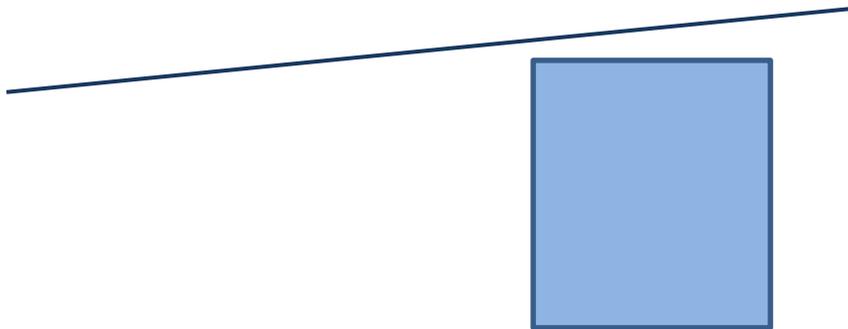


---

# The Role of the Teacher Today

A SCETT Publication

Registered Charity Number 296425



**Edited by Dennis Hayes and Toby Marshall**



A collection of essays based on  
themes discussed at  
SCETT conferences and seminars

**2016**

This work is licensed under Creative Commons. You may:

**Share:** copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

**Adapt:** remix, transform, and build upon the material.

**Attribute:** you must give appropriate credit and indicate if changes are made. You may do so in any reasonable manner but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**Non-Commercial:** you may not use the material for commercial purposes.

Published in 2016 by SCETT

**ISBN:** 978-1-910755-06-8

**Citation:**

Hayes, D. and Marshall, T. (Eds.) *The Role of the Teacher Today*, Derby, UK: SCETT.

All the talks/papers in this book are printed without updating. For referencing purposes these are the dates of the original talks/papers:

Neal (2009); Perks (2010); Hayes (2008, revised 2013); Rooney (2010); Waiton (2010); Hafez (2011 revised 2015); Marshall (2011); Hinchcliffe (2009); Sehgal Cuthbert (2011); Young (2012).



## Dedication

---

### Tyrrell Burgess

7<sup>th</sup> September 1931 - 24<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Tyrrell gave what he said would be his last keynote speech at the SCETT Conference in November 2008. His topic was: what is the role of the teacher now? Tyrrell stayed with us throughout those two days, exemplifying his skill as an educator by telling an anecdote in every session that cut right to the heart of the issue and raised, in a concrete way, thoughts for further reflection. At that conference, Tyrrell won the friendship and affection of those trade unionists, academics and educational professionals who all recognised how privileged we were to have had the truly educational experience of knowing him.

Tyrrell was emeritus professor in the philosophy of social institutions at the University of East London. For five decades he was a prolific contributor to educational debates. In his 'Postscript' to the *Routledge Guide to Key Debates in Education* (2004), Tyrrell noted that 'the spirit of the age is against debate'. Reclaiming debate is less easy in a world without Tyrrell; however, both those of us who knew him and those who did not have a responsibility to put debate at heart of our social, political and cultural life.

---

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	It's harder than ever to be a teacher	<b>Ralph Surman</b>	<b>p8</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<i>Subject to Change</i> : where are we now?	<b>Julia Neal</b>	<b>p11</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	The case for subjects	<b>David Perks</b>	<b>p15</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	The therapeutic turn in teaching	<b>Dennis Hayes</b>	<b>p18</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	Politics and the politics teacher today	<b>Kevin Rooney</b>	<b>p24</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	The fearful teacher: insecure adults, vulnerable youth	<b>Stuart Waiton</b>	<b>p29</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	Professionalism without autonomy	<b>Rania Hafez</b>	<b>p36</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	Teachers need autonomy, not pedagogy	<b>Toby Marshall</b>	<b>p41</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	Education or pedagogy?	<b>Geoffrey Hinchliffe</b>	<b>p50</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b>	Why 'evidence' is not enough	<b>Alka Sehgal Cuthbert</b>	<b>p57</b>
<b>Chapter 10</b>	What should we teach?	<b>Michael Young</b>	<b>p60</b>
<b>Contributors</b>			<b>p64</b>
<b>About SCETT</b>			<b>p66</b>

## INTRODUCTION:

### IT'S HARDER THAN EVER TO BE A TEACHER

**Ralph Surman**, Chair of SCETT

**Giving what was to be his last public lecture at the SCETT Annual Conference on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2008, the late Tyrrell Burgess remarked on the role of the teacher today:**

*The context in which teachers work is much less promising than it was but the role of the teacher is as it has always been. It is about developing a relationship with individual children, understanding and acting upon the way that children grow and develop, developing a sound theory of learning as a basis for practice, taking control of our own development and helping to build or rebuild the profession of teaching.*

This book is about that 'less promising context' in which we have to talk about teaching today. It is harder than ever to be a teacher; the intellectual and moral responsibilities of teachers that Tyrrell described are all contested. Indeed, as some of our contributors argue, they are actively under threat.

The root of the problem – for me – is that teachers are no longer at the heart of schools. They have become technicians, expected to deliver lessons by the manual, with their performance measured and directed by inappropriate numerical targets. As a trade unionist it is clear at every meeting I attend that teachers feel demotivated and deskilled. Trained to be technicians and made compliant through Ofsted inspections, teachers are suffering an identity crisis. They want to regain autonomy and build the profession of teaching but feel unable to do so.

This book contains a selection of papers based on talks given at SCETT conferences and seminars since 2008. Where possible, their conversational tone has been retained. All these talks were given at events with a clear aim: to attempt to give teachers a forum in which they could reflect on and debate issues at the heart of the current identity crisis within teaching today. Our aim was always to encourage discussion and we hope that the discussion will continue now these talks are more widely available.

The first two papers by Julia Neal and David Perks advance two very different positions on the nature of education. In Chapter 1, Neal, in conversation with Martin Johnson, discusses the case for the ATL's 'Subject to Change' philosophy. Teaching for the ATL starts with pupils' needs and interests and is designed in terms of the skills and attitudes we want children to acquire and develop.

Teaching should be based on a light-touch national framework, setting out what children require for their future employment, caring and citizenship roles. It should focus on why, how and who, rather than what, with the curriculum being designed locally on that basis. By contrast, in Chapter 2, Perks sets out the case for subjects. His essay also appears in the Institute of Ideas' Education Forum's booklet *A Defence of Subject-Based Education*. Teachers, Perks argues, have been remoulded as facilitators who help pupils learn how to learn instead of teaching subjects. The consequence is the complete disintegration of education.

In Chapter 3, Dennis Hayes discusses the human subject and challenges the 'therapeutic turn in education'. For Hayes, this therapeutic turn has emphasized the emotions over the intellect, therefore denying children the possibility of an intellectual life.

Two papers then examine political intervention in teaching. In Chapter 4, Kevin Rooney argues that schools should not try to create active citizens but rather give students a knowledge of politics that can underlie their future understanding and actions. In Chapter 5, Stuart Waiton challenges teachers not to feel vulnerable but rather to regain a sense of authority, becoming adults unafraid of offering moral and intellectual leadership.

The next three papers go out of the school classroom to examine professional issues. In Chapter 6, Rania Hafez investigates the changing concept of professionalism in further education. She argues that the new 'regulatory' professionalism removes teacher autonomy.

The penultimate contributions discuss the revival of the notion of 'pedagogy'. In Chapter 7, Toby Marshall warns that the promotion of ways of teaching – what he calls 'Government Pedagogy' – is turning teachers into state-controlled zombies and, in Chapter 8, the philosopher Geoff Hinchliffe puts the case for 'a true pedagogy, rooted in the practicalities of classroom experience on the one hand but informed by a democratic vision that aims to develop all children and students to their fullest potential on the other'.

Alka Sehgal Cuthbert in Chapter 9 advances arguments against the current obsession with finding 'evidence' for education, particularly from neuroscience. This, she says, is based on a misunderstanding of what teaching is and cannot give teachers the pedagogic authority it purports to offer.

Finally, Chapter 10 presents an argument for 'powerful knowledge' from the distinguished sociologist of education, Michael Young.

These readable, sometimes raw, but always challenging papers are a contribution to what SCETT wants to be a broader debate about teaching that involves not just teachers but educationalists, policy makers, politicians and parents.

In choosing our title for this volume we were conscious of Eric Hoyle's perceptive and influential book *The Role of the Teacher*,\* first published in 1969. Re-reading it today, I am struck by its excitement about the 'need to disseminate knowledge much more widely and a growth in the belief that we have by no means reached, and probably never will, the limit of what the mass of the population can gain from education', and how '...this has affected the teacher's role in that there are pressures upon him to accept no level as final in the dissemination of knowledge' (Hoyle 1969: 13). This positive view of education, Hoyle recognised, was being challenged by its growing instrumentalisation. Hoyle also saw that: 'A new set of variations on the teaching role is emerging including, counsellors, teacher-social workers and curriculum development leaders...and the orthodox teacher's role is expanding to embrace a more direct relationship with the home' (Hoyle 1969: 95).

Many of these emerging developments – and more – are discussed in this book. Hoyle wrote at a time when changes within society and education were, arguably for the first time, 'beginning to lead to a redefinition of the role' of the teacher. Today, the role of a teacher is more uncertain and contested than Hoyle could ever have imagined.

SCETT believes that through debate about the issues raised here, teachers can begin to re-define their role and be at the heart of schools once again.

\*Eric Hoyle (1969) *The Role of the Teacher*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

## CHAPTER 1

### *SUBJECT TO CHANGE: WHERE ARE WE NOW?*

**Julia Neal**, former ATL President, interviews Martin Johnson, author of *Subject to Change*

**In 2007, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) published a thought-provoking contribution to the education debate. *Subject to Change – New Thinking on the Curriculum* sought to challenge the thinking of policy makers and all those who contribute to the education of young people in England.**

In the report, Martin Johnson, who authored the work with his colleagues at the ATL's education department, made the case for a new curriculum based on a framework of communication, physical, interpersonal, thinking and learning skills, all of which are required if an educated person is to think and act effectively in the twenty-first century.

This new curriculum, he argued, would develop skills through content, with teachers being given the freedom they need to respond to the demands of their local communities and the interests and abilities of their pupils. Ideally, subject content would not be decided by civil servants in Whitehall.

When *Subject to Change* was launched, it attracted much interest and controversy. Many interpreted the work as a call for the abandonment of traditional school subjects and an attack on the knowledge-based curriculum. Some education writers claimed the study was an attempt to turn back the clock to the 1970s, when schools were largely left to their own devices. One commentator even went so far as to describe the union's report as 'disturbing nonsense', whilst another reported that the 'ATL believes pupils should not have to learn dates of famous battles, such as Trafalgar'.

As ATL members engage with the challenges of a new academic year they may well be asking themselves: are school standards really improving? Are young people engaged in the National Curriculum as it currently stands? What is more, have policy makers actually listened to the ATL's proposals?

One day at the end of the summer term Martin Johnson agreed to be interviewed on the issues raised by *Subject to Change*.

**Q.** *Do you think that government is giving the workforce freedom to innovate? Has the role of the teacher changed?*

**A.** It has, to an extent, and the trend is likely to continue, but the sticking point comes at upper secondary level where government can exercise control through assessment rather than curriculum content. Teachers should have a higher degree of autonomy over the detail of what and how to teach and the right to the professional development that supports this.

**Q.** *Has the debate moved on since 2007 and has our work received the attention it deserves?*

**A.** Yes, the new KS2 and KS3 programs of learning have enhanced teacher autonomy and involvement. When we wrote the book, we suggested this as a way forward and we said ‘be brave and do it’. The current has been running our way since – control has been conceded in the curriculum – but at Key Stage 4 the Standards Agenda is still ruling and so it is less easy for the government to relax its control.

However, there is more of a propensity for schools to innovate generally. More schools are prepared to ‘think outside of the box’ and primary schools have in many cases rebuilt KS2 on a skills basis, largely on their own initiative. A good example of this is the significant take up of the RSA ‘Opening Minds’ program, which enables active learning with the development of personal skills. Teachers are becoming more empowered and there is less timidity.

**Q.** *What contribution will the 14-19 Diplomas make? And how might a future Conservative Government add to the skills agenda?*

**A.** There is deep skepticism about the Diploma generally and I think there remain real difficulties and huge costs in implementing the 14-19 reforms within the present structure of 14-19 institutions. A future Tory government may well pull the plug on it. The ‘Gold Standard’ ‘A’ level may prevail. Between five and 16 years, the Conservative party may encourage professional autonomy but they will also want the basics of the three ‘R’s to be encouraged. Testing will continue to pressure schools.

Basically, the older the student, the more powerful are the drivers for acquiring qualifications as schools can be measured by them and they are necessary for entry into Higher Education and employment.

**Q.** *Has progress been made towards the establishment of local curricula?*

**A.** Yes the discourse has changed over the last few years and a recent report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on 20 years of the National Curriculum was set within a context that was in line with the ATL's thinking. There was certainly an emphasis on the local curriculum and a suggestion that ATL's views are relevant.

Indeed, the key themes of the report were: trusting schools, curriculum coherence, empowering teachers and scaling down the National Curriculum. Key findings called for a slimming down of the National Curriculum and a cap to be placed on the teaching time it can account for. And there was an affirmation that the National Strategies should be discontinued in their current form. In addition, it suggested that the freedom that academies enjoy should be extended to all schools, so as to provide the space for curriculum design and innovation. As the ATL maintains, the National Curriculum should be a framework – setting out the aims, the main areas to be covered – teachers should be tasked with 'go away and work it out.'

Of course it needs to be clear how all of this should be decided; pupil voice is important just as is teacher accountability. At the ATL, we would say that we need to take into account other interests and not just rely on teacher decision. Pupils, parents and governors are important too, and it might be the role of a range of other agencies, including Local Authorities to produce curriculum models. As for the role of the Trades Unions and bodies such as SCETT, the development of appropriate Continuing Professional Development is crucial to all of this and they would have an important role to play too.

**Q.** *Did the ATL really call for the abolition of separate academic subjects?*

**A.** We're often misunderstood about this. Each subject has core skills which all pupils should acquire, for example a sense of chronology in history. Schools need to organise to ensure that but it doesn't necessarily mean that the subject 'history' needs to appear on a timetable. We do understand the need for teachers to transmit the key items of academic subjects thoroughly. The problem is that assessment gets in the way – it is certainly the elephant in the room.

The other point the ATL makes is that an academic curriculum is not a balanced curriculum. We think pupils should spend relatively more time on practical and physical skills, including arts and crafts and personal skills.

**Q.** *How significant is the impact of the recession?*

**A.** The impact is, of course, highly localized and there is a very complex pattern across the country. There will always be a need for a flexible work force and the curriculum must deliver the required skills for employability. The government must not be afraid to address this issue – it needs to be radical – it should abolish the A-Level (and I mean really abolish it!). Universities should select on a new basis and we need to be sure that employers can get on board with the new Diplomas. But I hope that politicians will understand that schools should never be about employability alone. In fact, the skills needed by employers are increasingly the skills needed for life in general. In this fast moving world, better understood communication becomes more and more important for us all.

**Q.** *What else needs to be achieved?*

**A.** There is an urgent need for a rationalization of the current overlapping systems of teacher accountability. It is probably not likely that Ofsted will be abolished but other bureaucratic measures need to be put on the bonfire. The SATS dispute should be settled once and for all - progress has been made and the time is right to take another look at our assessment and accountability system. In fact, SATS are not the real issue here; league tables are. They should go. After all, the government is looking to save money and we know that our present system costs many millions of pounds. It is certainly time for a fresh look at the way accountability operates.

**Q.** *How would you sum up our current position?*

**A.** It is a classic situation of is the glass half empty or half full? The swing of the pendulum is moving in our favour and things are better than they were. However, we still have massive problems at 14-19 and we have inappropriate curriculum design in early years and at the Key Stages – but there is a good case for optimism.

Overall, teachers are feeling more empowered and there is evidence that they are able to think for themselves once more. We still need more effective CPD and positive Initial Teacher Training to increase the capability of today's and tomorrow's professionals to make a more effective contribution – they have been silenced for too long.

It is important that the profession takes heart from the words of Barry Sheerman, Chairman of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee: 'We need to trust schools and teachers more and empower teachers to do what they do best'.

We can only hope that the government listens and that 'Subject to Change' becomes a reality in classrooms across the country.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR SUBJECTS

### David Perks

**Over the past thirteen years there has been one consistent theme in educational reform: an attack on knowledge in the school curriculum. Despite widespread complaints about declining standards, the real effect of these reforms has passed largely unnoticed. Every revision of the National Curriculum or change in the examinations system has, without fail, advocated reducing the content to be tested in order to make space for more flexible forms of assessment, such as modular examinations and coursework, or to replace teaching content with skills. But like the spread of death watch beetle, the continual and gradual undermining of schools' ability to deliver subject knowledge has led to the complete disintegration of education.**

### The attack on liberal education

One extreme example is the recent rewrite of the key stage three science national curriculum for 11-13 year olds. Rather than being tested on their knowledge of physics, chemistry and biology, pupils are now assessed on 'how science works'. This comprises a bizarre collection of ideas, including a critique of the experimental method and appreciation of the limits of scientific knowledge. If this weren't bad enough, the disease has spread throughout the teaching profession. Railroaded by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) – the schools' inspectorate – teachers are remoulded as facilitators. They help pupils learn how to learn, rather than teaching a subject. The deconstruction of pedagogy is so complete that to tell a new teacher the most important thing for children is teaching them something is to indulge a dirty secret. The inspectors believe it's more important to let pupils play games and assess each other's work.

We've reached the point where teaching pupils anything intellectually demanding means being classed a failing teacher. According to Ofsted, if every pupil doesn't show progress in a lesson, the lesson is a failure. Being a good teacher thus amounts to asking children to tell you what they already know. Teaching all students academic subjects is a distant memory in schools. The standard achievement for sixteen year olds in English schools is a GCSE in mathematics and English, along with a mixture of pseudo-vocational qualifications rated as equivalent to four or more GCSEs.

Whether it's the attack on knowledge or a general flight from academic subjects, the idea that

state schools in particular should offer a grammar school curriculum for all is long gone. So has comprehensive education's aspiration to open up the best for every child. Instead, the grammar school curriculum is considered an elitist paradigm, suited to the managerial and political classes but not ordinary citizens. Why study mathematics when functional mathematics will do? Why study science if you're not going to become a scientist but a consumer of science? Abstract thinking is dismissed as useless for the average citizen.

The charge that a traditional liberal education based on the sciences, humanities, languages and the arts is the prerogative of the cultural elite alone is another way of saying young people are bored by an education irrelevant to their lives. This attack on liberal education belies a deeply pessimistic view of ordinary people. Thinking about ideas is not for them. Rather, the cultural elite will think about ordinary people's needs on their behalf.

### Liberal education is a conservative project

But the truth is education doesn't have the power to emancipate people from oppression. It doesn't tell them how to change the world. And it certainly can't substitute for the political class's lack of a political program. What it can and must do is provide the foundation for understanding the world we live in.

At root, this means understanding what we already know. The transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next isn't a foregone conclusion. It's possible to forget. This forgetting has been consciously attempted over the last century by those dictators who've systematically tried to eradicate whole areas of learning. But we've yet to witness such a calculated withdrawal from educating the mass of people in a western democracy. What we have isn't a conspiracy against those deemed unworthy of a good education but rather a loss of faith in education in general. This undermines our ability to transmit knowledge *per se*. This is the collateral damage of using education to repair social inequalities rather than educating the next generation.

The recent election in the UK opens up the possibility of taking a deep breath. We can reconsider what education means and what our schools should do. Nick Gibb, Schools Minister, made it clear he wants a debate about the nature of education and to see a return of the subject-based curriculum. This is encouraging. But the Conservatives' case for subject-based education sounds a little hollow. Concerns over 'access' and 'social inclusion' still predominate in the ideas put forward by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education. Even the reform of the National Curriculum includes a predictable call to reduce its content and give teachers space to decide how

to deliver it. The omens are not good, unless we can make a positive case in favour of liberal education for everybody.

Making such a case lies at the heart of a conservative project. We live in a moment when institutions of all kinds are drawn into question as the old political certainties have dissolved away. But worshipping 'change', as Barack Obama and Ed Miliband would have us do, means blaming everything on the past. In education, as in politics, this is also the case. Justified in the name of social inclusion or anti-elitism, old educational ideas are being swept away. But the foundations of our knowledge of the world remain as true today as they have done for the past hundred years or so of formal state education. The 'information age' does not make Ohm's Law redundant or Shakespeare irrelevant. Google may be able to translate phrases but it can't replace learning a language and its literature.

### Passing on the torch of the Enlightenment

The key to educating pupils is giving them a framework for understanding what we know about the world. Education is the study of our collective knowledge and how we know what we know. This means studying subjects in the context of how our understanding evolved. This has happened through systematizing knowledge into disciplines, each with its own coherence and methods. For example, the great advances in modern biology and its emergence as a separate discipline arose through the Prussian invention of the modern research laboratory and the systematic application of the use of the microscope to study living organisms. This work led to the discovery of the cell, the fundamental unit of life. Subjects are at once historical accidents and the product of systematic attempts to pursue knowledge. To dismiss this is to dismiss the huge advances we've made in comprehending the world around us.

The basis for a liberal education is to be able to explain how we have come as far as we have. It involves passing on the torch of the Enlightenment to the next generation, so it isn't snuffed out by ignorance. The key to achieving this is to take pupils seriously when we engage them with these ideas. That means not just having a passion for your subject but being an evangelist for the ideals of the Enlightenment. This is the project we face if we are to salvage education for the next generation.

## CHAPTER 3:

## THE THERAPEUTIC TURN IN TEACHING

## Dennis Hayes

**The central argument of *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* (2008) can be stated succinctly: a ‘therapeutic education’ is one constituted by various practices that emphasise the emotions over the intellect. The rise of such practices is ‘dangerous’ because they begin to deny the possibility of an intellectual life for children and young people. This happens because what is central to these practices is an attack on knowledge, the knowing subject, and this results in what we can call an ‘emotional self’ which is *eo ipso* a diminished self or diminished human subject.**

Many therapists, counsellors and teachers criticised the use of the term ‘therapeutic’ in the book and couldn’t see anything in the examples given as constituting what they would properly label ‘therapy’. They struggled to see in the examples any valid forms of therapy or psychoanalysis or even counselling. They often agreed with us about the dangerous nature of what we described, or at least saw our examples as poor pedagogical practice, but denied that that what was going on was really ‘therapy’.

However, the argument that there has been a ‘therapeutic turn’ in teaching at all levels is not merely technical. It deliberately does not refer to or attempt to provide an analysis of the various sorts of professional therapy and track their influence on educational practice. There might be something of value in this analysis but it would be a purely academic project that would not explain and certainly would not counter the therapeutic turn.

Nor does it primarily refer to the plethora of fads and fashions about teaching to improve self-esteem or build up personal resilience, or to promote emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, emotional well-being or happiness. These are important factors but each one is only a symptom or expression of our contemporary therapeutic culture.

These fads and fashions may come and go but the therapeutic turn represents a more profound philosophical shift that is rarely challenged, unlike some of these fads. Due to this, teachers will continue to be transformed into therapists and unwittingly assist in a process of deepening therapy culture by turning every child into a diminished individual in need, not of lifelong learning, but lifelong therapy.

To explain the epochal significance of the therapeutic turn, I will present seven profound changes that affect the lives of all teachers and are transforming them into therapists.

## Seven changes that frame the therapeutic turn in education

### 1. The cultural change: from ascetic culture to therapy culture

It is impossible here to do more than assert that there has been a fundamental shift in our entire culture from an ascetic culture to a therapy culture. This shift is documented in 'Explaining the Emotional State' (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008: Ch.7). For my purposes here there are two things to emphasise. First, that what has changed is the whole of our culture, and not just some aspects of our lives. In 1966, Philip Rieff, writing in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, describes the profound nature of this change:

The therapeutics must be understood precisely in their efforts to go beyond the analytic attitude, as the articulate representatives of *a sharp and probably irreparable break in the continuity of Western culture*. None of their doctrines promises an authentic therapy of commitment to communal purpose; rather, in each the commitment is to the therapeutic effort itself. As Jung insisted, the therapeutic cannot claim more than a private value for his moral science. The therapy of all therapies is not to attach oneself exclusively to any particular therapy, so that no illusion may survive of some end beyond an intensely private sense of well-being to be generated in the living of life itself. *That a sense of well-being has become the end, rather than a by-product of striving after some superior communal end, announces a fundamental change of focus in the entire cast of our culture – toward a human condition about which there will be nothing further to say in terms of the old style of despair and hope* (Rieff [1966] 1987: 261: my italics).

Rieff is only wrong about the 'probability' of this irreparable shift in our culture. Since he wrote his perceptive book, the 'sense of well-being' has indeed become the 'end' rather than what it should and must be: the 'by-product of striving after some superior communal end'. This was, for Rieff, not an alternative 'culture' in the form of 'therapy culture' as we now misleadingly call it but the end of anything that could be called 'culture'. Another writer from the 1960s, Paul Halmos, explained this change in more personal terms:

*In the past, if there was something wrong with the society in which a man had to live he would turn to the political and moral reformer; if a*

*man's body was ailing he would consult a doctor; and if he had a sickness of the spirit he would seek help from the priest. Those who had a vocation or mission to better their fellow man's life chose practice in one of these fields* ([1965] 1978: 11).

Despite a caveat revealing a misplaced but understandable optimism in the revival of politics in the 1960s, Halmos concludes that the last two of these professions 'have already yielded some of their functions to the counsellor' ([1965] 1978: 11). This process has deepened over the years and become more invasive of everyday as well as professional life.

The second point is that this 'therapy' culture in which we are either 'therapists', who Rieff more precisely calls 'therapeutics', or we are in need of therapy, we are potential 'patients'. We don't even see therapy as being for *sick* people any more. It is all the fashion, as the new widespread use of the term 'therapy' to describe any pleasant experience such as 'retail therapy' or 'exercise therapy' indicates. The point about living in a so-called 'therapy culture' is that we can't escape from therapy. It affects us all to some degree and even those who oppose it often find it hard to be consistent and easily slip into therapy speak or therapeutic approaches.

This is the most important change and appreciating it is essential to understand all those that follow.

## 2. The epistemological change: from knowledge about the world to knowledge about yourself

The second feature of the therapeutic turn can be neatly summed up through this one statement of history teacher Dr Mark Taylor: 'You know something has changed when young people want to know more about themselves than the world'.

The concern with the self is a result of masking the epochal nature of the therapeutic turn by celebrating personal well-being. Self-denial for the community and a moral or religious purpose has been replaced by social and educational concern with personal satisfaction. We don't see how damaging the therapeutic turn is because it seems the opposite; it seems to enhance the self. As Rieff put it: '...what apocalypse has ever been so kindly?' ([1966] 1987: 27).

From circle time and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) classes where pupils' feelings are explored through to student satisfaction surveys in universities, the message is 'education is all about you'. This is a process that enhances childish and adolescent self-absorption and has given birth to the 'me' generation.

### 3. The political change: from class war to couch war

The political change is a shift from 'class war' to 'couch war'. Politicians, trade unions, institutions and even the police service see people as needing therapy. Whether it's counsellors to work with unemployed men in case they turn on their wives and families, union officials protecting their members from being 'bullied' or promoting the idea that anyone who is a 'victim' is damaged for life, the therapeutic state now has only one role: to give therapy to victims (T2V).

### 4. The changing subject

One of the most important insights in *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* was the recognition that the emphasis on the emotions was in essence an attack on the knowing subject, whether that subject is a child, a young person or an adult. The human subject was no longer held to be primarily a knowing but a feeling being. Often dressed up as creating a 'balanced' education, the arguments for 'emotional education' ignored aesthetic education as traditionally perceived, which was undertaken through the study of literature in all its forms. In any discussion of how we understand subtle and complex human emotions our primary source is a writer like Shakespeare and not SEAL.

Reducing the knowledge-based content of education to skills, often 'soft skills', is an explicit attack on the 'subjects' in the curriculum and at the same time an indirect attack on the human 'subjects' that we all are. This 'dual attack on the subject' with its crude emphasis on subjective 'feeling' is a primitive and misanthropic approach to human beings. It reduces us to the level of animals with crude instinctual 'feelings'.

### 5. The change in assessment

When the subject of education is the self, assessment must also be about the self. Teachers will have experienced this during training when they have to keep 'reflective logs' or other reflective pieces on their learning. In schools, and now even in universities, building character is the focus of much of the ordinary teaching. Examples are easy to find: encouraging 'empathy' in history; 'environmental awareness' in geography; 'anger management' in SEAL and every desirable trait in PSHE. Some universities are now listing 'graduate attributes' which are often soft or emotional dispositions such as being 'emotionally intelligent', 'considerate of others', having 'self-awareness, empathy, cultural awareness and mutual respect' and, of course, being 'employable, enterprising and entrepreneurial'.

All of these 'must be assessed'. They may be initially seen as by-products of the education on offer but bureaucracies will soon be ensuring they are promoted in every subject and with the checklists comes the assessment of self.

## 6. The changing meaning of 'education'

The therapeutic turn is possible only when the term 'education' has no agreed meaning. This is the case now when education is an empty vessel into which government, other organisations and some teachers themselves think they can fill with experiments into children's emotional lives. The promotion of happiness classes and the introduction of SEAL, are obvious examples. But the collapse in the understanding of what education means is much wider. Developments such as the Royal Society of Arts' competence-based 'Opening Minds' project now on offer in over two hundred schools and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' skills-based alternative to subject based education in 'Subject to Change' are indicators of a decline in understanding of what education is. Above all, it was the interventions in education under New Labour which made schools the location for social engineering and the resolution of social problems and killed the idea of the school as a unique place where children learned, in Matthew Arnold's famous phrase 'the best which has been thought and said'.

## 7. The changed social settlement

Promoting the diminished self is a major cash nexus and that makes it difficult to challenge. As well as innumerable consultants, charities and businesses earning money from promoting courses on happiness, emotional intelligence and 'brilliance' training, as well as 57 varieties of counselling and therapeutic interventions, the state is financing the therapeutic turn particularly through the indirect costs of teaching SEAL in 90 per cent of primary schools and 70 per cent of secondary schools.

For an example of one financial inducement towards the therapeutic turn, it was announced in May 2013 that £40m of lottery funding was to be targeted at community health projects that promoted happiness, well-being, increased self-esteem and 'life satisfaction' rather than material 'riches' (Big Lottery UK: 30 May 2013).

Money now flows to those who support the therapeutic turn not merely in the form of interventions and training but to all who frame their projects in therapy speak. A clear example of this is the

recent but extensive renaming of health and education departments and research projects with the label 'well-being' along with endless talk of pupil, student or staff 'well-being'

The changed social settlement means that if you want a job or funding, then promoting knowledge and understanding won't get you the cash cow but yet talking therapy pays.

### **Conclusion: The meaning of the therapeutic turn**

The therapeutic turn means that unless teachers are conscious of it and resist it, their practice and any innovation will increasingly promote diminished human beings – children, young people and adults – who are in constant need of psychological stroking, whether to improve their self-esteem, resilience, emotional intelligence or literacy, their happiness, well-being, their 'brilliance' or whatever. The therapeutic turn is becoming an end in itself, spontaneously filling a vacant space in schools when education, the teaching of subject-based knowledge, has been abandoned.

Reversing the therapeutic turn requires two things. Firstly, that teachers recognise the existence of a dangerous rise of therapeutic education, which is dangerous precisely because of its seeming kindness towards meeting the perceived emotional needs of children and young people. Secondly, that teachers return to subject-based education with a basis in the disciplines into which knowledge and understanding have been divided. If it is not reversed it will mean that we will have a kindly apocalypse in education that will leave us with a generation of damaged and diminished children who will never grow to be knowing adults capable of 'despair or hope'.

### **References**

Ecclestone, K. and Hayes, D. (2008) *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, London and New York: Routledge.

Halmos, P. ([1965] 1978) *The Faith of the Counsellors*, London: Constable.

Rieff, P. ([1966] 1987) *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **POLITICS AND THE POLITICS TEACHER TODAY**

**Kevin Rooney**

**Why teach politics? This is a question I have been forced to ponder recently as increasing demands have been placed on my subject. I think that defending the teaching of politics in its own right is necessary for many reasons, but above all because there is something intrinsic about the subject itself that is worth studying. Today, however, even my fellow politics teachers struggle to defend the subject in its own terms. Instead, they increasingly make the case for politics on instrumental grounds: for its ability to create 'active citizens' and increase voter turnout. This is a development that should worry us all.**

It is my contention that the job of a politics teacher is to provide a political education in the 'master science', as Aristotle once termed it. Of course, there is more than one way to teach politics but above all it must involve the acquisition of comprehensive subject knowledge. It requires an introduction to the major political institutions and processes, as well as the relationships between them. The politics teacher must teach a range of concepts and theories, so that his pupils are familiarised with a wide field of political knowledge. If a young person is to be introduced to visions of the good society, in my view there can be no short cuts. This must involve a thorough introduction into the key political ideas: conservatism, liberalism, socialism, anarchism, nationalism, feminism, as well as environmentalism and multiculturalism. Only then will the young person be equipped with the understanding they need to analyse the world both past and present.

To the extent that I concede any objective for the subject other than the acquisition of knowledge, it is the broader aim of education: the creation of autonomous young people capable of thinking and acting upon the world and analysing and evaluating political arguments for themselves. Our role is not to prepare young people for jobs or to make the British economy more competitive. Nor is it our duty to in any way to assist government by using our subject as a vehicle for solving wider social problems, such as youth apathy and low voter turn out

### **The politicisation of politics teaching**

The problem is that my faith in the intrinsic value of the subject does not appear to be shared by the most influential actors in politics education. Many educationalists and policy officials now believe that a key role of politics teaching is to turn young people into active citizens who participate in civil society, vote and volunteer in their local community.

Similarly, the exam boards often now advertise the subject primarily on the basis of possible career routes or its positive societal impact. The new AS and A-level syllabuses, for example, have adopted this overtly instrumental approach. In the promotional literature the subject is posited as a key weapon for reversing declining voter turnout and driving up levels of civic engagement among young people.

The dangerous consequence of this instrumentalism is that it changes the nature of the subject being taught. Here, 'politics' becomes redefined as 'active citizenship', while the 'study of democracy' becomes the crude and fruitless attempt to sell participation to young people. Ironically, the politicisation of politics education results in students being less informed, as you reduce the already very limited time available to impart facts and knowledge. It also changes the role of the politics teacher, who becomes less of a teacher and more of a cheerleader for voting and community cohesion. Fundamentally, this is anti-intellectual, since it prioritises values over academic enquiry. In doing so, it makes voting and participation unquestionable and therefore rules out the critical enquiry that is the true purpose of politics education.

Of course, teachers have always had some role to play in the creation of citizens. Politics teachers aspire to create autonomous young people, but as an indirect by-product of a rounded liberal education. In the past, teachers understood that they contributed informally to the socialisation of young people. And yet, the process was always implicit and the integrity of individual subjects was automatically respected. Today, this is no longer the case. Crudely explicit instrumental requirements are now damaging the integrity of every subject, with politics suffering disproportionately, as it is seen as particularly well suited to solving society's crisis of political engagement.

### Can teachers create active citizens?

One of the key assumptions that drives this discussion is that political illiteracy is the reason that young people don't vote. Consequently, we are told that politics lessons can play a role in boosting voting amongst the young. But can an academic subject like politics solve what is a political – not an educational – problem? My experience is that students can be politically literate to a high level and can achieve excellent A-level grades, whilst also choosing not to vote at 18. This isn't because they are ignorant – quite the opposite – but because they find the parties bland and their manifestos dull and uninspiring.

It is understandable that a government desperate to re-engage young people would turn to the subject of politics as a vehicle to do so. But I strongly believe that using the subject in this way won't

solve the problem. It is the contemporary political culture that is failing to inspire young people and it therefore follows that there is little that can be done in the classroom to rectify this. If you want to see what inspires young people to vote, just take a look at the last US Presidential election. The high voter turnout amongst all age groups was everything to do with the excitement around Obama and nothing to do with people having learned the importance of voting in a classroom. Similarly, in Zimbabwe people queued for days to vote because there was something real at stake and they believed their vote mattered. Inspirational political leaders and the need for change and elections where there is a clear choice of distinct policies are what lead people to vote.

### **Politicisation is authoritarian**

Left unchallenged, instrumental and values-led education could eventually destroy the spirit of intellectual enquiry within politics education. It could also undermine students' freedom of conscience and their right to determine their own social and political values. The danger is that in parts of the politics curriculum students are now being told what to think. And there is a truly malign element to this – let's think about those young people who reject the prescriptive approach to voting, participation and community cohesion. What grades will go to those students with a rebellious streak who reject the current political fashions, such as multiculturalism? Indeed, what marks will go to those who conclude that the environment should not be protected or that eating and drinking to excess are what life is about or – God forbid – that the best party is the BNP?

### **The politicisation of all education**

We should also not forget that politicisation is not confined to politics education, since through the current inspection frameworks all subjects are expected to comply. If I teach a high quality lesson on the anarchist attitude to freedom, for example, I can still fail an Ofsted inspection and be rated unsatisfactory, even if learning has taken place and students' curiosity has been provoked. Why? Because the criteria on which my teaching is assessed includes the extent to which my lesson plan and scheme of work has contributed to community cohesion, helped the socially disadvantaged, aided the financial capability of students, as well as a host of other external criteria that have now been imported into schools via 'Every Child Matters' legislation and other box-ticking exercises.

This highly political form of regulation now applies universally, no matter what the subject, as the cross curricular themes of citizenship and 'Every Child Matters' have to be evidenced in all academic subjects, including history, biology or geography. This means that lessons that that would once have

been considered outstanding will now fail inspections if such themes are not addressed. So it's not just politics teachers who should be worried by the politicisation of education.

Sadly, this approach now appears to be common sense. As the head of a Social Science Department I am increasingly astounded by the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) that I have to fill out every year, a very large proportion of which has absolutely nothing to do with education or the Social Sciences and everything to do with the extent to which my department is meeting externally driven instrumental imperatives centred on solving a host of broader social problems. Unfortunately, many teachers are so used to such crude requirements that they are almost immune to the absurdity of them.

Indeed, the trends I have identified are now so well established that the next generation of politics teachers is being trained in this way. On postgraduate teacher training courses knowledge is now low down on the list of professional priorities and the traditional subject-centred approach has been lost. I mentor student social science teachers on placement and many frequently complain about the amount of time that is now set aside for the latest government campaigns, be it 'Every Child Matters', health and safety, healthy lifestyles or community cohesion. A quick glance at their file notes gives a shocking insight into the extent to which subject knowledge is now playing second fiddle to government-led social engineering.

These developments are mirrored within academic and policy circles, where the assault on subject knowledge is explicit and direct. Books such as John White's *Rethinking the Curriculum* (White, 2003) or Martin Johnson's *Subject to Change* (Johnson, 2007) have paved the way for making it positively respectable to denigrate subject-knowledge and to brand it as either elitist or old fashioned. In these publications the short-term imperatives of preparing people for the British economy and addressing youth disengagement takes priority over education.

### Is there a way back?

The politicisation of education has changed both the role of the teacher and the purpose of teaching. This change must be challenged. Teachers should not play any part in what is essentially a social engineering project. Instead, we need to mount a robust defence of the value of academic subjects for their own sake.

In my field there are certain things that will need to happen if we are to re-establish the intrinsic worth of politics as a subject. Firstly, a clear separation must be made between the government's desire to produce a more engaged generation and the educational needs of students. This requires that politics educators stand up to social engineering. In other words, the teaching of politics in

schools should be separated from the government's legitimate desire to engage young people in politics. Reversing voter decline, the need to create active citizens and community cohesion should be removed from the politics lesson and politics must be restored to its former status as an academic subject like physics, English literature and chemistry. In the same way that pupils in science lessons learn about the scientific method, so politics pupils deserve the right to experiment, hypothesise and enquire insulated from the pressures and demands of the real world outside the classroom.

The second step is for politics teachers to take responsibility themselves. It seems ironic that politics teachers have been so passive about the overt politicisation of their subject. For some, this probably comes from an agreement with government that society does need young people to become more engaged. But politics teachers should recognise that by equipping the next generation with the knowledge and skills of enquiry we can do our bit to create the kind of educated young people we all want to see. Politicians, for their part, also need to address the issue of voter apathy and the lack of political engagement amongst young people. But the way to do this is through re-energising the political climate and offering people an exciting vision of the future or a battle of ideas that engages us all. By confusing education with politics we undermine both.

The future of politics as an academic subject looks grim. But all is not lost and this battle at least is one that can inspire and motivate some of us into action. We must uphold the integrity of our subject, for the sake of our students, but also because society has more prospect of being a better place if the next generation is educated to a high level and has the academic skills required to enquire, judge and interrogate our body politic.

## References

- Johnson, M. (2007) *Subject to Change – New Thinking on the Curriculum*, London: ATL.
- White, J. (2003) *Rethinking the School Curriculum: Values, Aims and Purposes*, London: Routledge.

## Stuart Waiton

**Sometimes, it's hard to work out what's going on with the whole youth thing – less in terms of what youth are up to but more in terms of society's apparently schizophrenic love-hate relationship with the young.**

In the last decade or so we have been swamped by a discussion about the 'job culture' of binge drinking and violence. The result has been myriad new laws and regulations: ASBOs, curfews, more young people being locked up and a growth in school exclusion. From the government to teachers' unions and even among the public, there appears to be a high level of intolerance of the young, a sense that they are out of control and need tighter control and regulation. Today, for example, even the discussion about youth unemployment quickly moves from a concern about jobs to one about a 'lost generation of young people'. Consequently, the social problem of job creation shifts to a fear of 'disengaged youth'.

For some critical sociologists, this fear and regulation of young people is understood as an assertion of authority over the young – a kind of adultism which results in child and youth oppression, with adults portraying 'power as responsibility, control as care and regulation as protection' (Scruton 1997: 163). However, why adults would want to oppress young people in this way is never made clear.

At the same time as this apparently authoritarian anti-youth sentiment has grown, there has also emerged some opposition to it and there is the beginning of a defence on behalf of the young. There is, for example, a call to end the 'demonization of young people', coupled with various campaigns to promote positive images of youth. The government has created the post of Children's Minister, which has a remit to act as a representative or a 'voice' for children and young people. Child-centeredness is also part and parcel of school life and more widely the framework of children's rights is firmly established across the UK, not least of all within the various children's organisations who campaign on behalf of children and young people.

To some extent we appear to have developed two opposing camps: one that is on the side of adults and authority, the other that represents children and youth and seeks to protect them from the intolerant authoritarianism of adults.

However, this adult/youth division is far from clear cut, after all the same government that has enforced curfews on young people has also established the Children's Minister. The Department for

Children, Families and Schools has also appointed a consortium to challenge the demonization of youth and to promote positive images of young people. Teacher unions campaign for zero tolerance of pupil misbehaviour but at the same time endorse an educational approach that focuses on the 'whole child'. Whilst the general public, for its part, appears to have a certain fear of young people, as parents they are more home and child centred than ever before.

So what is going on today? Are we lovers of children and young people or do we fear and loath them? Arguably there is no contradiction, as both the 'child-centred' approach to young people and the 'lock 'em up' response, are both products of the decline of adult authority.

### The humanism of child centeredness?

Firstly, to unpick this question a little, it is worth examining certain aspects of the 'child-centred' and 'pro-youth' approach, in particular, the sense that there is something humane and positive in the attempt to stand up for young people. An alternative interpretation could be that the celebration and promotion of youth and children's rights in fact stems more from a negative view of adults than a positive one of the young.

The recent campaign by Barnardo's connected to their report *Breaking the Cycle* is a useful illustration of this point. Using a YouGov survey, the press release for this campaign announced evidence that more than half of the adult population think that 'children are beginning to behave like animals'. The release was based on advocacy research, in which leading questions gave little or no leeway for responses. This was then backed up with comments made by 'Mr Angry' type adults worthy of the gossipy sections of online newspapers. On this basis Barnardo's portrayed adults in the UK as rabid, child-hating fanatics. In their online promotional video this representation took the form of a group of bile-spitting men ranting about feral youth before going out to hunt down and shoot some kids hanging out on the streets.

That a respected charity like Barnardo's could fraudulently produce such a one-dimensional and degraded view of British adults is telling. That there was almost no questioning of it is equally worrying. Indeed, the level of venom directed at the adult population usefully illustrates the underlying anti-adultism or indeed anti-humanism that underpins the thinking of the pro-youth lobby. Here, fear and loathing of adults is the mirror image of perceptions of young people. Rather than vitriol and rhetoric about 'yobs' we get an alternative panic about vile adults.

### The child friendly nature of child centeredness?

The growth of campaigning by children's charities in the last decade can at first appear to represent a positive alternative to the anti-youth anxieties that exist in society. However, the apparently pro-child and pro-youth approach of these organisations is not straight forward. As we have seen, misanthropy typically applies to adults, but it also extends to young people themselves.

The work of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) demonstrates how the myopic focus on abuse can lead to young people being represented as a danger to one another. It published research in September 2009 that explored the nature of teenage sexual relationships. This resulted in headlines such as a 'third of teenage girls forced into sex', which were backed up by quotes about the high rate of 'exploitation' and 'violence' existing in teenage relationships. Their research replicated the approach adopted in a previous NSPCC document *Child Maltreatment in the UK*, which discovered that the greatest abusers of children are in fact children – or more specifically 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends'.

In fact, this 'discovery' had nothing to do with the changing nature of young people and their relationships but the interpretation of them – an interpretation which transforms teenage fumbblings and 'trying it on' with abuse and violence. That it is 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends' who are described as being the greatest child abusers in society tells us more about the immature and unworldly approach of the NSPCC and their obsessions than it does about life behind the bike shed. Here the apparently child friendly NSPCC ends up labelling and criminalising young people as child abusers – an approach that in part helps to explain the growing number of young people being placed on the sex offenders register.

### The dangers of the vulnerable child

Young people have increasingly been defined and understood in terms of vulnerability. Indeed, by the mid-1990s the Association for Metropolitan Authorities noted that: 'children are the most vulnerable group in society' (Scruton 1999: 179). Once they are defined in this way an ever growing array of experiences that young people have can be interpreted as damaging, abusive or traumatising. As many of the difficulties and conflicts youngsters face are with their peers, the end result of this vulnerability focused outlook is that children themselves are understood not only as victims but also as villains – as potential bullies and abusers of their peers.

At a conference in Edinburgh the perverse consequences of this 'child-friendly' approach was illustrated beautifully by the then Scottish Children's Commissioner Kathleen Marshall. Feeling a little under pressure to illustrate her child friendliness in an audience of child care professionals Marshall stood up as the saviour of the 'vulnerable child' pronouncing with great gusto that we

should understand and recognise that bullying is a 'crime'. Taken seriously, and taking the breadth of behaviours that can today be described as bullying, here Scotland's Children's Commissioner managed to propose the criminalisation of far more young people than any authoritarian grumpy old man has ever done.

Within schools more widely, the institutionalisation of anti-bullying practices and aspects of the new relationship education curriculum can turn everyday interactions into something that is understood as dangerous and damaging. This is illustrated by 'relationship education', which represents young people's ordinary sexual relationships as one-dimensionally bound up with 'peer pressure' and potential abuse. Ultimately, this process results in the problematization (and potential criminalisation) of children and young people's behaviour and relationships.

### **Progressive campaigners?**

Here, through the prism of vulnerability, we find that the ironic outcome of the activities of children's campaigners and organisations is that they end up being at the forefront of the demonization of young people. However, this process is not specific to children's organisations. Take Age Concern for example. A few years ago they ran an advertising campaign about the abuse that the elderly face. Again, a newly defined 'vulnerable group' – the elderly – were seen to be in danger of all sort of things, that we the public needed to be made aware of. The following awareness poster consequently pictured a teenage boy standing behind his grandmother with the words: 'What will you do to your Gran today? Steal from her? Beat her? Rape her?'

Here, the interpretation of older people as vulnerable not only resulted in anxiety about aspects of their daily dealings with their grandchildren, but even more perversely it resulted in the construction of a bizarre panic about grandchildren who beat and rape their grandparents!

The anti-youth approach of Age Concern can at first sight appear to represent a very different outlook to the pro-youth approach of organisations like Barnardo's. In reality however, they both represent an underlying misanthropy – a fear and loathing of either young people or adults – based in part upon an exaggerated sense of the vulnerability of the groups they claim to represent.

### **Demonised youth or vulnerable adults?**

It is the crisis of adult authority that explains the explosion in the numbers of children being locked up, the growth of ASBOs and curfews and the significant number of exclusions from schools. These

initiatives are not the consequence of old fashioned authoritarianism by state institutions but are the direct outcome of a new vulnerability based social policy.

If adults on the street and teachers in the classroom are understood to be vulnerable, then the antics of the young will be as damaging and dangerous. Following from this, adults will then need protecting from the 'harassment, alarm or distress' caused by antisocial behaviour (or what used to be called nuisance behaviour or even mischief). Finally, adults in authority will be required to take a 'zero tolerance' approach to 'violence', particularly in our schools (where violence is now reinterpreted to include verbal 'attacks').

This approach, in which teachers themselves are seen as being fundamentally weak, has been promoted by various teachers' unions over the last decade and was illustrated when the Association of Teachers and Lecturers ran a campaign against the cyber-bullying of teachers by pupils. That the occasional derogatory comment made by pupils on the 'rate your teacher'-type websites can be understood as a form of 'bullying' of adults by children is more illustrative of an infantilized view of adults than it represents any growth in demonic youth.

### A question of authority

If the pro-child and youth approach is not all it seems, neither is the so called adultism and the sense that society has become overly authoritative in its dealings with the young. In fact, the opposite is closer to the truth. Rather than adults asserting their authority over the young, today it is the collapse of adult authority that helps to explain why more children are being locked up and excluded from schools. Previously, adults would recognise the nuisance behaviour of young people for what it was and deal with it themselves. Today they are encouraged to phone the police and get the council to use a variety of ASBO type laws to sort things out. Similarly, in schools the previous assumption that teachers can build up their own authority and exercise it over a class has declined and problems are increasingly passed on to guidance staff – or in some schools to the resident police officer! So whilst the zero tolerance initiatives introduced into schools and elsewhere appear to be authoritative, they in fact reflect a society that uses bureaucracy and laws to *enforce* order rather than relying on the genuine personal authority of teachers.

The outcome of all of this is that the messy business of day-to-day dealings with young people moves out of the hands of adults, who can make judgments based on their experience, and moves over to officialdom and its legally and bureaucratically enforced system of order maintenance. More child prisoners, more laws to deal with teenagers and more excluded school pupils are some of the

consequences of an adult society that has lost its sense of authority and has come to rely on procedures and prison bars to regulate the young.

### Therapeutic manipulation

However, there is a contradiction in today's world: the young are increasingly seen as vulnerable while also being subject to new laws, forms of exclusion and even prison. The difficulty is that once we've redefined all people as 'being vulnerable' then the very idea of punishment becomes problematic.

Prisons (even adult prisons) are now often understood as places where 'vulnerable adults' face 'further victimisation'. Indeed, it is hard to find robust defence of prisons, even though we are imprisoning more people. Simultaneously, disciplining children is becoming problematic, so that smacking, for example, or even shouting at children is perceived as tantamount to child abuse. Indeed, the very act of criticising a child is understood as undermining their self-esteem.

The world, however, cannot operate without some form of order, which is why teachers are increasingly inclined to use therapeutic methods to deal with the problems of behaviour. But like more technocratic forms of behaviour management, therapeutic techniques are themselves simply an avoidance of the assertion of adult authority. As Edgar Friedenberg observed as far back as the 1950s, therapeutic discipline should be understood as a form of manipulation of the young that 'mediates' but never 'clarifies' things for pupils.

In the end, what we are witnessing in schools today is a managerial, legalistic and therapeutic regulation of young people – an anaemic replacement for real and meaningful adult authority. How this situation is resolved is not straightforward but must be predicated upon the reestablishment of the meaning (and authority) of education and a challenge to any policy or practice that encourages the idea that either teachers or their pupils are essentially vulnerable.

The modern notion of the vulnerable child demonises adults who assert their authority over children and inadvertently leads to more serious forms of regulation and criminalisation. It results in the perverse situation where children are themselves represented as abusers of one another, which again leads to even more forms of regulation. In the end, this outlook actively helps to further undermine the thing that children and young people need more than anything else - a society of authoritative adults who have the strength of character and the autonomy to socialise the young. Young people need authoritative adults who can recognise the difference between themselves and children and who consequently embody a mature sense of both discipline and tolerance towards

youngsters. They also need adults who can act as leaders for the next generation and who can bring meaning and purpose to their lives through their own beliefs and actions.

### References

Scruton, P. (1997) *'Childhood' in 'Crisis'?* London: UCL Press.

Friedenberg, E.Z. (1959) *The Vanishing Adolescent*, New York: Dell.

## CHAPTER 6: PROFESSIONALISM WITHOUT AUTONOMY

**Rania Hafez**

**Meeting a new neighbour many years ago, I was pleased to find out she was a teacher at a local school. “I too am a teacher,” I declared eagerly. “Where do you teach?” asked my new neighbour. “At the FE college!” I replied enthusiastically. “Ah,” she said making a face, “You’re not a real teacher then.”**

That was in the late 1980s, when teachers working in Further Education (FE), often at a ‘Technical College’ or the ‘TEC’ were considered to be expert vocational instructors training apprentices along with a motley crew of ‘O’ and A-Level teachers, artists, writers and some philosophers. The TEC was flexible and without romanticising it, worked to meet local needs in terms of vocational and adult education. It was the world satirised by novelist Tom Sharpe in *Wilt* ([1976] 2002) and subsequent books. Despite the changes that have been transforming FE colleges since their incorporation in 1993, this folk memory endures, even if Sharpe’s novels are no longer part of lecturers’ frames of reference.

Now, as then, FE lecturers appear to be stranded in a professional wilderness, deemed to fall short of the virtues of school teachers and lacking the academic credentials of university lecturers.

One response to this apparent lack of status was an attempt to re-professionalise the FE workforce, most notably through the work of its first professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL), by far the most salient event in the recent history of professionalism in FE. Since its launch in 2002, the IfL was backed by many stakeholder organizations like the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) and had the blessings of the government as it was an important feature of *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future*, New Labour’s seminal policy paper on teacher education and training in FE (DfES 2004).

The IfL approach was simply to promote and market the idea of FE lecturers were ‘professional’, even that they had a ‘dual professionalism’. This concept embraced the inherent dichotomy that is the FE teacher being part vocational practitioner/expert and part teacher/lecturer. But the celebration of the dual professionalism of FE teachers has not led to improved professional recognition.

At a rhetorical level the need for autonomy was also recognised by the IfL in its statement of values and beliefs which holds that: ‘our members should be trusted to exercise informed judgement’. But although this was an important assertion of principle, it is one that is open to interpretation, qualifications, and increasing political and institutional restrictions.

Professional autonomy may be better understood if we were to examine the perspectives of FE teachers from two different generations.

Three decades ago, professional standing – or lack of it – was not an issue for most FE teachers as they got on with the job of teaching, which without romanticising it, involved providing a rich and diverse curriculum to young people and adults alike. They may not have been considered ‘real teachers’ but nevertheless they enjoyed a level of pedagogical integrity and classroom autonomy many teachers nowadays would envy.

In the passage below ‘Bill’, a now retired tutor, describes what it was like thirty years ago when he started teaching in an inner-city London college, in contrast to his later experiences:

*They were wonderful exciting times. Every day was different. You had complete freedom in the classroom to teach as you saw fit. No one looked over your shoulder constantly criticising, and you certainly didn't have to justify yourself to managers or fill in endless paperwork. You decided what the students needed to know and how you should teach it and you got on with it. The curriculum was discussed in team meetings, proper team meetings where everyone had a say. The Head of Department was there but he didn't order us about. It was very democratic. And none of this issue of being observed endlessly. We did peer teaching where you taught with a colleague and then discussed it afterwards. We were of course inspected by HMI, but they were different the inspections then. Best of all we had complete control of our teaching.*

The enthusiasm and optimism are still in his voice three decades later. Compare this reflection from a new and very articulate business studies lecturer ‘Amelia’ who has just completed her PGCE. After hearing Bill's account she said:

*That's interesting. I came into teaching full of enthusiasm and bursting with ideas but find myself routinely struggling to put them into practice. Every minute of my lesson seems to be planned for me by college managers desperate to achieve 'quality' through what seems to me to be 'uniform conformity'. The lesson planning process is determined college-wide leaving little scope for subject-specific strategies. Not content with imposing the usual lesson plan proforma on all subjects regardless of mode of delivery, a new edict has been issued on the structure of the lesson imposing a format that prescribes what every 10minutes of the lesson should be focused on. Lessons are observed with minimum notice and will fail if they don't conform to the imposed lesson structure. There's no room for discussion or debate. Team meetings revolve around checking compliance rather than discussing what would make us good teachers, never mind anything like 'pedagogy'.*

These two accounts are not untypical and illustrate the changes teachers have experienced in the sector. What they show is that the drive to be a good teacher and an autonomous professional exists now as it did then for the teachers. The key difference is that now the relationship of the teacher to students is regulated by managers who ensure compliance to 'professional' standards, determined by Ofsted and an assessment driven curriculum which requires a formulaic teaching style. Three decades ago, FE teachers had the freedom to interpret and deliver a flexible curriculum. Nowadays the curriculum is rigidly prescribed and outcome-driven. It revolves around achieving competencies as opposed to knowledge and reduces the teachers to automatic deliverers and assessors of a skills package.

Working by the old adage that you don't fatten a pig by weighing it, Bill illuminates the difference between assessing quality of teaching and learning then and now with a reminder of what inspections were like thirty years ago. "I had a message saying that an HMI was spending a few days with me going from class to class. I thought nothing of it. Afterwards, the inspector gave me some good advice and we had long debates about approaches to teaching". Nowadays, Amelia is unlikely to get much notice before an Ofsted inspector walks into her class unannounced to observe her and make a snap judgement about her teaching. No discussion, no advice, no debate.

### The short, unhappy life of the 'new' professionalism

The steps towards a new regulatory professionalization started with the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards for teaching and learning, introduced in 2000, and the requirement for all teachers to be qualified by 2010. Although intensely disliked, and in some quarters ignored, the FENTO standards nevertheless became a framework for teacher education if not for teaching itself within the sector. The consensus is that they were the first official blueprint for FE professionalism. So did these standards make us professionals?

The answer depends on how we define professionalism, and that in itself is contestable. It seemed that the New Labour government which came into office in 1997 was embarking on a re-conceptualisation of the term. In a speech to the Social Market Foundation in 2001, Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills signalled the end of old professionalism and the 'third way' search for a new accommodation between professionals and the government:

*Gone are the days when doctors and teachers could say, with a straight face, "Trust me, I'm a professional". So we need to be clear about what does constitute professionalism for the modern world. And what will provide the basis for a fruitful and new era of trust between Government*

*and the teaching profession. This is an arena ripe for debate and we welcome views from all round the education system and from others, including parents and business people (Morris 2001:19).*

It is interesting that New Labour sought to link professionalism, especially teacher professionalism, to the 'trust' of government in practitioners as opposed to the trust of those who seek professionals' intervention. The fact was that government was already, through the FENTO standards, seeking to redefine professionalism from the top down, signalling a distancing from what is essential to professionalism: a community of practice of autonomous experts, self-governed and self-directed. Five years after they were first introduced, the FENTO standards were deemed too 'vague' and unceremoniously discarded in favour of the more prescriptive 'Overarching Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Lifelong Learning' sector devised by the then new 'sector skill' council for FE, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK). Coupled with the draconian tightening of Ofsted inspections and the introduction of a punitive code of practice, this ushered in the era of professionalism by regulation, prescription and sanctions.

The question we must ask ourselves is to what extent are we, in this regulatory era, capable of being autonomous, knowledgeable, self-directed professionals making judgments individually and collegially about our own practice? I believe that many teachers in FE would struggle to recognise themselves as such. The effect of past policy initiatives has been to reduce the former autonomous teacher to a facilitator responding to changes to regulations, changes to the curriculum and changes to assessment. All interactions with students are now regulated, recorded and audited, even pastoral conversations which should be private. A description of the role that might be more readily recognised by teachers in FE is that of a check-out assistant handing out curriculum packets to 'customer' students.

### **Back to the future: the possibility of being more professional and autonomous?**

In November 2011, the Coalition government set up an Independent Review Panel into *Professionalism in Further Education*, led by Lord Lingfield, to judge the current state of FE teacher professionalism. It did just that in a report which condemned the current state of affairs and made some dramatic recommendations. The panel found that the statutory imposition of national occupational standards had been shown to have 'failed to achieve consistency in the diverse provision for acquiring vocational knowledge and skills' (Lingfield 2012: 2). The panel went on to state that they wished to see:

*A change in the nature of the debate from ‘professionalization’ of FE to supporting and enhancing the professionalism which we consider already exists, in the context of the government’s intention to increase the autonomy of providers and considering whether services which encourage a broad commitment to FE as a whole and to the body of knowledge and the values it represents might be strengthened (Lingfield 2012: 6).*

They recommended that the 2007 regulations, that introduced mandatory teaching awards, should be revoked from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and replaced by ‘a largely voluntary regime of in-service advanced practitioner training and CPD [Continuing Professional Development] for lecturers, based on advice to employers drawn up through consultation...’ (Lingfield 2012: 22).

In rejecting the restrictive and prescriptive form of professionalism that had developed in the sector and removing such things as the mandatory requirement to undertake thirty hours of CPD, some aspects of the Lingfield Report are welcome. But there is nothing like a return to anything like Bill’s experience of relative autonomy. Regulation will still be there through the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and college employers will have choice and flexibility in what training they require for their teachers.

Without being over-optimistic there is a possibility in a period of change to begin to debate what professionalism means, and to argue that ‘professionalism’ cannot be ascribed and ‘autonomy’ cannot be bestowed. If we begin a debate then the prospect of a more professional, autonomous FE sector may just become a possibility.

## References

DfES (2004) *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future: Reforming Initial Teacher Education for the Learning and Skills Sector*, London: HMSO.

Lingfield, R. (2012) *Professionalism in the Further Education* (The Lingfield Report), London: DBIS.

Morris, E. (2001) *Professionalism and trust: the future of teachers and teaching* (a speech by the Rt Hon Estelle Morris MP, Secretary of State for Education and Skills to the Social Market Foundation), London: DfES/SMF.

Sharpe, T. ([1976] 2002) *Wilt*, London: Arrow Books.

## CHAPTER 7:

### TEACHERS NEED AUTONOMY, NOT PEDAGOGY

## Toby Marshall

**The Coalition's position on pedagogy and classroom autonomy as expressed in its first education white paper lacks consistency. For the most part, *The Importance of Teaching* rightly maintains that 'teachers, not bureaucrats or ministers, know best how to teach' (DfE 2011: 41). Yet when it comes to primary level literacy, they adopt a position more characteristic of New Labour. Here it is claimed that the 'evidence is clear that the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way of teaching young people to read'. For this reason, the white paper argues that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) should judge primaries by both their results *and* their methods (DfE 2011: 43).**

There may be many good reasons why a teacher might choose to teach using systematic synthetic phonics but the imposition of a particular state-sanctioned pedagogy is a quite a different matter, which raises distinct issues. Firstly and most fundamentally, the imposition of any method undermines that most crucial of all education resources: a teachers' sense of ownership and responsibility over that which takes place in their classroom. Secondly, it restricts their capacity to respond creatively to the particular intellectual needs of their pupils. Thirdly, it creates a wider culture of pedagogic conformity, which stifles both innovation and creativity.

So whilst it may be true that systematic synthetic phonics has proved a highly effective method for many, the Coalition should consider whether the approach it has adopted will have the outcomes it intends. Might the continued imposition of a particular method of reading instruction in fact alienate primary teachers from their practice and discourage the culture of experimentation that will be needed if standards are to be improved continuously? If there was a more open classroom culture, could teachers develop an even more effective method?

This essay will not, however, focus exclusively on the particularities of the debate over reading instruction, even though these are both fascinating and important. Instead it will engage with what I call 'Government Pedagogy' - a mode of raising educational standards in which the state tells teachers how to teach. This approach first developed under New Labour, starting with the introduction of the Literacy Strategy and Literacy Hour for primaries but expanded, so that all classroom practitioners were soon expected to follow a generic teaching code that applied irrespective of subject or phase. In this sense the heated debate over the specifics of reading instruction has been a significant, if welcome, departure from the more typical genericism that has characterised much recent pedagogic discourse.

The aim of this essay is to remind the Coalition of the perils and follies associated with the government developing a preferred pedagogic code, just in case it is tempted to go down this route. It will use the ideas of Robin Alexander and Brian Simon as a springboard for making one simple argument. If government wishes to raise standards it needs to have the courage of its own convictions: it should, for the reasons outlined above, focus on measures that enhance teachers' agency and autonomy. At the same time, it should avoid imposing techniques for which miracles effects are claimed. This argument will be made by examining two recent documents, which I take to be indicative of contemporary pedagogic trends. These are the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's (TLRP) *Evidence Informed Pedagogic Principles* (TLRP, 2008) and Ofsted's *Framework for Inspection* (Ofsted, 2009). The final section of this essay will develop the idea that it is teachers that raise standards, not pedagogies, and will suggest some strategies that the government might productively adopt.

### New Labour's government pedagogy

Pedagogic ideas and practices became a barrier to teaching when New Labour ran state education. Pedagogic discourse was typically platitudinous, whilst institutional approaches associated with it were tightly prescriptive. Up and down the country, New Labour's Government Pedagogy disabled teachers by distracting them from their subjects and limiting their room for manoeuvre in the classroom. Most worryingly, it created a new group of zombie pedagogues, whose minds became intellectually detached from their bodies. Too many new teachers learned to mindlessly enact the commandments of what was then called the Department for Children, Schools and Families – *no space for education you might note*. If nothing else, this left many students thinking they were immersed in the latest iteration of the *Resident Evil* video game. They deserved better.

### Reversing zombification

With a new government, we have a chance to argue for a fresh settlement. So how might zombification be reversed? Perhaps the first stage is to remind the new administration that it hasn't always been so. Once upon a time, a Labour Education Secretary proudly declared that he knew 'nowt about the curriculum', let alone how it might be delivered. Admittedly, that was some time ago, but more recently, as Robin Alexander usefully reminds us, a Tory Education Secretary by the name of Kenneth Clarke politely wrote to Primary Heads stating that: 'questions about how to teach are not for Government to determine' (cited in Alexander 2008: 44). That he needed to point this

out perhaps suggested that this particular barrier was about to be breached, but none the less, it is clear that the state hasn't always sought to intervene at the level of classroom practice.

Equally, we might add that pedagogy need not be the main concern of educationalists. When Brian Simon penned his now celebrated essay *Why no pedagogy in England?* in the early 1980s (Simon 1981), he observed that it was within European cultures, with their Piagets and Vygotskys, that learning tended to be theorised. In England, by contrast, there was no such tradition, which Simon links to the influence of England's public schools in which he claims, perhaps simplistically, that the 'religion of games' dominated. Simon's essay is of course a call for a greater focus on pedagogy but it could equally be argued that there are more important questions for teachers to consider, such as the curriculum, and that this might explain the particular bent of English educationalists. Today, we could add, we live in an era in which education has become highly politicised, with schools being expected to address issues as diverse and as challenging as social mobility and terrorism. So perhaps the really important question for educationalists at this moment in time is: what is education *for*?

Simon's essay is, however, instructive at a number of levels. Most importantly, rereading it illustrates the continuities and the changes in pedagogic discourse. By way of contrast, it shows the extent to which pedagogy during New Labour's period of office came to play a far more significant role than it had previously, with large scale government interventions, major research initiatives and generous allocations of teacher development time. In some respects, an interest in method even displaced the more traditional concern with content. So perhaps the question we now confront is not why no pedagogy but why so much?

For Simon, discussions of pedagogy in the early 1980s tended to be eclectic, incoherent, a-theoretical and pragmatic in the sense that they followed rather than led experience. Most importantly, they were conservative in that they took institutional arrangements as given. But with greater prominence and resources given to this issue, did the quality of pedagogic discourse improve?

Robin Alexander offers an answer to this question through an analysis of New Labour's primary strategy *Excellence and Enjoyment*, which was launched in 2003. Within the confines of this essay there is not enough space to outline every aspect of Alexander's argument, so some choice descriptors selected from his reflections on its teaching and learning sections will have to suffice: 'problematic ...truism...contradiction...confusion...impoverished reasoning...populist...dubious provenance ... bland...shaky' (Alexander 2008: 58-62). Alexander's analysis shows that there was an increase in the volume of pedagogic discourse during the first period in which New Labour ran state education, but little improvement in its quality. Did things get any better towards the end?

## Principled pedagogy?

One way of answering this question is to look at the work of the Teaching and Learning Research Project, which drew to a close during the final period of the New Labour administration. This project involved more than 700 academic researchers, had a budget in excess of £43m and aimed 'to conduct research with the potential to improve outcomes for learners in a very wide range of UK contexts across the lifecourse' (TLRP 2010: 1). Many of its individual strands had real merit, particularly those that related to Maths and Information and Communications Technologies, but for our purposes we will focus on a document that attempted to distill its findings.

The first and most important point to be made about *TLRP's Evidence Informed Pedagogic Principles* is that the ideas contained within it are highly generic (TLRP 2008). Whilst sections of the TLRP investigated practice in particular disciplinary areas, the project's findings are presented in a form that strips teaching of any specific subject content. Rather than suggestions as to how to best teach Physics, or English Literature, we have principles that are said to inform *all* teaching. This genericism has been typical of much recent pedagogic discourse and teachers have often found it infuriating as it is the particular content of a lesson that is usually the most salient feature of their practice.

Many of the TLRP's ten principles are also highly platitudinous. The second principle, for example, states that: 'effective pedagogy engages with valued forms of knowledge' (TLRP 2008: 1). But is there any conceivable position other than this? Has it ever been seriously argued that effective pedagogy engages with valueless forms of knowledge? Or perhaps, more interestingly, that effective pedagogy engages with valued forms of ignorance?

At the same as being generic and platitudinous, the TLRP's principles tend to neglect the specifics of different teaching phases. In the introduction to the principles it is stated that they are expressed in a form that is 'applicable to all sectors'. The problems associated with this broad brush approach are then illustrated by principle 4, which states that: 'effective pedagogy requires learning to be scaffolded' (TLRP 2008: 2). At an abstract level we might accept that there is some truth to this since all pedagogy involves one who is able – the teacher – providing a structure for one who is less able – the student. However, the generality of the statement means that it has little real meaning. Surely the significant issue for teachers is the extent to which the support they provide varies depending on the level at which their pupils are working. A student in a primary level reception class, to put this point baldly, has significantly different needs to one who is in the final stages of their A-Levels.

More could be said about the TLRP's evidence-informed pedagogic principles, not least that they appear to lack any recognisable theory. Hopefully, what we have considered so far provides a brief illustrative taster of the pedagogic ideas which practitioners have recently encountered.

### Government pedagogy institutionalised

From the analysis presented above it seems clear that the quality of pedagogic discourse did not improve in the years that followed Simon's famous essay. There was simply, as Alexander identified, *more* of it. However, one might reasonably ask if any of this really matters for teachers. Surely bland ideas are of little consequence?

This might have been true were it not for the fact that contemporary pedagogic ideas have also provided a rationale for a powerful regime of external and internal classroom inspection. Here pedagogy has become codified and has served as a mechanism by which the activities of practitioners have been regulated in an attempt to raise education standards.

One of Ofsted's recent Annual Reports provides a good illustration of the pedagogic code that developed during New Labour's period in office. Its section on teaching and learning confidently states that there is 'very clear and precise evidence of the components of good teaching' and, like the TLRP, it argues that these apply 'consistently across phases and subjects' (Ofsted 2009: 105).

In relation to its notion of best practice, Ofsted then cites four particular markers of excellence: the application of good subject knowledge; clear direction and lesson structure; skillful questioning and opportunities for exploratory learning; as well as the effective use of assessment for learning. Here we might be relieved that subject-knowledge is given first priority, but the report adds that 'on its own it is not enough', as its delivery needs to follow a tightly defined set of criteria. In terms of 'direction' it states that that lessons must have a 'clear purpose that the learner understands'. Hence, the development of the now common expectation that teachers should set out learning objectives at the start of lessons and must ensure that these have been understood by learners. Further, the importance of 'exploratory learning' is noted, with the explanation that 'good teachers support learning by providing time for thinking and discussion' - cue small group work and in class student presentations. Finally, under the section on assessment for learning, it points out that outstanding teachers 'regularly revisit and reinforce objectives at key points and are skillful in drawing learning together', which relates to the expectation that lessons should always end with a plenary in which 'what we have learned' is vocalised by students (Ofsted 2009: 105-9).

Individually, of course, each one of these examples of 'excellence' or the new pedagogic code need not represent anything especially damaging. One might observe that they propose a form of practice that is perhaps rather rigidly structured. It might also be added that they raise a perhaps rather unrealistic expectation that each individual session will end with a 'eureka' moment in which learning can be clearly demonstrated for the benefit of the inspector. But with that said, there is nothing wrong with activities, or plenaries, or perhaps even learning objectives.

The important point, however, relates not to the individual components of Ofsted's pedagogic code but to the impact of a powerful state institution promoting a template of 'best practice' to which all teachers are expected to conform. This mistakenly establishes the principle that a single common method can be imported into a classroom, irrespective of group dynamic or the particular subject content of a lesson, or indeed the preferences of the teacher themselves, and by doing so it also undermines practitioners' autonomy and effectiveness.

I have suggested that imposing a preferred pedagogic code results in zombification but Michele Ledda has perhaps explained its impact more effectively. He has argued that the intensive and intrusive regulation of classroom practice has undermined teachers' scope for professional judgment, making them significantly more *accountable*, in the narrow sense of the term, but also less *responsible*, since responsibility requires they be allowed to make decisions for themselves (Ledda, 2009).

It might be said that teachers are not inspected that frequently and are generally free to go about their business as they see fit, despite the occasional and inconvenient inspection. There is some truth to this but the key point is that when a government takes a view on pedagogy, either directly through the Department of Education, or indirectly through semi-autonomous organs such as Her Majesties' Inspectorate, this has a wider impact on the professional lives of teachers. Most particularly, it encourages educational institutions to become more conformist in their expectations, which then makes it significantly harder for teachers to be creative, as the individuality this requires runs counter to the priorities of their workplace. In the recent period good teachers have of course continued to exercise autonomy, to be creative, and to make personal decisions about their practice, but the development of a preferred pedagogic code has made this more difficult.

### Beyond zombification

This essay has argued that the development of a government sponsored pedagogic code has undermined the autonomy of classroom practitioners, restricting their sense of ownership and capacity to respond with flexibility to the particular intellectual needs of their students. Further, it

has been suggested that this code has given rise to a conformist working culture in which it has become increasingly hard for practitioners to teach with the individuality that can make teachers inspirational, life-changing, figures.

It has also been argued that government pedagogy could in the long term stifle the very creativity and innovation we need if educational standards are to rise continuously. Teachers must have a space to experiment and share new approaches if their practice is to develop. This will mean that mistakes will be made. On its own, this need not be a problem for students, providing these mistakes take place in a wider context in which teachers take responsibility for their decisions and exercise judgment with regards to their effectiveness. This again requires that teachers have autonomy.

However, a number of questions remain. New Labour perhaps understandably sought to intervene at the level of classroom practice in the hope that this would raise educational standards. Writing in a different era and from a different perspective, Brian Simon expressed similar aspirations with regards to a new 'science of learning'. The Coalition, for its part, has already signaled that it intends to continue aspects of the New Labour's approach, particularly in terms of primary literacy and phonics, and it could well become tempted to include other subjects and phases for the same reasons as New Labour. So, is it right to seek out a science of teaching and learning? Should the Coalition be using this to develop a new and more effective form of Government Pedagogy?

My view is that there will never be anything that could properly be called a *science* of teaching and learning and that government attempts to develop evidence-based forms of 'best practice' will always be counterproductive. Unlike the natural world, our classrooms - beastly as they might at times appear - are populated by feeling and sometimes thinking human beings, who respond in curious and unique ways to the items of culture that teachers make available for them. Attempts to standardize classroom activities tend to strip teaching and learning of the very particularity that are their fundamental and driving feature. For this reason, any so-called 'science of learning' - even if it were less crudely generic - would always fail to either explain, or properly guide, our practice.

However, recognising the particularity of the process of teaching and learning does not mean that educationalists should exist in intellectual isolation. The job of teaching is to introduce new generations to the existing disciplines of public thought and so we need teachers who are engaged in both their classrooms and the broader world of ideas. If the government wants to raise standards, it should focus its efforts on initiatives that encourage teachers to develop their subject-knowledge and to share their experiences of delivering it.

Further, in delivering subjects, teachers are required to make educational judgments. Teachers may indeed deal with distinct combinations of unique personalities – including themselves – but many great thinkers, including Brian Simon, have developed important educational ideas that can help them to analyse their own experiences and understand their institutions. For this reason, studying educational thought can bring clarity to one's practice, whilst also acting as an inspirational intellectual force. In doing so, it creates the conditions in which autonomy can be exercised effectively.

### Which way forward?

Firstly, government must do everything it can to encourage teachers to exercise creativity, initiative and good educational judgment. Hence, it must create a space where this is possible, since without autonomy none of the other faculties can be exercised. Practically, primary schools should be freed of the requirement to teach reading using any particular method and should instruct Ofsted to only pass comment on learning outcomes, not the methods by which these are attained.

Secondly, government should focus its energies and funds on supporting teachers in their own education, in their subjects, and in the subject of education itself. To initiate this process, it might consider how a more robust system of initial teacher education might be developed. Sadly, too much training of teachers today tends to focus on practical competences and skills. There are of course skills that teachers need to learn, particularly in the initial phase of their development, but all educational decisions ultimately resolve into questions of knowledge and values. So understanding is always central to the process of exercising educational autonomy. Sadly, the approach to initial teacher development that the Coalition already seems committed to, with its narrow focus 'core teaching skills' (DfE 2011: 9), seems unlikely develop the intellectual autonomy that we need teachers to exercise.

### References

Alexander, R. (2008) *Essays on Pedagogy*, London: Routledge.

Department for Education (2011) *The Importance of Teaching*, London: HMSO.

Simon, B. (1981) *Why No Pedagogy in England?* in Simon, B et al (Eds.) *Education in the Eighties: The Central Issues*, London: Batsford.

Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2008) *TLRP's Evidence Informed Pedagogic Principles*, available at [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org), (accessed on 4 January 2010).

Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2010) *Aims*, available at [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org), (accessed on 4 January 2010).

---

Ofsted (2009) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2008/09*, London: The Stationary Office.

Ledda, M. (2009) Why has Ofsted failed? available at: <http://educationopinion.blogspot.com/> (accessed on 4 January 2010).

## CHAPTER 8: EDUCATION OR PEDAGOGY?

**Geoff Hinchliffe**

**It is not too difficult to see how anyone concerned with education might be distrustful of the term 'pedagogy'. For pedagogy seems to suggest the idea that education takes place through teacher-led instruction, as if there could be a 'science of instruction'. The distrust arises from the fact that there is no fixed set of methods to which a teacher can refer when going about the business of teaching: this is not because teaching is a mysterious art but because no two educational situations are the same. Notoriously, what seemed to work quite nicely with class 3B last year isn't quite working with class 3B this year, even though there are no substantive differences between the classes. A teacher needs a repertoire of methods, styles, tricks, tactics and stratagems ranging from the intense and instructional to the (apparently) casual learner-centred approach. Therefore, no pedagogy is going to capture the complexity of what a teacher actually does.**

There is another reason why pedagogy should perhaps be mistrusted. Education, in the best sense, is about empowerment, building knowledge and awareness in the child or student so that they can take on their own learning and explore paths which neither they nor their teacher would have dreamed of when they started out. Education is a journey where the destination is not always signposted. Pedagogy, on the other hand, just is, it might be said, a whole bunch of signposts where nothing is left to chance. And that is not what learning is really about. Pedagogy may suit governments as they try to shape education in the service of economic imperatives and bureaucratic goals but education lets people think for themselves, so they might even end up questioning said goals and imperatives.

I confess to feeling the full force of these criticisms of pedagogy. And yet, I feel, it is only a word. Surely a pedagogy can be flexible and empowering? Moreover, I am slightly reluctant to side too easily with those who think that education must be unsullied by worldly concerns, such as economics or employment. If that is the root of the objection to pedagogy, then I am unconvinced. In any case, matters are slightly more complex than what I have rehearsed so far, as we shall see.

In this chapter I propose a very brief historical overview, followed by some conceptual considerations and a conclusion.

## A historical perspective

In the article 'Why no pedagogy in England?' the celebrated educational historian Brian Simon traces the emergence of pedagogy in the United Kingdom. He suggests that the concept of pedagogy started to develop at the end of the nineteenth century in response to the growth of School Boards. Although these were abolished in 1902, pedagogy flourished somewhat at the beginning of the twentieth century in response to the emergence of secondary schooling. The original text for pedagogy in England was Alexander Bain's *Education as Science* (published 1879), although later on Herbart's work was also influential. Both authors tended to see teaching as formal instruction, even though Herbart in particular emphasised using an imaginative approach to engage children using stories and music.

The continued development of pedagogy, according to Simon, was hampered by two factors: first, there was a lack of a unified system of education until the introduction of comprehensive schooling after 1965. Consequently, it was difficult to introduce a unified pedagogy prior to this date as schools were not merely diverse but had quite different purposes and aims, given the grammar/secondary school divide. Second, there was the widespread belief that education was driven by measurable intelligence, which made selection the principle driver of educational policy. This in effect saw child development as pre-determined and underplayed the impact of schooling and teaching on what was seen as pre-formed raw material. For it is one of the working assumptions of pedagogy that teaching can actually develop learning and that the teacher has an active role in achieving this. One of the pernicious consequences of the over-reliance on intelligence measurement was that teaching was correspondingly downgraded: there was simply no need for a science of pedagogy.

So, pedagogy (a systematic 'science' of teaching) couldn't get established until intelligence testing was discredited and there was a unified system of education, which didn't start to happen until the 1960s. Simon also argues that the influence of the public school system in the Victorian age was still felt in the late twentieth century in terms of the perceptions of what constituted teaching: often, it was still seen as character building, where school was an extension of the middle class home, a place in which cultural capital was to be developed and discussions of teaching methods were marginal.

Writing during the recession of the early 1980s, Simon advocates the generalised 're-skilling' of the population in readiness for what was later known as the knowledge economy. The raising of educational standards at all levels required a systematic approach to educational development. Relying on pragmatic, *ad hoc* responses to changing economic circumstances is no longer adequate, he thought. In addition, Simon believed that we were moving towards a more democratic age in

which the essential needs of both the economy and society could no longer be provided for by a small elite. Education needed to be transformed so that it was attuned to the needs of a democratic society. Both the organisation and methods of teaching and learning needed to be translated into a recognisable pedagogy – a pedagogy fit for a democratic age that reached out to all strata of society.

Some twenty years after Simon had written these reflections, Robin Alexander (2004), commenting on Simon's article, notes the appropriation of 'pedagogy' by managerial interests and gives as an example a major government document on the Primary Strategy (2003). This sets out expectations as follows:

- Ensure that every child succeeds.
- Build on what learners already know.
- Make learning vivid and real.
- Make learning enjoyable.
- Promote assessment for learning.

Alexander suggests that these are platitudes. They simply disguise a managerial view of pedagogy in which learning can be set out in terms of measurable outcomes and the job of the teacher is to ensure their delivery. This, Alexander argues, skews teaching in the sense that outcomes that cannot be easily measured and compared do not really count. It also tries to encapsulate teaching into five simple bullet points. Thus, by the early part of the twenty-first century, pedagogy was far from being an educational methodology attuned to a democratic age, as Simon had hoped. Rather, in Alexander's eyes pedagogy is already becoming the prescriptive tool of an over-mighty government.

But Alexander also sets out his own view on what a pedagogy needs to take into account. He suggests a pedagogy needs to address the type of children/students/learners who are being taught; the kind of learning and teaching and the nature of the curriculum – itself a complex matter. There is furthermore an institutional context to be taken into account in terms of the school and also a policy context as well. Finally, a pedagogy will need to spell out any assumptions it has regarding culture and the self (for example, is it the business of schooling to promote autonomy? Engagement with the community? Global citizenship?) Finally, Alexander suggests that any pedagogy needs to be cumulative, in that it is aware of its own history and takes account of preceding research. Pedagogy is the accumulation of experience and is a process, not an end point.

### **Pedagogy: an essentially contested concept**

I have already mentioned that until fairly recently it was assumed that pedagogy was what teachers did to children – in other words, a fairly formal approach to learning which emphasised teaching as instruction. But even if we take a broader view of pedagogy, the basic problem is that there are no scientifically-based methods of teaching and learning that can be identified and agreed. No doubt the extent to which this is the case in other professions is exaggerated but at least in medicine, for example, there is a core of clinical procedures that are widely accepted within the profession. In teaching this is not the case and consequently any pedagogy will be strongly influenced by the following:

- Power relations within a society (e.g. the influence of business or the church)
- Cultural norms (which themselves are diverse and contested)
- Economic constraints on resources
- Government objectives

Each of these factors can, and does, reach right down into the classroom itself. Nevertheless, one would expect a pedagogy, however configured, to have the following features:

1. Assumes that teaching and learning can make an appreciable difference to development and that selective procedures play at lesser role;
2. Spells out a systematic relation between teaching and learner development;
3. Sees assessment (formative and summative) as an integral part of teaching and learning;
4. Values knowledge acquisition for its own sake – that is, there is a connection between learner development and knowledge whether this is tacit or spelt out (and incidentally, knowledge can take the form of tacit understanding as well as explicit information and concept acquisition);
5. Has certain aims and values in respect of learner development and these aims reflect broader social perspectives concerning, for example, autonomy, citizenship, ethical development.

However, even if these points are agreed there is still room for many different modes of pedagogy.

### Auto-pedagogy

There is another way of looking at pedagogy as well. Pedagogy can be seen, borrowing from the ideas of Foucault, as a set of disciplinary procedures and methods through which individual identities are constructed. It is something which at first is imposed on individuals but then needs to be thoroughly imbued and internalised by those same individuals if its effects are to work in the

desired way. A recent example of this is the case of lifelong learning, which has the following features:

- The individual becomes their own teacher.
- The individual manages their own learning.
- There is virtually no experience that cannot count as learning and there is no activity that cannot be learnt.
- The individual must acquire the identity of a learner from cradle to grave.
- Individual learning needs to be translated into assets that can be marketed.

Auto-pedagogy is the ultimate in the marketization of education. It represents the transformation of lifelong learning from something that transforms peoples' lives for the better, giving them richer experiences and opening up new vistas, into a tool for developing their employability, largely at their own expense. This pedagogy transforms learning so that it is no longer the responsibility of the community but is now the responsibility of the atomised self.

Yet there is no inherent reason why pedagogy should become auto-pedagogy. If we glance back at the ingredients that Alexander suggests make up a pedagogy, we can see that auto-pedagogy is just one version – admittedly, a cramped, miserable dull version at that.

### **Pedagogy as an instrument of Government**

I take as my example (there are a great many) the following: the DfES document *Key Stage 3 National Strategy: Pedagogy and Practice* (2004), Unit 2: Teaching Models. This is part of a broader government-led programme: *Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools*.

In this Key Stage 3 document, it is explained that there is an inductive model of teaching and a deductive model as well. Let us examine the deductive model. We are told it has five phases which can be divided into episodes, as follows:

- The teacher begins the lesson with the concept rule, or a statement of what the pupils will attempt to prove during the lesson.
- The teacher provides some examples which show proof of the concept rule.
- The teacher, through questioning the pupils, identifies the critical attributes and non-critical attributes which are essential and non-essential characteristics of the concept.
- The teacher follows this by showing examples and non-examples of the same concept to the pupils.

- The pupils must categorise the examples or non-examples (those which do *not* show essential characteristics of the concept rule) by explaining why they do or do not fit the concept rule being discussed.

Now, you might think that there is nothing very disagreeable here: it seems methodical and nicely laid out. Yet it seems to me this is a good example of pedagogy as micro-management. It is scarcely any wonder that teachers are suspicious of pedagogy if this is what is being done in its name. There are at least four questionable features of this document, which are:

- The teacher has complete and total control over the learning process.
- There is no room for the unpredictable.
- There is no dialogue.
- The child/student voice is only heard within closely defined parameters.

I would suggest that pedagogy *doesn't* imply total control as this government document suggests: that pedagogy *does* leave room for risk – the risk that the teacher might get it wrong – and I would suggest that good teachers actually take risks and that students take risks with their own learning as well.

## Conclusion

Taking my cue from Simon and Alexander I am inclined to think that it will do teachers no good to ignore the concept of pedagogy, doing their best to keep it at bay. One of the reasons – it is not the only one, mind – that teachers have seen their professional autonomy diminished is that the profession has never had a unified theoretical conception of what constitutes teaching. Many teachers – most of them good ones as well – prefer to rely on a pragmatic view of teaching and learning in which reliance on theory, philosophy and psychology is fairly minimal. Teachers simply have not had the conceptual equipment to resist government policy and to formulate alternatives. Consequently, they fight governments with one hand tied behind their back.

Therefore, I suggest, teachers need to develop the idea of pedagogy, preferably taking Simon's suggestion that it is a pedagogy for a democratic age (not an elitist one). In this way it will be a true pedagogy, rooted in the practicalities of classroom experience on the one hand but informed by a democratic vision that aims to develop all children and students to their fullest potential on the other.

## References

Alexander, R. (2004) *Still no Pedagogy?* principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 34 (1): 7-33.

Bain, A. (1879) *Education as a Science*, London: Kegan Paul.

Foucault, M (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Hinchliffe, G. (2001) *Education or Pedagogy?* *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35 (1) 31-45.

Simon, B. (1994) Why no pedagogy in England? in Moon, B. and Mayes A. (Eds.) *Teaching and Learning in the Secondary School*, London: Routledge.

## CHAPTER 9:

### WHY 'EVIDENCE' IS NOT ENOUGH

#### Alka Sehgal Cuthbert

**Evidence-based education (EBE) is a growing phenomenon within educational policy and professional practice. The model for basing policy and practice upon the findings of experimental research has a long and honourable record in other professions, most notably the medical profession. Advocates of EBE such as Rob Coe, head of the Centre of Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University, or more cautious supporters like Tom Bennett of *Researched* hope that through fashioning educational policy and practice along similar lines three things will be more achievable. These are better educational outcomes; more teacher autonomy; and a profession able to resist some of the more nonsensical initiatives imposed upon it, such as 'Brain Gym'.**

Recent developments in brain scanning technology have added impetus to the idea that education can be improved by evidence derived from scientific research. One such example currently being undertaken at the Centre for Neuroscience in Education (CNE) at the University of Cambridge is a project developing computer games aimed at teaching decoding phonemes and rimes.

Possibly the most advanced, complex cultural accomplishment humans have developed – language in verbal and even more importantly, written, form – is being defined as something which can be usefully understood and investigated by methodologies which are essentially empirical. This idea makes sense if the underlying claim that neuroscience or other empirical experiments can tell us about the embodied brain in ways which can extend what we already know about how the emergence of skills required for reading, such as word and sound recognition and recognizing grapheme phoneme correspondence correlate with neural activity in particular regions of the brain. The 'embodied brain' here refers to the idea that there is some sort of causal relationship between the brain as a physical organ, and the mind, which has a broader definition including cultural properties.

However, the idea that the brain is the main organ of learning and has a causal relationship with the mind is reductive in the extreme; it conflates what is essentially a cultural and collective phenomenon (even if we experience and express this as individuals) with a biological phenomenon. All past and present cultural objects – material, intellectual and imaginative – comprise our mind;

and this lives far beyond the geographical and chronological scope of any biological object, even one as complex as the brain.

Both Hannah Arendt and Ernst Gombrich have pointed out that the history of art testifies to the negligible connection between biology and culture. Our representations of people and the physical world have changed dramatically through time, yet at a biological or physical level, changes have been minimal. Furthermore, a causal relation in one direction does not mean that the reverse also exists. So whilst reading might cause certain neural events, it does not follow that if it were possible to say, electrically stimulate the brain to produce neural events in the same region, someone will be reading. To think this is so, or that reading proceeds from any physical, empirically observable cause is to ignore the centrality of human will, intentionality, and judgement needed to teach reading.

In education, the trend to recast education as an empirical activity – as opposed to a cultural and intellectual one – is likely to lead to a blind alley in terms of addressing legitimate problems facing educators today. Even allowing the possibility that playing phonic-based computer games has some sort of measureable positive effect, it is hard to see how this could be of any use whilst we do not have a good picture of how much reading children do at school across the curriculum at different ages. Nor do we know in any logically systematic or well-theorized empirical way the likely educational effects of a culture that has long abandoned the idea of a hierarchy of knowledge in general and a literary canon in particular.

To conclude, in contrast to earlier forms of research or studies in education, which were rooted in scholarship and teachers' classroom experiences, today's EBE represents a decisive rejection of a traditional liberal humanist understanding of education which has three main requirements.

First: that there is something worthwhile to be learnt i.e.. an object of study. Traditionally, this has been different forms of subject knowledge understood as symbolic codes created by collective human thought over a long period of time, and each having its own orientation towards meaning in its language as well as criteria for what constitutes progress.

Second: a prior broad acceptance that such knowledge, irrespective of any individual gain, is worth the effort; so individual volition is required, on the part of teacher and pupil.

Third: a cohort of teachers who are both knowledgeable and intellectually committed to teaching the important, carefully selected ideas, language and meanings of their subject to all pupils. The ease and potential success of their work also depends upon the support of their school and wider community in affirming this educational role over and above any other instrumental aims, be it better job prospects or preventing terrorism.

The last condition is especially difficult in today's culture. This has been characterised by what sociologists Frank Furedi and Nikolas Rose have called a 'risk culture' and the emergence of a therapeutic discourse in education, as discussed by Dennis Hayes and Kathryn Ecclestone (see Chapter 3). The underlying beliefs of these discourses create a climate of anxiety that attends almost every sphere where the generations meet. Parenting and education inevitably come under intense public and official scrutiny as primary sites of socialization of the next generation.

Finally, the kind of traditional liberal subject-based education I am advocating has often been criticised as passé or elitist. And from this political view, the conclusion has been drawn that past knowledge is also redundant; that we need to be constantly seeking new knowledge.

But new knowledge, unanchored in what has been thought and argued for in the past, is unlikely to have the deeper, wider generative or explanatory power needed to address problems in education today. Nor is EBE likely to provide teachers with the intellectual wherewithal to help them assert their pedagogic authority as teachers, which is a public role, rather than their technical expertise as pseudo-researchers.

Research, if undertaken seriously, is a highly specialized activity and not the business of teachers. Their role is to teach.

## CHAPTER 10: WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH?

### Michael Young

**There has, for some time, been a disturbing mixture of fear and antagonism towards knowledge in many educational circles – as if it were related to a kind of punishment. Where does this come from? It arises partly from a flawed view that what is potentially emancipatory about education is a kind of open-ended freedom, one traced back to selective interpretations of Rousseau associated with progressive education. It is also an understandable, if mistaken, response to the dramatic and often ill-conceived proposals of the secretary of state to give greater emphasis to subject knowledge.**

Teaching presupposes teachers and schools, so we can also ask: what are schools for and why do we need teachers?

My answer to this question is that schools are a key institution in modern society while teachers are a key profession; both have a distinct purpose. However, over the years this idea has been badly distorted and undermined by governments, sometimes teachers and by others of us who work in faculties of education.

Quite simply, the purpose of schools – and why in the last two centuries parents in every country, however poor, have struggled to get access to schools for their children – is the hope and expectation they will acquire knowledge that they could not get at home, at work or in the community. This raises three questions further questions:

- Why might parents want their children to acquire this knowledge?
- Why are schools uniquely equipped to make this knowledge available?
- What is this knowledge that is in some way special to schools?

I shall comment briefly on the first two questions and at greater length on the third.

1. For most of history until the last one and a half centuries, most children never went to school and even elite families employed tutors in their homes. So whatever teaching went on, it was carried out by employers, parents and priests. Several things distinguished those pre-schooled societies from ours:

- They were small and relatively simple.
- They changed little from generation to generation.
- How people lived was guided largely by tradition
- There were craft skills but little or no specialized knowledge except religion.

Likewise, science, other than as a gentlemen's hobby, hardly existed; the idea that applying systematic knowledge of the material world could improve people's quality of life was unknown. In contrast, modern societies are characterized by:

- Complexity and the extensive differentiation of institutions, sectors and jobs.
- Change.
- The reduced role of religion.
- The expansion of specialized knowledge.
- The increasingly global connections of workplaces.

We claim to live in a democracy but those who have no access to specialised knowledge will have lives controlled by those who do. Access to specialised knowledge is a basic condition for living in a democracy. Many pressures to expand access to specialised knowledge have come from democratic movements associated with subordinate social classes, women and disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

Some countries like ours achieved political or at least electoral democracy but have yet to ensure access to specialised knowledge for all or even the majority. Others, like China, are expanding access to knowledge but are not democracies in any sense. However, this expansion of specialised knowledge, along with the wider social changes associated with it, are the primary pressure for such countries to become more democratic.

Why is there such a close link between access to specialised knowledge and democracy? Briefly, and it is a point I will come back to, it is specialised knowledge that enables people to envisage alternatives in science, the arts and in social life, and the opportunity to envisage alternatives is the or at least one of the main sources of emancipation in any society. Without such knowledge there is no basis for emancipation as there has not been for the majority of people throughout human history.

So why schools? Why can't we get our knowledge from experience? This has always been a question for philosophers but it needs to be a question for those of us in education. Our experience traps us where we are, in the contexts of our everyday experience. Schools (and indeed any formal

education) can and have the potential to take us beyond that experience. The school curriculum is not concerned with day to day experience; children have that anyway and come to school with it. Schools present or can present a quite different opportunity – a way of thinking quite different from experience – that is what the curriculum can offer. Whether a school does or not depends on how it understands what school knowledge is and how it is distinct from the experience that any age can bring to school. I call this ‘powerful knowledge’ and I want to use the rest of this article to ask two questions about it. Through lack of space, I shall not address another important question, the ‘pedagogic’ question, which involves the close relationship between learning and teaching: how do we teach? My argument for not addressing this question is not just a question of space: it is a question of principle. If we are not clear about our purposes – what we want students to learn – we have no chance of thinking clearly about effective teaching.

### What does powerful knowledge do?

It tells the truth as far as we know it. It is the best knowledge we have, the most reliable in any field, and reminds those who face it that it is fallible and always open to question.

Because it does not depend on any specific experiences, powerful knowledge offers opportunities for students to generalize, predict and imagine alternatives. As Basil Bernstein evocatively put it, it enables them to think the un-thinkable or the ‘not yet thought’. This potential of powerful knowledge applies in very different ways in different fields: literature, sciences, humanities or the arts.

Why must the school curriculum, or as I refer to it, powerful knowledge, take a subject form, when the world of any pupil’s experience is not subject-based and cuts across subject boundaries? This, I am aware is a contentious issue and has a subject of political and educational debate in England. Many countries do not have such debates. They associate the word *knowledge* with the search for truth and the disciplines within which newest knowledge is created. In the schools, they associate knowledge with the subjects that draw on the disciplines but also take account of both what we know about teaching and learning and the needs and capacities of students at different stages of their education. My argument about powerful knowledge, therefore, is as follows:

- It is distinct from experience or we wouldn’t need schools.
- It is specialized – it relies on the assumption that human progress has always been associated with specialization. Historically, we have found better ways of making judgments in different fields that are more reliable and worth trusting than others; future generations will continue to do so.

- Subjects are the most reliable way this specialization has developed in the school curriculum.

John Meyer and his colleagues at Stanford have documented the enormous similarity of subjects across all the countries they studied. Subjects provide the best access to ‘powerful knowledge’ for school students for three reasons: firstly, subjects are derived from the disciplines within which new knowledge is produced in universities; secondly, the boundaries between subjects are sources of identity for pupils as learners and for teachers in their links with teachers in other schools and in national subject associations; thirdly, subjects provide the best guarantee to parents that what their children learn is not just a teacher’s opinion but the opinion of the specialist community of which teachers are members.

## CONTRIBUTORS

### **Rania Hafez**

Rania is a past Chair of SCETT. She is a senior lecturer in education and community studies at the University of Greenwich and the founder and director of *Muslim Women in Education*.

### **Dennis Hayes**

Dennis is the Honorary Secretary of SCETT. He is professor of education at the University of Derby and the co-author of *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*. A follow-up book, *It's Teaching NOT Therapy*, will appear in 2016.

### **Tony Marshall**

Toby is the Programme Development Secretary for SCETT. He has taught on a wide variety of further and higher education courses and has most experience of teaching sociology, film and philosophy to both teenagers and adults.

### **Julia Neal**

Julia is a past Chair of SCETT and a past President of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), of which she remains a national executive member.

### **David Perks**

David has spoken at many SCETT events. He is the principal of East London Science School and the lead contributor to the book *What is Science Education For?*

### **Kevin Rooney**

Kevin has spoken at several SCETT events. He teaches politics and is head of social science at Queen's School, near Watford, and is currently editing a book on *Evidence and Education*.

### **Alka Sehgal Cuthbert**

Alka has spoken on several SCETT seminar panels and at the SCETT Knowledge Summit in 2012. She is an English teacher and researcher and a writer on education.

### **Ralph Surman**

Ralph is the current Chair of SCETT and a member of the national executive of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

### **Geoffrey Hinchliffe**

Geoff has previously spoken at a SCETT seminar. He is Director of Academic Practice, University of East Anglia, and completing a book entitled *Liberty and Education: A Civic Republican Approach*.

**Stuart Waiton**

Stuart has spoken at a SCETT conference. He is a sociology and criminology lecturer at the University of Abertay, Dundee, and author of *Scared of the Kids?*

**Michael Young**

Michael is a regular contributor to SCETT events. He is emeritus professor of education at the Institute of Education, University College London, and is the author of many books including *Bringing Knowledge Back In*, *Knowledge and the Future School* and (with Johan Muller) *Curriculum and the Specialisation of Knowledge*.

## ABOUT SCETT

### 'Supporting teacher education since 1981'

The Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers (SCETT) was established in 1981 by the major teaching unions and professional associations. Taken together, the constituent, associate and individual members of SCETT represent the interest of three quarters of a million teachers in supporting and developing initial teacher education and training and in all forms of continuing professional development. SCETT is a Registered Charity Number 296425.

### Aims and Purposes

SCETT provides a forum for all those engaged in the education and training of teachers and in their continuing professional development, whether it be in schools, colleges of further education or in higher education institutions.

Many of the professional associations representing teachers at every stage and level are in membership of SCETT, together with training schools, colleges and universities and other professional organisations. Individual membership is also welcomed. The SCETT committee fully reflects this breadth of experience.

SCETT is a democratic organisation. The committee is elected from its membership and decisions about its policies, activities and programme are taken collectively.

SCETT's aims are:

1. To initiate and contribute to the formulation of policies for teacher education and to make recommendations accordingly to the appropriate bodies.
2. To participate with appropriate bodies in discussion on matters of concern to teacher education.
3. To promote communication and collaboration between those representatives and others involved in teacher education and the teaching profession.
4. To encourage and initiate the promotion of research and development in teacher education.

SCETT provides an annual seminar programme and a conference. It draws strength from its distinctive membership which allows it to bring together a uniquely wide range of teachers and education and training stakeholders.

**For further information, visit the SCETT website: [www.scett.org.uk](http://www.scett.org.uk)**

