more fuzzy and patchy the system of schools, the more difficult it is for those without the 'right' cultural assets to navigate their way through. Concomitantly some schools are using their 'freedoms' to deploy subtle forms of selection. Competition between schools articulated through league tables based on output indicators has produced an 'economy of student worth'. In these respects, the relation of supply to demand in the education market is dysfunctional. Pedagogy and classroom decision-making are driven by the overbearing emphasis on performance. Outcome measurement and teaching and learning are distorted by the fears of measurement and comparison.

Despite the relentless and repeated criticisms of state schooling and the ongoing reform of the school system, the relationships between opportunity, achievement and social class have remained stubbornly entrenched and have been reproduced by policy. Inequalities of class and race remain stark and indeed have been increasing since 2008[1].

In response to this we have to reconnect education to democracy and work towards an educative relationship between schools and their communities. Put simply "we should recognize the centrality of education to larger projects of democracy and community building"[2]. Among other things schools should have a responsibility to develop the capabilities of parents, students, teachers, and other local stakeholders; to participate, to discuss, to challenge and critique. It is time to get *back to basics* – to think seriously about what is the purpose of education and what it means to be educated, what schools are for, and concomitantly and crucially who should decide these things.

It is clearly necessary to dismantle systems of assessment and related incentives that encourage schools to focus their attention on some students and neglect others. Forms of assessment which rate students according to standardised age-related criteria that encourage 'teaching to the test' and ignore that children learn at different speeds and in different ways should be done away with. We need to engage students in discussing and designing purposeful and meaningful systems of assessment.

All of this, would also mean addressing directly, and in practical ways, the complex and difficult relations between education and poverty and reworking "the tangled and confused nexus between the new realities of adolescent lives, and the out-of-touch realities of educational policy regimes"[3] in sustained and different ways. Fundamentally, this means moving away from the idea that there is a simple and inevitable relationship between social background and something called ability.

Rather than blaming teachers for low expectations or parents for lack of aspiration, we need to think about the social conditions that make effective learning possible, at home and at school. Once those conditions are met we can begin to think more about the role of expectations and aspirations.

What are needed are forms of *radical incrementalism* based on “consultative and participatory processes”[4]. This is not however a proposal for tinkering and compromise, it is a process of re-starting policy from a different set of organising principles - a staged but unequivocal abandonment of the current education policy infrastructure.

The political process of rethinking education for the 21st century, related to real social needs and economic problems, will only come about by unleashing the innovative potential of schools, teachers and communities; by building and exploiting a proper sense of “democratic fellowship”[5]; and by rebuilding trust in teachers and schools.

Such changes will require a new kind of teacher and a move towards forms of democratic professionalism[6], with an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders[7]. Which in turn means that teachers, parents and students will have to accept challenges and demonstrate a readiness to lead and adapt.

There are many risks and costs to be borne here, and there will be failures and dead-ends. Nevertheless the risks of not struggling against ignorance and for educational change are greater, in particular for those who bear the costs of things as they are now in education.

Introduction

This paper is the last in a series which marks the 70th anniversary of The Beveridge Report[8]. William Beveridge, an economist, identified five ‘Giant Evils’ in society: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease, and went on to propose widespread reform to the system of social welfare to address these. Highly popular with the public, the report formed the basis for the post-war reforms known as the Welfare State.

This paper begins by considering the progress made in combating the evil of ignorance since the Report was published. It begins with a synoptic survey of current education policy, focused on compulsory schooling, and identifies a broad and fundamental failure to achieve even the modest aspirations of Beveridge. It describes a system of schooling riven with divisions, inequalities, alienation, failure, despondency and bias – six evils.

The second part of the paper outlines a new beginning for education – a different kind of back to basics. This involves a fundamental shift from a system of education driven by economic necessities, to one which gives priority to social and political necessities. This will be a democratic education system, a system of hope and happiness and social renewal. A set of possibilities are presented which are premised not on fixed proposals but on the need for local democratic debate, deliberation and decision-making. The vision here is of schools as centres of civic responsibility and as educative institutions. Schools that will both foster and respond to the participation of parents and students with teachers and other local stakeholders, in the making of decisions about what education is for, what it means to be educated and what, and how, students should learn. Education would be reconceived in relation to other aspects of social policy and to social problems. What is outlined is somewhere different from where to start.

A shaky and unstable settlement

> **Ignorance is an evil weed, which dictators may cultivate among their dupes, but which no democracy can afford among its citizens.** ***Beveridge, 1942***[9]

The relationship between The Beveridge Report and educational reform in the 1940s was a fairly indirect one. Indeed, then as now, were very few examples of a clear articulation between education and other areas of social policy. Furthermore, within the thinking of the time of Beveridge almost everything that counted as education, and what it meant to be educated, was taken for granted. The assumption was that what was needed were 'appropriate' ways of expanding and distributing the participation of young people in secondary education. Up to 1944, participation and distribution was based firmly on a set of class divisions which enacted the recommendations of the three great education commissions of the 19th century, i.e. Newcastle 1861 (elementary schools), Taunton 1868 (grammar and endowed schools) and Clarendon 1864 (public schools).

By 1938, in England a total of 88% of children were attending 'all-age' schools up to the age of 14. Classes of 50 or more were not unusual and only 1 in 150 of these children ended up at university. A small, mainly lower middle-class group was selected at the age of 11 for 'special places' at local authority secondary schools where, overall, 45% of places were free. Still, smaller middle and upper class groups attended independent grammar schools or public schools. Schooling reflected the gradations of society – only 1 in 7 children remained at school after the age of 13, the intake to grammar schools increased only slightly from 90,000 in 1921 to 98,000 in 1938. Barnett[10] called this a "half-cock" education system where the figures for secondary participation compared poorly not only with Germany, France and the US, but also with Scotland and Wales.

Furthermore, during the 1920s and 1930s the relationships between education and class were increasingly inflected and legitimated by assertions about 'intelligence' drawn from the nexus of psychology and eugenics. That is, it was taken to be clear that abilities were fixed by heredity and could be measured by tests, and that not everyone could benefit equally from education[11]. Beveridge himself sat on the Council of the Eugenics Society[12].

The Report of the Norwood Committee[13], which outlined the tripartite framework for the 1944 Act (grammar, secondary modern and technical schools, although only 54 LEAs opted to establish the latter more expensive schools), argued that:

> **In a wise economy of secondary education, pupils of a particular type of mind would receive the training best suited for them and that training would lead them to an occupation where their capacities would be suitably used.**

The response to the great evil of ignorance was addressed in the passing of the 1944 Education Act. Contemporary educationalist Fred Clarke was highly critical of the 1944 Act and deeply suspicious of what he described as its “class prejudice”[14].

Michael Barber argues that the 1944 Act may not have been ‘radical’ but was ‘flexible’ and stands “in strong contrast to the kind of rolling, detailed legislative programme which has characterised the late 1980s and early 1990s”[15]. In many ways, in the drafting of the Act much more time and effort was devoted to solving the problem of the faith schools than thinking about a modern system of education suited to the needs of post-war society. The compromise which emerged from negotiation with the churches was a mix of ‘controlled’ and ‘aided’ status for religious schools that remains in place today. The role of faith schools in the state system continues to be a source of controversy and inequality[16].

The social intakes of faith and non-faith schools differ in a number of ways, and there is a preponderance of faith schools among the newly opened Free Schools. For example, the Guardian recently highlighted the intake of the London Oratory School, described as being “far from…an average comprehensive”[17]. Here, only 6% of pupils are from deprived backgrounds (a third of the English average) and “almost 91%” gain at least five A*-C GCSEs, while the average in England is just 51.9%[17].

The history of English education is then very much a history of social class, and the 1944 Act did little to interrupt that history. Rather it brought about a very modest loosening of the relationship between social class and educational opportunity. This was partly in relation to the raising of the school leaving age and partly by allowing some working class students access to grammar schooling via the 11+ examination system[18]. The Act raised the school leaving age to 15 (though the stated intention that it should be 16 was not effected until 1972), but established age 11 as the decision point for sending children to different kinds of secondary school (grammar, secondary modern or technical school). However, despite the 1944 Act, universal access to state education was not put in place until 1970 when Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education, announced that:

> **On 1 April, local education authorities became responsible for the education of severely handicapped children hitherto considered to be 'unsuitable for education at school'. Now for the first time in history all children without exception are within the scope of the educational system. The Education (Handicapped Children) Act of 1970 is the last milestone—along the road starting with the Education Act of 1870, which set out to establish a national system of education.** [19]

The 1944 Act did also allow for the setting up of comprehensive schools which would combine the tripartite strands. Initially only a few were founded and neither the post-war Labour, nor the subsequent Conservative governments, were keen to approve such schools where grammars and secondary moderns already existed. The 1944 Act also created a system of direct grant schools, under which a number of independent schools received a direct grant from the Ministry of Education (as distinct from local education authorities or LEAs) in exchange for accepting a number of pupils on 'free places'. The Act also renamed the Board of Education as the Ministry of Education, giving it greater powers and a bigger budget, ended fee-paying for state secondary schools; and enforced the division between primary (5–11 years old) and secondary (11–15 years old) that many local authorities had already introduced.

Despite the shortcomings, 1944 was a significant moment in state education in so far as it represented the clearest, although still equivocal, commitment of the state to responsibility for compulsory educational provision. An educational 'settlement' was set in place for the period 1944-76, but it was shaky and unstable. It was not until 1976 that the Labour Government passed an Act requiring LEAs to reorganise school systems on comprehensive lines, but there never was a thoroughgoing comprehensive reform. Reynolds et al[20], in their review of comprehensive education, describe the period 1965-87 as "two decades of controversy" and sum up the end of that period by saying that "it is the insecurity of the comprehensive enterprise which is now most striking"[21]. Equivocation, indeed reluctance on the part of the state is fundamental to the history of English education.

> **From its late beginnings, public education was weakly developed in England, sapped by private and voluntary provision, fragmented, exclusionary and lacking in public support.** ***Johnson, 1991***[22]

The landscape of education politics in England today

The reluctant state

A liberal reluctance on the part of the state is now once again very evident in a number of respects. Both the New Labour (1997-2010) and Coalition Governments have worked to unpick the idea of direct responsibility for the delivery of educational services. The current system of education in England is beginning to resemble some aspects of the pre-1870 system of education. The distribution of responsibility for the solution of social problems is changing and now philanthropy and business are essential parts of the delivery and policy processes of education. These ideas have been embedded through initiatives like the academies and free school programmes, studio schools, trust schools, Teach First, teaching schools, and Troops to Teachers. We are moving back towards a ‘system’ of education that is messy, patchy and diverse, involving a variety of providers, as before 1870 – voluntary, philanthropic, faith, self-help (parents) and, on a small scale so far, private.

While at this point in time, public sector providers remain as the main providers, they increasingly operate as free-standing competitors detached from local authority oversight and planning. Local authorities are being residualised, schools given greater ‘freedoms’, and at the same time the Secretary of State has accumulated a vast range of direct powers in relation to a diverse system made up of ‘autonomous’ schools. Since 1960 the office of Secretary of State for Education has acquired 2,500 new powers.

These changes in the basic infrastructure of the system are most prominent in the establishing of free schools, academies and trust schools, and the conversion of existing schools (willingly and unwillingly) into academies or trusts.

Academies, governance and freedom

Academies blur welfare state demarcations between state and market, public and private, government and business. They introduce and validate new agents and voices within policy itself and bring them into processes of governance. They are indicative of a ‘re-agenting’[23] of education policy. A set of academy chains run by charitable and social enterprise organisations has been developed. The numbers (below) indicate existing chain schools in March 2012, plus (in some instances) additional, 'under-performing' schools that have been assigned to these chains. As of May 2012, a further 96 primaries and 65 secondaries were required, or forced, by the Secretary of State to become academies and some of these entrusted to the chains. Several chains have indicated ambitious plans for further expansion; E-act intends to run 126 schools by 2015.

Table 1: Academy chains

Organisation	Number of academies in chain
AET	19 +19
United Learning Trust (a Church of England charity)	19
Ormiston Trust	18
E-Act	16 + 11
Kemnal Academies Trust	12 +10
ARK	11+6
Harris Federation	10
Greenwood Dale	4+6
David Ross Foundation	4 +4

These schools are neither state nor private. They are outside of LEA oversight and are intended to draw on the energies and ideas of the private and voluntary sectors. They were presented by Labour as an innovative response to the 'failures' of public sector schooling and traditional forms of governance in areas of social disadvantage. The academies programme is a further dramatic step in the break-up of the state education system, a form of disarticulation which was begun under the Conservatives with CTCs (City Technology Colleges) and grant-maintained schools.

This disarticulation was taken a stage further in the 2006 Education and Inspections Act which created another new category of trust schools, much like grant-maintained schools but with additional freedoms. In effect, it was being proposed that all local authority schools would be academies, voluntary-aided, foundation or trust schools. LEAs would be left to work alongside a newly created National Schools Commissioner to promote choice, diversity and better access for disadvantaged groups to good schools. Trust schools own their own assets, may contract or procure their own building projects and may be established by or, in the case of existing schools, may establish partnerships with 'a foundation' and "allow that foundation to appoint a majority of governors".

Again, through this mechanism new agents become involved in the running of state schools – private companies, charitable foundations, religious organisations, voluntary associations, local community groups or groups of parents. Of the 400+ trust schools currently in existence, over 100 are governed by the Co-operative Society. The Co-operative trust schools “follow co-operative values and use a membership structure to engage parents, carers, pupils and teachers, staff and local community”[24]. The Co-op group is also a sponsor of three academies and is interested in recruiting converter academies.

These various policy moves build on, extend, and advance previous ones. Although as the NASUWT Briefing for Governors’ says: “it would be a mistake to assume that the academies being promoted by the Coalition Government are merely an extension of the previous Government’s policy”[25]. The latest iteration of academies is packaged differently in political terms and is a much more decisive break from local democratic oversight of education. The NASUWT document goes on to say: “They are designed to open up education to commercial activity and will result in previously public assets being handed over to the control of private providers”[26]. The Coalition’s Academies Act 2010 was passed just 76 days after the General Election and established a statutory basis for all primary, secondary, special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to convert to an academy with no requirement for a sponsor to be involved.

> **Up to the start of June 2013 a total of 2,263 schools had converted to become academies and a further 781 had applied for conversion. Most of these academies are secondary schools and 40% of secondaries in England have converted. The secondary schools which have converted so far had free school meal eligibility rates around half the national average. *House of Commons Library, 2013*[27]**

The attractions of conversion were presented as new freedoms and extra funding. However, the possibility of increased funding is very uncertain and much disputed when off-set against increased running costs like insurance, auditing, payroll and pensions administration, as conversion schools take over virtually all of the responsibilities held by Local Authorities and become their own admission authority.

Alongside the conversion academies, the 2010 Act introduced the possibility of free schools, which can be set up by groups of parents, community organisations, charities and businesses – although a number will be run by existing academy chain providers. The first 16 free schools were announced on the 7th September 2010 and included 5 proposed by faith groups, 2 involving ARK, one each by The Childcare Company, King's Science Academy, and Discovery New School. In September 2011, 24 free schools opened, 17 primary, 2 all-age and 5 secondary. Half are located in areas of social deprivation. In all 323 applications were received in the first application window. In September 2012, 79 new state schools were due to open; another 55 free schools (21 primary 33 secondary and 8 all-through); 13 university technical colleges and 15 studio schools. However, one of the 55 new free schools, the Newham Free Academy, advertised as offering a ”no-frills high-quality traditional education” and set up by an evangelical Christian group did not open. By July 2012 only 9 families had expressed an interest in the 180 places[28].

The question is of course whether academies and free schools really address problems of social disadvantage and deliver in terms of raising performance[29]. Machin and Silva’s research indicates clearly that academies have not helped low-attaining pupils[30]. It shows that improved attainment centres on higher attainers, and particularly on those in the 50th-80th percentile (i.e. average to quite high). It also cites research[31] which shows a 12.5% reduction in pupils on free school meals (FSMs) attending academies compared with the schools they replaced. The researchers conclude by asking:

> **But does autonomy work? And does it offer scope to improve the lot of disadvantaged students in the lower tail of the education distribution? Our conclusion is probably not, or at least not in England and in the case of Labour's sponsored academies.**

Different kinds of freedoms are in play here, both a libertarian freedom (demand side) – to set up your own school or have a wider choice between schools of different types, run by different providers – and a market freedom (supply side), opening up public services to non-state providers. There is also a basic tension here between localism and mutualism on the one hand, and multi-national business interests and large chains on the other. That is, the Big Society against big capital. A great deal of the work of education is now thoroughly commercialised and commodified. Education and children’s services are a lucrative area of profit, little different from other sorts of goods and services. All of this is part of a more general conceptual shift in the relationship between citizens and state and the market, and what it means for a society to educate its citizens.

The Conservative Governments of 1979-97 and Labour and Coalition Governments have all been keen to break the public sector monopoly and get new actors into the provision of state schooling and education policymaking, and to displace the participation of teacher associations, trade unions and local authorities. Furthermore, the introduction of new kinds of schools has enabled a gradual dismantling of national pay and conditions agreements for teachers and a concomitant move towards individual contract arrangements for teachers and other school workers. Indeed, more generally the reform of the teacher has been at the centre of the reform of education since the 1970s. In the process of reform, the relationship between government and state education has been articulated by criticism rather than partnership.

Educational inequality and the ignorance of policy

Despite constant criticisms of state schooling since 1976 and the ongoing reform of the school system, the relationships between opportunity, achievement and social class have remained stubbornly entrenched, consistently reproduced by policy. Although in many respects the changes in opportunity and outcome over the last 50 years seem more directly related to changes in the economy than changes in education policy. If we look at participation in higher education, the continuation of class inequalities is very clear[32]:

- State school students in England who have university-educated parents are five times more likely to reach higher education than those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- But family background also plays a role in determining which state-educated pupils go on to university. Even after achievement levels at age 15 are taken into account, the children of university-educated parents are still twice as likely as their less advantaged peers to enter higher education. They are also twice as likely to win places in the 24 Russell Group institutions – the UK's elite universities - as similarly qualified higher education students from lower social backgrounds.
- The ablest 15 year-olds from privileged backgrounds are two and a half years ahead of most able children from disadvantaged families in terms of reading skills.
- Two in three (66%) teenagers from families in the top fifth of the household income range enter university, compared to fewer than one in four (24%) from the bottom fifth. The vast majority of this difference – just over four fifths - is explained by earlier educational attainment. Parents' qualifications and the school attended also helped to determine who reached university.
- Household income itself – rather than the factors associated with it – also accounts for a small, but statistically significant, part of the difference in university entrance rates. There is relatively little disparity in entrance rates among young people from the top and bottom income groups who actually submitted applications. Almost seven in ten (68%) applicants from poor

homes gained a university place, compared to just over eight in ten (85%) applicants from families in the top income group.

The very recent Report from the Government's Social Mobility Commission[33] also demonstrates how tinkering with incentives and programmes based on notions of social exclusion have failed to shift established patterns of disadvantage in access to higher education. The Report notes that:

- The proportion of state-educated pupils attending Russell Group universities has declined since 2002. It suggests that the nation's most academically selective universities are becoming less socially representative.
- Universities need to take account of "the growing evidence base that students from less advantaged backgrounds tend to outperform other students with similar A-levels grades on their degree".

Enmeshed within these relations of disadvantage, there is now also a body of evidence that indicates that middle class families use their social and cultural resources in relation to school choice both in order to escape from class 'others', and to maximize their children's performance and future opportunities. This can be in terms of type and numbers of qualifications achieved, and the likelihood of entry into elite universities. In a period of mass higher education, unemployment, and austerity, marginal advantages are ever more important to a middle class in 'fear of falling'. The more fuzzy and patchy the system, the more difficult it is for those without the 'right' cultural assets to navigate their way through.

Concomitantly some schools are using their 'freedoms' to deploy subtle forms of selection. Competition between schools articulated through league tables based on output indicators (5+ GCSE A*-C grades) has produced an 'economy of student worth'. In these respects, the relation of supply to demand in the education market is dysfunctional. There is a very clear interplay between policy requirements, institutional self-interest and student experience which work against the interests of some students. At the institutional level within the education market, it makes sense where possible, to avoid those students who have previously performed poorly, have special needs or English as their second language, those who have 'unsupportive' parents or have social or behavioural difficulties. Institutions may seek to maximize the recruitment of their opposites, who are cheaper and easier to teach, and more likely to contribute positively to institutional performance indicators. At the classroom level these pressures on schools to perform are enacted through the constant monitoring and recording of student progress. As GCSE examinations come closer, schools are forced to focus time, energy and funding on those who can be driven across the C/D boundary. This is what Gillborn and Youdell[34] call “educational triage” – which leads to the systematic and systemic neglect of those identified as unlikely to make a difference to performance output measures and investment in those who will or might do.

> **Evidence: Poor children at the back of the queue for good schools**
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> Children's charity Barnardo's[35] has warned that unfair admissions practices are resulting in schools having intakes that did not reflect their neighbourhoods, and that the expansion in the number of academies and the creation of parent-led free schools risked widening the gap. It recommended the use of ability bands to achieve a truly comprehensive mix.
>
>> **Secondary school admissions fail to ensure a level playing field for all children. Instead we are seeing impenetrable clusters of privilege forming around the most popular schools. Allowing such practice to persist - and almost certainly expand as increasing numbers of schools take control of their own admissions - will only sustain the achievement gap in education and undermine the prospects of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.** ***Martin Narey, Barnardo's Chief Executive***

However, it is certainly not the case that there is an absence of attention to social disadvantage within education policy rhetoric and the politics of education. In the run up to the 2010 election, speeches by Conservative Shadow Ministers spoke many times about poverty, educational inequality, inclusion, mobility and ‘the education gap’. Within an explicit mission of helping “the very poorest” and “making opportunity more equal”, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove asserted:

> **The central mission of the next Conservative Government is the alleviation of poverty and the extension of opportunity. And nowhere is action required more than in our schools. Schools should be engines of social mobility. They should enable children to overcome disadvantage and deprivation so they can fulfil their innate talents and take control of their own destiny.[36]**

The current evidence indicates very clearly that none of this is being achieved, and indeed that social inequalities are increasing, particularly since the financial crisis. It could be argued indeed that education is being given far too great an emphasis in driving social mobility and closing the gap in performance between rich and poor. In these respects education policy has become divorced from the stark realities of structural inequality, labour market conditions and the competition for opportunity.

According to the Sutton Trust's[37] study that looks at publicly available data on the proportion of pupils eligible and claiming for free school meals (FSM) in the top 500 comprehensive state schools and at how representative they are of their localities and of their school type:

- The overall rate of FSM uptake at the top 500 comprehensives measured on the traditional scale of five good GCSEs is just below half the national average: 7.6% compared with 16.5%, in almost 3,000 state secondary schools. Although 49 of the top 500 schools have FSM rates higher than the national average.
- 95% of the top 500 comprehensives take fewer pupils on FSM than the total proportion in their local areas. This includes almost two thirds (64%) which are unrepresentative of their local authority area with gaps of five or more percentage points.
- 75% of the top 500 comprehensives are their own admissions authorities, compared with 61% of the same types of school nationally.
- Faith schools account for 19% nationally, but make up 33% of the top 500.
- Single-sex schools account for 11% of the sample nationally but make up 16% of the top 500.

The Coalition Government might well claim that it is taking Beveridge very seriously especially his guiding principle, that a "revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching"[38] but current education policy looks more and more like a 19th century revolution rather than a 21st century one.

A curriculum of the dead – and cultural restorationism

The focus on ignorance, over and against the *ignorance of policy*, raises questions not just about who gets to know, but also what they get to know. This has two aspects to it. One is the control over, and definition of, a national curriculum. The other is the creation of different routes, with different skills, knowledge and opportunities, open to different students.

In general terms the Coalition Government is again reinventing the educational past, what is sometimes called ‘cultural restorationism’ – a curriculum based on traditional subjects, canonical knowledge and a celebration of all things English; a curriculum of facts, lists and eternal certainties. The Telegraph comments that: “This is likely to lead to the drastic toughening up of lessons in Britain [sic]”[39].

There are currently three key moves within the agenda of restoration: the creation of the English Baccalaureate (E-Bac); the abolition of ‘non-subjects’; and a new primary curriculum. The E-Bac is based on a traditional subject set (5+ GCSE A*-C grades including Maths, English, a science, a modern language and either History or Geography) and “fixed reference points that are absolutely essential to a child’s education” but will, it is argued “not specify how teachers should contextualise these concepts and subjects for their students”[40]– a fine balance between prescription and ‘freedom’. As Michael Gove put it, neatly and tellingly, in his speech at Brighton College private school, this is the “freedom to concentrate on what matters”[41]. Here ‘what matters’, what Michael Apple[42] calls “official knowledge”, is determined to a considerable extent by the Secretary of State based on advice from selected education experts (see below). The curriculum is presented as a technical rather than a political issue, or indeed just a matter of common sense. There is a renewed emphasis on the basics – times tables, punctuation and spelling, a new national School Games competition, the introduction of a National Reading Competition and foreign language learning from age seven. Ministers have not been hesitant in naming their own favourite books and authors, or in bemoaning the over-emphasis on 20th century, non-British literature in current school teaching – this is what Michael Apple calls “the cultural politics of the text”[43].

In contrast to this assertion of a common sense curriculum, Apple argues that "the process of defining official knowledge [is] a site of conflict over the relations between culture and power in class, race, gender and religious terms"[44]. In this instance, the overbearing pressures of performance comparison and benchmarking mean that many schools will be focusing their attention very directly on the requirements embedded in the examination system and exam format as enactments of 'official knowledge'.

The current curriculum changes are framed within "greater expectations"[45], including the raising of the GCSE benchmark target from 30% to 35% in 2011, to 40% for 2012-13 and to 50% for 2015. As already noted, schools that fail to reach these targets will be taken over by academy chains or other 'successful' schools. Again here the conditions for learning are erased. Furthermore, in relation to the restoration of what Gove often refers to as 'real subjects', many courses and programmes (Btecs, Diplomas etc.), which had previously counted as GCSE equivalent and towards GCSE performance indicators, have been disqualified as part of what the Schools Minister calls the "reform of our whole discredited curriculum and examination system"[46]. There is a similar emphasis on what is commonly referred to as 'back to basics' and raising performance in the primary curriculum. More generally, all of this is driven by another level of comparison, rendered through the league tables of national educational performance constructed from international PISA testing. Ministers' speeches are littered with references to performance in other education systems, as an incentive and necessity for driving up test results at home. Better performing systems are taken to be models for better practice – but context and history are ignored.

As indicated already, curriculum reforms are tightly tied to assessment reforms, and in particular the notion that GCSE examinations have become "less rigorous" and "less demanding"[47]. Two policy responses were made here. First, reforming the existing assessment methods: "ending modules and re-sits, insisting there be proper marks given once more for spelling, punctuation and grammar, ending corrupt coaching sessions and insisting we look beyond our shores for meaningful comparisons of an examination's rigour"[48]. Second, the proposal floated by Michael Gove in June 2012 to scrap GCSEs altogether (GCSEs were first taken in 1988 as a result of Conservative Secretary of State, Keith Joseph's decision to merge O-levels with CSEs), and reinstate O-levels, in a modified form, which would be taken by around 75% of pupils. The remaining 25% of pupils taking an as yet unspecified lower-grade exam. The idea was not well received by the Liberal Democrat Coalition partners, who had not been consulted in advance[49]. This new iteration of an academic/vocation 'binary divide'[50] is linked by some commentators with Michael Gove's announcement in December 2011 that parents would be stripped of the right to object to the expansion of existing grammar schools, under a new school admissions code laid before parliament. These reform forays have been met by a mix of criticism and disbelief, which in combination has led Gove to retreat and rethink[51]. In June 2013, the Secretary of State announced that in 2015 GCSEs would be replaced by 'new', very traditional, Intermediate Examinations.

University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools

The creation of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and studio schools are further examples of reform by regression to previous divisions. Both contribute to the reinvention of a technical vocational route in secondary education (the 1944 Education Act introduced Technical Schools). Based on a proposal by former Secretary of State Kenneth Baker, a UTC is for students aged 14 to 19, specialises in technical studies and is sponsored by a university. It offers full time courses which combine practical and academic studies. Employers are involved in shaping the curriculum. Wolverhampton, Aston and Cranfield are among the universities involved.

Studio schools combine mainstream qualifications with experience of the world of work. Employers are involved in all aspects of the schools from designing the curriculum and delivering master classes, to providing paid work placements and mentoring students. It is intended that many studio schools will run their own social enterprises, and students will run their own businesses, and contribute to the economy and community in their local area. By September 2013 it is planned that 30 such schools are up and running. The key question is the status of these new routes when set against the government's constant re-assertion of GCSE and A-Levels as an academic 'gold standard' and the post 1944 problem of 'parity of esteem'.

Teaching and Learning

Changes in pedagogy, overlap with changes in curriculum and assessment. First, in the heightened emphasis given to raising measured performance, as indicated above. Second, in the endorsement of particular teaching approaches, specifically at primary level synthetic phonics:

> **I am delighted to see 4,142 primary schools already signed up to more than £10m on new phonics products and training. Taking advantage of the Government's match funding scheme… *Nick Gibb, 2012*[52]**

This, despite the fact that reliable evidence demonstrating that synthetic phonics improves comprehension is very hard to find. The Coalition has also set itself against what Ministers call educational 'progressivism' – 'wrong-headed methods'[53]. Furthermore, in anticipation of, and in response to, criticism and opposition to these reforms, the "evidence-based, practical solution[s] built on by successive governments – both Labour and Conservative" are set over and against "the new ideologues … the enemies of reform, the ones who put doctrine ahead of pupils' interests"[54]– "the usual suspects"[55]. This is an interesting reversal. Coalition Ministers claim to draw on evidence, examples of good practice, and a commitment to equity, to portray criticisms from teacher unions, academics, professional associations, and others, as a kind of 'progressive conservatism' which is taken to be resistant to change and good sense.

One of the Coalition's erstwhile curriculum advisers, Andrew Pollard[56], has argued that the primary influence on the new curriculum proposals has not been evidence at all but rather Ed Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*[57], which outlines a year-on-year core knowledge sequence of what pupils should learn. Pollard also suggests that there is no clear relationship between the proposals and the overseas examples cited to support them and says it is "far from clear that these sources have influenced the proposals". He concludes that: "the constraining effects on the primary curriculum as a whole are likely to be profound and the preservation of breadth, balance and quality of experience will test even the most committed of teachers". Indeed, it is tempting to read Hirsch's work and that of his Core Knowledge Foundation in the US[58], as a key sub-text of the Coalition curriculum policies. Hirsch[59] describes public education in the United States as "an institutional and intellectual monopoly” based upon “failed theories”, and aims much of his critique at progressivism in schools which he argues has supplanted verbal instruction and repetitive practice for the transmission of a body of solid knowledge. He also argues that the public school curriculum is incoherent and that local knowledge and multicultural knowledge have replaced “valued content’. For him, education is a cognitive-technical process, the consumption of traditional subject matter and a ‘shared’ national culture, which is beyond politics. He also sees this approach to the curriculum and teaching and learning as the means of addressing the knowledge deficiencies, the ‘famished minds’, of children from culturally impoverished homes, and thus a way of addressing and redressing social inequalities[60]. There are Core Knowledge Schools in 44 states in the US and the Core Knowledge curriculum materials sell very well. An English version of these materials is now published by Civitas. The revised national curriculum framework, published in July 2013, was described by Education Minister Lord Nash as “slimmer and focused on essential subject knowledge”[61]. This framework combines some greater flexibility for teachers within a set of definite imperatives, and was described by Labour spokesperson Baroness Jones as a “list of U-turns”[62]. Certainly, for example, Gove’s earlier decision to exclude climate change was reversed under pressure from Ministerial colleagues, and changes were made to make history less focused on Britain. All of this demonstrates how personalised, centralised and politicised the English school curriculum has become.

Ignorance and democracy

This then is a sketch, superficial and selective, of the current landscape of education politics in England and of some of the current issues which animate the struggle against ignorance. As articulated in Beveridge's aphorism quoted at the beginning of this section, ignorance is quintessentially a political issue that is fundamentally, crucially and intimately related to questions of democracy.

I want now to try and articulate the relationship between ignorance and democracy in a different way. A way that does not begin from where we are now or indeed, at least as far as education policy is concerned, where we have been before. To attempt this I am going to draw upon a set of recent writings which 'think differently' and think democratically about education and identify some 'modest possibilities'[63] for imaginative and creative, incremental but radical change. A change to create an education system of hope and happiness and social renewal.

> **The hope an individual teacher has for his or her students is vital, but it is limited if not accompanied by broader social hope and reform[64].**

Starting from somewhere different

> **The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of races, but the happiness of the common man.** ***Beveridge, 1942***

Education in the 21st century has moved a long way from even Beveridge's narrow vision. The daily lives of teachers and learners in school are driven more and more by the extrinsic demands of performance, competition and comparison, putting both under greater and greater stress. In 2012, the Health and Safety Executive reported teaching as one of the three occupations in Britain reporting the highest incidence of stress and depression, at a rate of 1,780 cases per 100,000 employees. Indeed, happiness is very much not what schools in England are about. A UNICEF study from 2007 placed the UK at the bottom of the child well-being league table among developed countries[65]. Furthermore, teacher-parent relations are currently articulated by expectations on both sides which are rooted in the demands of performance, rather than the education of the whole child, and we are moving ever closer to a full-blown system of performance-related pay for teachers - yet another feature of 19th century schooling. Schools act more and more like businesses, and have been, until recently, attractive to for-profit providers like those that run many of the Swedish Independent schools[66].

It is time to get *back to basics* – to think seriously about what the purpose of education is, and what it means to be educated, what schools are for, and concomitantly and crucially, who should decide these things. Such a profound rethinking needs to move beyond the views of self-proclaimed 'experts' and policy entrepreneurs and those with established interests. To hear what parents, students and teachers have to say about what they think education should be for - "about what education might be, rather than what it has become"[67]. To do this, we need to establish forums and opportunities to speak, in which all speakers are taken seriously and their views collated – town hall meetings, school study circles, classroom moots. This would mean turning away from scientism and economism and towards the recognition that above all, education is a political and democratic issue.

Educative Schooling

We have to reconnect education to democracy and work towards an educative relationship between schools and their communities. Put simply “we should recognize the centrality of education to larger projects of democracy and community building”[68]. Among other things schools should have a responsibility to develop the capabilities of parents, students, teachers and other local stakeholders to participate, to discuss, to challenge and critique.

- The education of democratic citizens requires critical and political literacies, not just functional skills training that leads to technical literacy. Schools must be centrally concerned with literacies for active local and global citizenship, including a critical view of the world of work. Learning to read and write should be based on an understanding that literacy is a social practice and that making meaning requires “reading the world and the word”[69]. As such, “students learn that knowledge makes a difference in people’s lives including their own”[70].
- “We need to break away from the passionless transmission of inert information, by choosing instead to study both the crucial problems faced by our culture and our procedures for thinking and acting on them”[71].
- Schools should be educative institutions, in the broadest sense, with a responsibility to contribute to the development of “high energy democracy”[72] in ways which draw upon ‘narratives of human possibility’.
- That means deliberation as well as debate. Public deliberation is the discussion of public issues by members of the public who are enabled to voice their diverse views, interests, and values, with values considered as important as interests. Through deliberation, people influence one another as they struggle with complex issues.

Such a back to basics would also involve rethinking the relationship between education and opportunity, equity, and wellbeing. It demands a fundamental reconsideration of the complex interplay between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It would rest on what te Riele[73] calls a “pedagogy of hope” which “needs to involve both teachers and students clarifying what is hoped for and the ownership of these hopes”. We must find ways of eradicating the damage done to the creativity, wellbeing and enthusiasm of teachers and students by the regime of performativity, which displaces humanity with productivity and calculability and renders complex social relations and processes, into numbers or labels. This would mean detaching education from the distortions of measurement and comparison, converting them “from exam factories to communities of discovery”[74].

Learning not performance

A-levels and GCSEs would have to be replaced, and this will mean confronting interests vested in the status quo. Perhaps we should move to a grade point average system as used in Sweden, the USA and elsewhere. It is clearly necessary:

- To dismantle systems of assessment and related incentives that encourage schools to focus their attention on some students and neglect others.
- To do away with forms of assessment which rate students according to standardised age-related criteria, that encourage 'teaching to the test' and ignore that children learn at different speeds and in different ways.
- To engage students in discussing and designing purposeful and meaningful systems of assessment[75].
- To recognise that "successful learning requires human relations between educators and learners that are freely chosen, based on trust and mutual respect, in which learners feel safe, supported and then challenged, so they become better at learning"[76].
- To avoid demotivation through alienated learning. Students of all ages should be involved in discussing the what, how and why of learning; they should learn high level academic concepts in familiar and interesting contexts; be engaged in problem solving; and work towards meaningful and motivating products, presentations and performances[77].

The recently published *An Education Declaration to Rebuild America*, begins in a similar way and states as one of its seven principles that:

> **Learning must be engaging and relevant. Learning should be a dynamic experience through connections to real world problems and to students' own life experiences and cultural backgrounds. High stakes testing narrows the curriculum and hinders creativity.[78]**

This requires the design of a curriculum or rather a means for curriculum design "based on the belief that knowledge comes to life for students and teachers only when it is connected to something serious"[79]. Learning would need to give greater value to the production of works of art, cooperative activities, and the understanding of, and solution to, real world problems through innovation and collective action by students. All of this means addressing and rethinking what Tyack and Tobin[80] call 'the basic grammar of schooling'. That is the need to question the traditional subject boundaries, conventional teacher-student relations and student groupings. All of this needs to be enacted from a simple basic premise that education policy and the arrangements of schooling should be aimed at ensuring that all children remain in the system, learning, flourishing and growing in self-esteem and confidence for as long as possible. Any policy or arrangement that works against this premise will be done away with. There is:

> **a driving need to counter the sense of shame and futility which blights the lives of many young people, through educational relationships and practices which are respectful, affirmative, identity-building, engaging, meaningful and hopeful. *Smyth and Wrigley, 2013*[81]**

Schools like these must strive toward what Fielding and Moss call 'the common school and the school of diversity'[82]. That is:

- "a more uniform system, networks of small, age-integrated and self governing schools serving local communities and in a close, mutual and democratic relationship with their local authorities". Schools committed to "a recognition of singularity, a resistance to working with pre-defined categories and outcomes, support for the construction of identities and solidarities, and a desire to experiment in learning and other projects"[83].
- Schools need to find new ways of recognising value in diversity and building aspirational and reflective identities within a pedagogic community[84].

The poverty of ability

All of this would also mean addressing directly, and in practical ways, the complex and difficult relations between education and poverty and reworking “the tangled and confused nexus between the new realities of adolescent lives, and the out-of-touch realities of educational policy regimes”[85] in sustained and different ways. That is, a decisive move away from the idea that there is a simple and inevitable relationship between social background and something called ‘ability’. Part of which would involve confronting directly and honestly the ways in which differences between school and student performance are produced by strategies of advantage and the ‘ability to pay’. As the National Equality Panel recently noted: “Wealth makes a huge difference to people’s ability to afford houses in the catchment areas of the best schools, private tutors and private education, and to finance the master’s degree essential for some jobs or to help children get on the housing ladder”[86].

One of the consequences of the radical re-focusing suggested here might well be flight by some families from equity and into the private sector – debate and deliberation at the national and local level will need to re-visit the question of the legal and tax status of private schools. The schools in which many of our leading politicians were educated.

Confronting the relationship between poverty and opportunity must begin with an acceptance that ‘education cannot compensate for society’, and a recognition of what education can and cannot do, and therefore what needs to be dealt with by other means[87]. Poverty, working through health, housing and employment inequalities, acts directly upon the possibilities of benefiting from education in diverse and very immediate ways. There is no point in denying these things but they are not and must not become a basis for reducing expectations of student capabilities. Nonetheless, young people who are hungry, neglected, frightened or stressed do not learn well, and learning may not be a priority for them. Schools must be part of a more general set of responses to poverty[88], not the least in raising for discussion the current ‘attitudes’ to government spending which read poverty through a set of negative stereotypes. Schools must be one site in which social and economic inequalities are addressed, but is not one where they can be solved, as current thinking about social mobility naively seems to suggest. Rather than blaming teachers for low expectations or parents for lack of aspiration, we need to begin thinking rigorously about the social conditions that make effective learning possible, at home and at school, and once those conditions are met we can think more about expectations and aspirations.

One way in which education could be part of a more general tackling of poverty would be a full development of New Labour's Extended Schools initiative, which had its origins in the Education Act 2002.

> **The Extended Schools Programme**
>
> The Extended Schools (ES) programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement and the longer term life chances of disadvantaged children and young people by providing the necessary additional support which can enable those children to reach their full potential.
>
> Launched in May 2006, £60 million of funding has been provided through the Extended Schools programme over the last 6 years allowing those schools serving areas of the highest social deprivation to provide for a wide range of services or activities outside of the normal school day to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and local communities.
>
> The varied activities offered through the Extended Schools programme are designed to support learning and promote healthy lifestyles, raise school standards while engaging schools with their local community and connecting people with local services; these include breakfast or homework clubs, sport, art, drama, ICT and many other programmes including those which aim to involve parents, families and the wider community in the life of the school.
>
> **Source: Department of Education, 2012 http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/curriculum-and-learningt-new/standards-and-school-improvements/extended-schools-programme.htm**

More generally, the educative role of schools must involve a recognition of the short and long term relations between education and the social health of the nation. Many of our worst social problems, social conflicts and inequalities stem from, or are perpetuated by, ignorance. All of this has to be part of a broader programme of social renewal in which schools are given the grand challenge of civic responsibility rather than the narrow and stultifying task of driving up examination and test scores in the service of local and international league tables. Schools should become sites of what Fielding and Moss call 'prefigurative practice'[89]:

> **Education through its processes, the experiences it offers, and the expectations is**

> **makes should prefigure, in microcosm, the most equal, just and fulfilling society that the originations of comprehensivism aimed to bring about.** ***Dale, 1988***[90]

As attempted by the Inner London Education Authority in the 1980s, schools would become responsible for ensuring that they are sites of anti -racist, -sexist, -homophobic and -transphobic practice, and that they tackle bullying of all kinds and do not tolerate practices that exclude students with disabilities.

Valuing Teaching

All of this also means rethinking, again, the education of teachers and reversing the trend of the past 20 years which has sought to reduce teaching and the teacher to a bundle of skills and competences which can be measured against standards set by government agencies. We need teachers who are creative and adventurous but also passionate and committed. We need teachers who are well informed about education, society and children, and the different ways they develop, as well as their diverse needs and capabilities. We need teachers who make judgments in relation to principles rather than in relation to performance indicators. We need teachers who can think about what they are doing, but who are also open to discussing and changing what they are doing. We need teachers who will listen to students and to parents and take them seriously. The crucial first step in rehabilitating the teacher is to stop the constant flow of derision. Blaming teachers has become over the last 30 years a political blood sport. This is the easiest way for politicians to deflect attention away from the failures of policy[91]. We have ended up with a teaching work force that is weary, wary and fearful. Workplaces should be places where we flourish and grow and are encouraged and supported. They are social settings in which everyone deserves respect and has the right to feel valued. Just like students, teachers do not work well when they feel stressed. As *An Education Declaration to Rebuild America* puts it: "The working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of students"[92].

According to a new study[93], employees in Britain are feeling more insecure and stressed at work than at any time in the past 20 years. The 2012 Skills and Employment Survey[94], which was conducted by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), revealed that public sector workers feel less secure than those in the private sector and are increasingly worried about a loss of status and unfair treatment at work. It stated:

> **The major change that occurred between 2006 and 2012 was that for the first time public sector employees were quite clearly more concerned about losing their employment than those in the private sector.**

A full and proper system of teacher education needs to be re-established, within which all teachers are prepared as public intellectuals, skillful classroom practitioners and confident specialists in their field. That is, teachers who know what they are doing, but also know what they are doing does! John White in a recent contribution to the IOE blog, makes the simple but telling point:

> **If it is agreed that teachers should be more than unthinking operatives, working within a received idea about what school education is for, then another way, or ways, must be found of equipping them to tackle these underlying issues with some degree of competence. How is this to be done? Are there lessons here for continuing professional development (CPD) as well as for pre-service work? (White, 2013)[95]**

This would rest on collaboration between schools and Higher Education Institutions and the development of an independent and authoritative professional body which would have the task of maintaining standards and ensuring ongoing professional development. This would occur within the framework of a national agreement of pay and conditions, while allowing schools an appropriate degree of flexibility in the management of their workforce, related to local needs and contingencies.

Real parental voices

Essentially, tackling the relationship between education, inequality and poverty differently would involve re-connecting education with the lives, hopes and aspirations of children and parents, not through choice and competition but through participation, debate and educative engagement of schools with their communities. In stark contrast, one of the travesties of recent government policy, both under New Labour and the Coalition is the forced academisation of schools, against the wishes of parents. On the one hand, the free school programme offers some parents the opportunity to open their own schools; on the other, parents who value and want to keep the schools they have, have been simply ignored.

> **Case Study: The DfE is trying to force academisation on our school, on the basis of one inadequate Ofsted report** [96]
>
> "I'm a parent at Gladstone Park Primary School in Brent, which has always previously been rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding, but at the latest inspection in November was astonishingly rated as "inadequate". This follows a change in Ofsted's rules last summer whereby the school as a whole is rated according to the worst feature found, and the inspectors decided that pupils' progress in Years 3, 4 and 5 was not fast enough.
>
> This is despite children entering the school with below average levels of literacy and numeracy (most children speak English as an additional language, and we have a higher than national average percentages with SENs and entitled to free school meals) and leaving with levels above average – for example, twice the national average achieve Level 6 in Maths SATs at KS2. In my view, the inspectors were told the result in advance, then sent in to find whatever evidence they could to fit it.
>
> Before even reading the Ofsted report, and before even the staff and governors were informed, a hired contractor ("broker") turned up at the school and said the DfE was going to force it into becoming an academy and choose its "sponsor".
>
> […] A Parents Action Group has been set up, a petition against academisation has been signed by hundreds of parents, and a large protest held outside school, reported in the Independent, Guardian, Standard, and local paper Kilburn Times. We have linked up with other schools in the same situation (notably Roke Primary in Croydon), forming Parents Against Forced Academisation, and got the public support of several Brent councillors and local MP Sarah Teather."
>
> **Source: Local Schools Network - http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/2013/03/the-dfe-is-trying-to-force-academisation-on-our-school-on-the-basis-of-one-inadequate-ofsted-report/**

All of this is extraordinary – where here is the Big Society and the localism agenda? How does this relate to "the idea of communities taking more control, of more volunteerism, more charitable giving, of social enterprises taking on a bigger role, of people establishing public services themselves"[97]. There may be things to be learned from the setting up of free schools, but we already know that they are introducing yet more inequalities into the education system[98], and that the replacement of society with community may also be divisive and exclusionary.

Perhaps we can learn something here from Behavioural Economics, Nudge Theory[99] as it is called, and think about the 'choice' architecture within which parents think about what they want for their children, but also how their priorities are related to more general trends and effects within society as a whole.

Re-starting policy somewhere else

What are needed are forms of *radical incrementalism*, that is a 'cumulative and transgressive persistence'[100] based on 'consultative and participatory processes'[101]. This is not however a proposal for tinkering and compromise, it is a process of re-starting policy from a different set of organising principles. That is, a staged but unequivocal abandonment of the current education policy infrastructure. Re-establishing local democratic control of education and educational planning in ways that recognise diversity and local needs, and reconnecting schools to their communities in direct and practical ways. This would involve both some big changes and many small changes, "the most powerful meaning of democracy is formed not in glossy political rhetoric, but in the details of everyday lives"[102].

On the one hand, we might want to seriously consider a return to directly elected local school boards. These would have local responsibility for educational planning and spending, for ensuring access and equity, and for supporting deliberation and decision-making by schools. The Department for Education would revert to its pre-1960 role as advocate for educational spending at the national level. Both with respect to school level and local decisions it will be necessary to find ways of ensuring that demographic differences are not translated into the assertion of exclusionary self-interest.

On the other, as explained earlier, there is a pressing need to get parents from all social backgrounds and circumstances involved in proper school-based decision-making, for holding weekly 'open classrooms' when parents can see what their children have been doing and for developing institutional forms of 'democratic accountability'[103]. This involvement must be adapted to the circumstances and working conditions of parents. In a recent study of schools judged 'Satisfactory' by Ofsted, an unanticipated finding was the level of frustration expressed by parents at their lack of influence, and a perception that the schools did not listen to their views or keep them closely informed of their children's progress[104].

Together, these are moves towards what Angela Eagle calls a deeper democracy:

> **Deepening democratic involvement in the policy generating process and the administration of the resulting government programmes is a slower way of achieving change but it is likely to be far more profound and longer lasting when it is achieved[105].**

Relatedly, we might want to experiment further with the idea of schools as mutual providers. That is:

> **In-sourcing services to dedicated employees with community shareholders, rather than out-sourcing to rent-seeking companies, offers the opportunity to tap into the insight and dedication of frontline workers and the engagement and involvement of citizens and communities.** ***Schoenborn, 2010***[106]

The Cabinet Office website lists over 50 mutuals that are up and running, most established since 2011 and 30 more under development. These range from GLL founded in 1993, now managing more than 100 libraries and leisure centres; to Kaleidoscope Social Enterprise which delivers information, advice and support for people with learning disabilities; and Project Salus:

> **Case Study: Project Salus**
>
> Project Salus, previously known as Kent Safe Schools, offers a range of innovative services in Kent to benefit children, young people, their families, schools, educational settings, professionals and communities, and is developing services to be delivered across the whole of the South East of England.
>
> Our services include direct support to children and young people, working with families, accredited and non-accredited training of school staff and other professionals, policy review and development, and advice/guidance.
>
> We strive to ensure positive outcomes by providing services that will improve the social skills, educational outcomes and emotional health and well-being of children, young people and their families.
>
> **Source: http://www.projectsalus.co.uk/**[107]

As yet we know relatively little about how these mutuals work and the extent to which they serve the needs of their communities effectively and democratically, or indeed whether they are simply the latest in a series of moves by the state to shuffle off its responsibilities to the education and social service market place. Nonetheless, we need to take back good ideas that have been coopted by others and use them in positive, democratic ways. There are languages and practices currently in play that might be of use in building a new vision of education – like mutualism, democratic accountability and co-production.

> **Co-production is a new vision for public services which offers a better way to respond to the challenges we face - based on recognising the resources that citizens already have, and delivering services with rather than for service users, their**

> **families and their neighbours. Early evidence suggests that this is an effective way to deliver better outcomes, often for less money.** ***NESTA***[108]

The political process of rethinking education for the 21st century, related to our real social needs and in relation to our real economic problems, will only come about by unleashing the innovative potential of schools, teachers and communities, by building and exploiting a proper sense of 'democratic fellowship'[109], and by rebuilding trust in teachers and schools. As explored above, this will only happen if steps are taken to address the process of change itself: to ensure meaningful collaboration and purposeful leadership. School development oriented to social justice requires meaningful collaboration, among the teachers but also involving other staff, students and parents.

Such changes will require a new kind of teacher and the move towards forms of democratic professionalism[110], with an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders[111]. Which in turn means that teachers, parents and students, will have to accept challenges and discomforts and demonstrate a readiness to change.

> **A democratic professionalism would seek to demystify professional work and build alliances between teachers and other members of the school workforce, such as teaching assistants, and external stakeholders, including students, parents and members of the wider community...a democratic professionalism thus encourages the development of collaborative cultures in the broadest sense, rather than exclusive ones. It certainly suggests that the teacher has a responsibility that extends beyond the single classroom – including contributing to the school, other students and the wider educational system, as well as to the collective responsibilities of teachers themselves to a broader social agenda. Indeed, under democratic professionalism, this broader agenda becomes part and parcel of the professional agenda rather than being counterposed to it.** ***Whitty, 2006***[112]

It is very important that teachers, according to Andy Hargreaves, serve as courageous counterpoints. Teaching today, in his view, "must include dedication to building character, community, humanitarianism, and democracy in young people; to help them think and act above and beyond the seductions and demands of the knowledge economy"[113]. That is only possible if teachers are able to recognise themselves in the place they expect to be, and are able to express themselves and their practice as public intellectuals.

Conclusion: Experiments and Risks

All of the suggestions discussed here are options and possibilities – an agenda for debate. They are not single nor once and for all solutions, at best they are ‘intermediate institutional innovations’[114], they might not all stand the test of a ‘deeper democracy’ or an inclusive education system. Neither democracy, inclusion, nor equity, are end states, they are things that will always need to be struggled towards and struggled over.

> **To challenge and to revise the context, even in little piecemeal ways, is not only the condition for a fuller realization of our ideals and interests; it is also an indispensable expression of our humanity as being whose powers of experience and initiative are never exhausted by the social and cultural worlds into which we have been born. *Unger, 2005*[115]**

There are many risks and costs to be borne here, and there will be failures and dead-ends, but the risks of not struggling for educational change and against ignorance are greater, in particular for those who bear the costs of things as they are now in education.

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