



## *Turning the clock back on examinations should not be the way forward*

Both GCSEs and A Level results this year have told the same story – a growth in the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students and between independent and state schools. The outcry has been more muted than in 2020, mainly because no attempt was made to artificially hold down grades and as a result far fewer students felt hard done by.

What we have seen however is the examination lobby – and they are a noisy and excessively influential lobby – taking the opportunity to rubbish any alternative to the pre 2020 model of relying almost exclusively on end of course written examinations.

They are doing this by claiming that the only alternative to end of course exams is the shambolic non-system that we had this year. Those who advocate for a more balanced approach to assessment need to resist this attempt to impose such a binary choice.

We are where we are because of deliberate choices made at the highest level of government:

Prime minister Boris Johnson told officials not to make contingency plans for schools last year in the event of another lockdown, according to an explosive new report.

The report concludes government's highly centralised approach, tensions between the Department for Education and Number 10, a refusal to work with local authorities and "dreadful" communications resulted in "U-turn after U-turn, with pupils, parents and teachers left bewildered and floundering time and again". (Schools Week 4th August)

So, there was no attempt to put in place a consistent approach to in school assessment until it was too late to do it properly. Schools and colleges undoubtedly did their best in almost impossible circumstances but were scandalously let down by government.

It's on this basis that the exam only lobby – led by Nick Gibb – is insisting that this proves exams are the only fair way of assessing pupils and that the disadvantaged will suffer if they are abandoned.

What this argument ignores is that exams as we have them don't actually measure many important aspects of learning. Nor, as research has shown, are they especially accurate. Never again in their lives after leaving education will people be faced with a 3 hour test of memory and handwriting with no access to any other resources. Moreover, there are huge vulnerabilities built into the exam system – at the individual level where illness or nerves can ruin a student's chances and, as we have seen, at system level because there is no plan B if exams are disrupted.

It should be obvious that the fairest system would use the widest possible range of assessment techniques. This would allow students with differing strengths to genuinely demonstrate what they know and can do. Building up assessment over time also provides a critical safety net in the event of system failure.

The challenge then is to make assessment fair, consistent and fit for purpose in the 21st century. That would include externally set and marked tests (not just at the end of a course), school-based tasks and practical and oral activities. Each different technique can act as a check on the accuracy of the others. That is what happens in robust, well-designed systems. We should think about what we actually want to measure in terms of knowledge, skills and qualities and create a system that starts from there. There are lots of ways of then building in a range of techniques such as moderation, sampling and external scrutiny.

But crucially, we must not allow opponents of assessment reform to use this year's experience as a stick to beat us with. Things went wrong because of a chronic failure by a government which thought they could deal with covid by just willing it away. What we should in fact do is learn from this year about what works, what doesn't and then think hard about building in real fairness and consistency – and apply the necessary resources to make it work.

**John Bolt, SEA NEC**

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## About Education Politics

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# Review of The Student Guide to Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Antonia Darder.

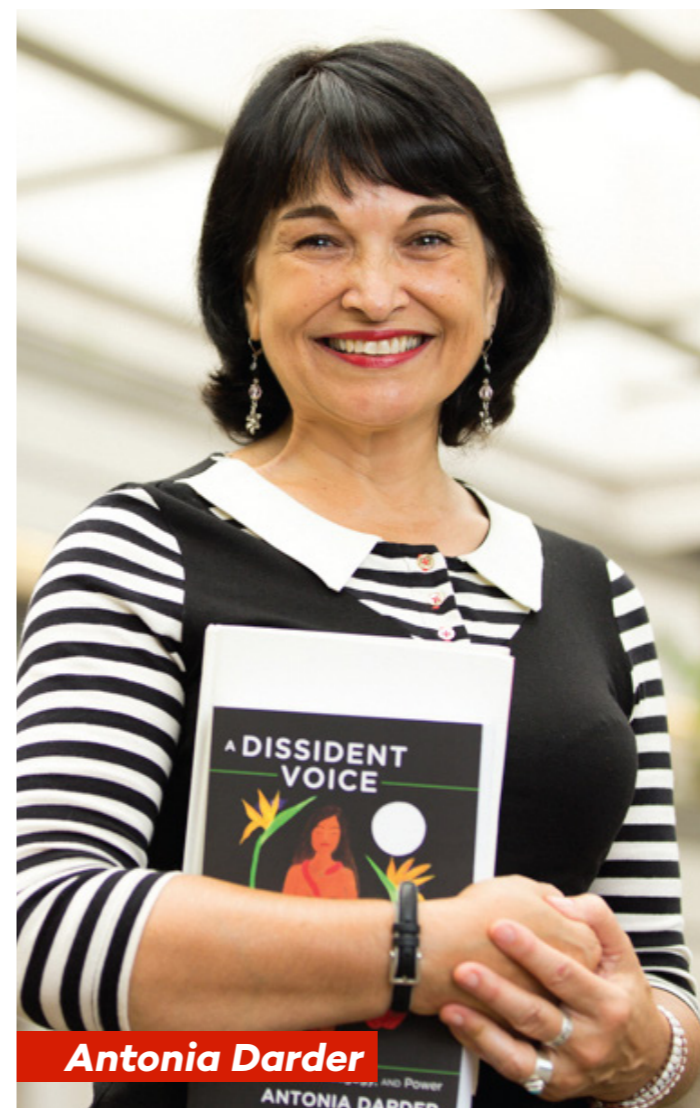
Bloomsbury Academic,  
2nd. Edition, 2020, £12.95

The Student Guide to Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' by Antonia Darder, originally published in 2018, re-issued at the end of last year serves both a tribute to what for many is the greatest book on education ever written and as an important companion to Freire's seminal work, providing powerful insights into both a philosophically sound and politically inspired understanding of Freire's work. It supports the application of his pedagogy and its continuing relevance for emancipatory educational programmes in the world today. Antonia Darder closely examines Freire's ideas as they are articulated in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, beginning with a historical discussion of Freire's life and works and a discussion of the central philosophical tenets that informed his ideas. She engages and explores Freire's fundamental themes and ideas, including the issue of prescription, the teacher/students relationship, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and his larger emancipatory vision. Questions for debate are included throughout. Reading the text chapter-by-chapter enables a fuller engagement with and discussion of Pedagogy itself. The bibliography offers invaluable support to those looking to read and study Freire's wider body of work.

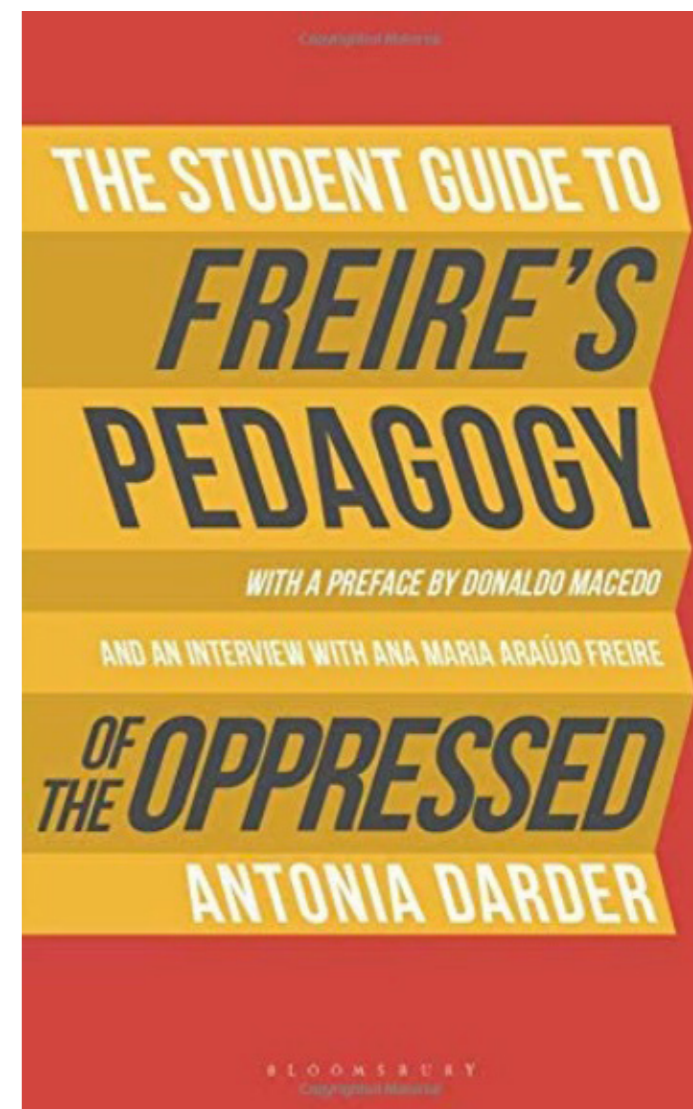
Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) is, of course, firmly established as a book about ideas and practice. Freire remains the best exponent of radical action-based pedagogy. Freire was an educator and a revolutionary. He stated that he saw his role in education as revolutionary and he believed in the ideal of a revolution of the common people. He was interested in the problem of impoverished, oppressed people and believed that the problem is systemic, rooted in the struggle between an oppressive upper class bent on maintaining power and an oppressed lower class rendered impotent by oppression. Pedagogy is full of ideas that can be put into practice in a wide range of educational contexts, formal and informal. It is, perhaps the later, Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1992) that best articulates the contribution of the earlier book: "language is the route to the invention of citizenship."

As a young teacher I read Pedagogy as a crusade for humanity. It helped me to see dehumanisation both as an historical reality and as an individual experience in the lives of many of the learners I worked with. Although rooted in adult literacy teaching in Latin America its truths about oppression, liberation, the word and the world, respect, education as work and the potential for change are universal themes. This informed my teaching for many years. As time passed, I saw the matter in greyer terms, but remain wedded to the view that barriers to learning are neither purely educational concerns to be addressed by teachers nor problems to be solved by social workers. In almost all cases they existed, and continue to exist, at the cusp of education and social care.

Freire's ideas are essentially Marxist, but they are also humanist and democratic. Freire views human knowledge in a relativistic way. Instead of saying that the uneducated lack knowledge or are ignorant. For Freire, good education is dialogical education, an educative problem posing process engaged with students, not something done to or for them. He believed what emerged from such teaching could



Antonia Darder



be called "thought language." Such thought language refers to reality and the levels where generative themes are located. Dialogical cultural action is indispensable for revolutionary educators and co-operation, unity for liberation, organisation and cultural synthesis are crucial aspects of the dialogic approach.

Freire's debt to Marx and Marxists is well documented, particularly in the elucidation that knowledge, like history, does not exist divorced from real life, but rather that: "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of men (and women), in the language of real life".

Charting the early intensive literacy work in northern Brazil, his early action research and appointment as national director of the Division of Research and Planning where he worked on solutions pertaining to pressing social issues.

Noting that what was truly ground-breaking about Freire's work was placing problem-solving as the focal point of his work; what Freire called "problem posing education", which was a break "with the vertical patterns of banking education...(fulfilling) its function as the function of freedom", Darder explains the strategy as a revolutionary praxis that is a response to the oppressive educational culture of the banking concept of learning.

Darder also notes the impetus for the flourishing movements for liberation such as Che Guevara as well as resonating with the revolutionary dreams of Jose Marti in Pedagogy. Indeed, in Pedagogy, Freire makes note to Guevara's memorable words on love and revolution, which echo his own: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by

strong feelings of love".

The author is bold enough to embrace the politically and culturally charged sensibilities of the immense contribution Freire made with all its spirit, passion and commitment is a major achievement that reminded me whether poverty and lack of opportunity is in rural Brazil, Nicaragua, immigrant communities in the United States, inner London or Norwich the song remains the same. In his foreword, Donaldo Macedo draws attention to the value of the study guide and Darder's demonstration that economic deprivation teaches that poverty is not a disease but a social construction that uncritical and unreflexive teachers play a part in making.

At a time when the considerable impact that the recent pandemic through emergency curricular and project-based learning has had and will potentially have on current and future cohorts of learners, Darder's challenge to educators to comprehend that poverty and human misery are not contagious like coronavirus but are part of the architecture of class society that can be tackled through political action and pedagogy. Furthermore, the recent sharpening of focus on equality and diversity by the Black Lives Matter movement and the work of the National Education Union (NEU) through its Celebrating Education Conference and decolonising the curriculum initiative as well as the push from youth for a greening of the curriculum all owe a nod of respect to Freire and I am confident that the great educator would smile his approval in return.

Ian Duckett, SEA NEC





# The National Education Museum

Learning from the past to enlighten the future

## Why a National Education Museum?

There was a time, not so long ago, when people thought of museums simply and only as repositories, places to learn about the past from artefacts and stories, places to explore the evolution and development of a culture and a way of life but nonetheless essentially for entertainment and amusement. It isn't like that anymore. We have come to appreciate that what we learn from the past enlightens the present and the future. The museum of the 21st century is a centre of study accessible to all. From what we learn of how things have been done by our predecessors, the successes they have achieved and the errors they have made, we can make better decisions to respond to the demands of our own times and better plans for our successors. Our museum will extend that learning opportunity to every visitor and participant.

There have been remarkable achievements in education and a commitment to teaching and learning has been a significant part of our culture over many centuries. Long before the state began to take responsibility for children's education, benefactors worked to extend that commitment to the children of poor families with a conviction that education offered the chance to escape from deprivation. Eton, for example, was founded in 1440 by King Henry VI as a charity school to educate '70 poor boys'. They were known as 'King's Scholars'. The boys would then go on to King's College, Cambridge, founded by the same King in 1441.

That same motivation amongst legislators, responding to strong public pressure and demands, in the second half of the 19th century gave us a statutory publicly funded system of education for all.

And yet we have no national education museum, no centre for the celebration of these achievements, no easily accessible study and gathering place, no online facility readily available to anyone who cares to enquire into the successes and the mistakes of the past and contribute to present and future development. All the history of the independent schools, private and public schools (and why they can mean the same thing), dame schools, grammar schools, comprehensive schools, ragged schools, the current academy schools etc. Basically, somewhere that covers the entire history of education in our country, linking up with those who have displays and artefacts, not just in museums.

Many will recognise this iconic photo which was taken by Jimmy Sime on 9 July 1937. It shows five English boys: two dressed in the Harrow School uniform including waistcoat, top hat, boutonniere, and cane; and three nearby wearing the plain clothes of pre-war working class youths. Schools such as Eton and Harrow were no longer for 'poor boys' by this time! Today, fees for Eton are running at



£48,501 per year. This is all part of our education history.

There is no lack of study nor any deficiency of opinion about education in our country. Far from it. It is one of the most intensely researched subjects amongst academics in our universities. They have their own descriptive language familiar only to those who share it. Despite the excellence of our record in educational provision, much the same debate about the purpose of education and the structures appropriate to secure its objectives seem to be repeated in nearly every generation. The teaching profession seems often at odds with those who design legislation to satisfy politically motivated aims. An innocent observer may wonder "Will they ever be satisfied that they have got something right?" We intend that the museum should help to enable an answer to that question.

This is the time, and these are the circumstances in which a national museum of education should be, must be, established. It will inform and fascinate, and it will entertain. It will provide its visitors, in person and online, with fond memories and with some amusement about long abandoned practices. Then, there will be so much more. Adopting the exciting ideas of a 21st century museum, we will also aim to educate, to add to understanding of purpose and by doing so to stimulate a new consensus about the values of education for our children and of lifelong learning.

## What is the National Education Museum Founder Patron Scheme?

The National Education Museum's Founder Patron scheme enables 100 donors to play a crucial role in the development of this project and be part of its history. We are delighted and so grateful that the SEA has joined our Founder Patron scheme and donated £2500.



This will go towards the acquisition of the museum's first premises in the museum city of Portsmouth, to equip the offices, and to begin setting up and building our collection supplied initially from the archives of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers released in the amalgamation of these two organisations in 2017. We will then be working with other establishments with educational content to promote and seek to share their education collections, ultimately with a national identity under a shared umbrella.

This special scheme aims to raise £250,000 in funds. Each of the 100 Founder Patrons donate at least £2500 to help to get this project up and running. Founder Patrons – individuals, families, Union branches, educational organisations (such as SEA!), memorial donors or non-profit organisations – will be given a special place in the Museum's own founding history. Unless they choose to remain anonymous, Founder Patrons will be honoured publicly and prominently displayed in the building as the people or organisations who enabled the Museum to happen.

Recently Anne Swift, Chair of the NEM and I have been targeting groups to get new Founder Patrons, mainly from within the National Education Union, but not exclusively. This means we now have £85,000 raised through the Founder Patron scheme! We are so thankful to everyone for their magnificent financial support. Overall, we have currently raised over £100,000. This is such a great move forward as the pandemic has hampered our work as it has so many. Plus, we are building up a useful fund for general costs through other very useful and generous donations.

## So, what have we done so far?

One of the best ways to find out how we decided to set up the Museum is to go to our website <https://nationaleducationmuseum.uk> This gives you a good background on how we started, milestones of education, the Trustees, the Founder Patron scheme as well as some artefact photos and how to join us. You will also see that we currently have four Honorary Patrons. In September 2019 our previous Chair of Trustees, Christine Blower, became a Peer and the Honorary Patron scheme was begun. Christine became our first Honorary Patron. We then approached several other well know people. First to agree was Professor Jim Al-Khalili followed by Gervase Phinn,

author, Baroness Morris, previous Education Secretary of State and Fred Jarvis, CBE.

Fred, as those in the SEA will know, was a champion for state education. He was the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers from 1975 until 1989. He was an active member of the Labour Party arguing for a proper comprehensive education. Fred continued his campaigning right until the end of his life and his passion for education shone through. He died in June 2020.

We have decided not to currently spend money on an expensive website. It is all run by one of our Trustees. It is a basic website, as our premises are key regarding our fund raising. But in the future, an 'all singing and dancing' website will be a key part of the project allowing not only engaging online interactive activities, but also a resource and study facility.

The Museum is non-political. All Trustees have a background of being passionate about education and the need to preserve its history as well as encourage discussion and research for the future. An important part of the Museum space will be areas for discussion and debate and to hold large gatherings for conferences about education and to discuss the way forward to ensure we are providing the best for all the children of our country.

Supporting this project will ensure that it happens. Do please spread the word among your work colleagues, friends and family about the National Education Museum. Register your support with an email to [nationaleducationmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:nationaleducationmuseum@gmail.com) Encourage others to give a donation, or perhaps even become one of our 100 Founder Patrons too.

**Jean Roberts is Secretary to the Trustees of the National Education Museum. She writes about why she and the other Trustees are passionate about creating a museum to celebrate education. On a personal level, Jean is also an active member of the Labour Party having managed to speak at annual conference several times. Her Constituency Labour Party (CLP) is Brent Central which has voted overwhelmingly to send the SEA motion, promoted and proposed by Jean, about the privatisation of education, as their motion to the Labour Party Annual Conference this year. The NEM is politically non-aligned and an independent charity.**



# Ways of Engaging:

some approaches to developing learning skills



Ways of Engaging is a project designed to support disaffected young people. It was initially rooted in research and was the inaugural project of the East Anglia Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) as Ways of Engaging. The project is supported by the SEA among a range of partners, including Norfolk District NEU and the NEU post-16 Researchmeet project, the Co-operative College, Norfolk County Council's Roar project (where some of the resources and activities were trialled along with YMCA Norfolk), Norwich Trades Council and latterly the University of East Anglia and UCU.

The research drew on experience in FE and alternative provision in the last 10 years in a wide range of contexts as well as previous research and development of case studies around NEET cohorts. It will be concerned with re-engagement, learning, and developing skills of employability and enterprise. There are three main curriculum components to the approach to engagement and re-engagement. These are leadership, employability and volunteering. Personalised and assignment-based the approach is learner focused and built on a foundation of agreed and realistic targets that fully takes account of individual learner needs. The engagement project equips learners with personal, learning and thinking and employability skills.

In the time of the pandemic, however, events overtook participants and it quickly morphed into practical piece of pedagogy linked to the emergency curriculum for practitioners to use in a variety of ways of engaging with the young people in their care, sometimes planned; sometimes as a means of managing in a crisis; sometimes collaborative, but always as a direct and personalised response to individual learner needs. While not directly born out of the current Covid19 crisis, some have been shaped and altered and, in some cases, driven on-line. Here are some examples:

## Skills and self- development

1. Introductory Skills session – what will you need to succeed? Teamwork; target setting and skills for learning; problem solving; language and communication.
2. Describe yourself – using a method of your choice (written description, picture, film, or artefact), try to explain who you are. You should think about your background, ambitions and words which describe you. Record your evidence.
3. Objects that represent your life – bring in three objects which represent who you are. Discuss with a partner or in a group what they represent and why you have brought them.
4. Research a topic that interests you – use the internet, library, newspaper, or another route to find out information about a subject of your choice. Present the information in an interesting or original way.
5. Think about leadership skills and communicate to a group what it takes to be a good leader. Use examples of famous leaders and, as a group, discuss what made them good or bad. How do you compare?
6. On your own, or as a group, draw a mind map about respect, showing what it means and giving examples of when it is and is not shown. Compare your examples with others.

## Some findings

Even when learners have chosen a course of study, it is sometimes a challenge for teachers to keep them interested and motivated. This is where personal knowledge of individual learners comes in to play. 'Knowing which buttons to press' for each individual can provide the ignition to motivate and inspire any learner. 'Which button' will differ from learner to learner as the very uniqueness of everyone

will form the basis for their personal determination and motivation. Learners crave realism. If we can gain their interest by making learning real, by linking it to the outside world, we can inspire and increase motivation.

Customised and flexible learning, including aspects of distance learning, is a means to achieving this. The whole notion of 'personalised learning' recognises that teachers focusing their attention on individual learners further progresses their learning and mirrors in the real world, such as the move away from narrow vocationalist models. Within the post-14 sector, the debate has centred on how best to move from a world where the individual responds to the system and its structures to one where the systems and structures themselves are designed to respond flexibly to individuals' needs for over a decade.

## Some recommendations

In terms of recommendations, this approach frees learners and teachers from a range of the usual constraints: Learners can take control of their own learning and teachers no longer really need to consider time allowances or constraints and can consider:

- length of time allowed;
- independent learning
- distant learning;
- resource-based learning;
- mastery learning.

## Teachers can and should ask themselves:

- How can learning and teaching styles move a learner from where they are now to where the learner has the potential to be?
- How can session-planning accommodate learners' different preferred ways of learning?

Although it looks unlikely, a more engaging model may grow out of the emergency curriculum necessitated by the pandemic. A more open-ended approach, with pupil referral units and excluded pupils,

developed through the current Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) Ways of Engaging project, which was piloted with Norfolk YMCA in Norwich and is characterised by engagement through personalised objectives and meaningful projects with a negotiated learning framework has potential for change. In mainstream schools the emergency curriculum could and should have been braver and more meaningful. It could easily have been concerned with the development of communication and problem-solving skills and been project-based and allowed learners to explore interests in the things that will change their world, notably, de-colonisation of the curriculum and education for climate change.

## Next steps

### Left field and left-wing research

Much has been made of the "recovery curriculum" I've read a good deal about the "emergency curriculum", but what I'm really interested in as a socialist educator is a curriculum that paves an alternative road out of this pandemic that our schools could take and build for a different and better future.

Social justice, with a focus on real-world research on topics like decolonisation and climate change, must be a keynote of the NEU Left's strategy. Curriculum development has, for me, always been concerned with three interwoven strands: the development of skills, knowledge, and general education/enrichment with entitlement as its strong backbone.

During the pandemic events overtook learners and a blended learning model coupled with a more practical pedagogy linked to the emergency curriculum emerged. New ways of engaging with the young people, sometimes planned; sometimes as a means of managing in a crisis; sometimes negotiated collaborative, but always as a direct and personalised response to individual learner needs became a reality. While not always directly born out of the Covid19 crisis, some learning activities have been shaped and altered.

This new curriculum should be based on genuine action research.

If you are interested in engaging in and sharing left field and left-wing research action research and shaping a bigger, more meaningful curriculum please contact Ian Duckett, [ianjduckett1@btinternet.com](mailto:ianjduckett1@btinternet.com).

Ian Duckett, SEA NEC

# Social justice and youth engagement: theory and practice

– paper for Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) East Anglia Conference – 23 June Carlene Cornish University of East Anglia and Ian Duckett

**Theory: the paradox of BKS assessments and Functional Skills:** the experiences of 'disengaged' youth on an employability course in a further education college.

Over the last two decades, changing socio-economic circumstances gave rise to important implications for young people through reforms of policies and educational qualifications. Yet, the risks of marginalisation and exclusion have also become significant. This work is based on empirical research examining the educational experiences of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and disengaged youth and the extent to which they were able to benefit from the 'second chance' rhetoric announced in RPA re-engagement provision. Foucault's theory of governmentality is used as the basis for key empirical findings which provide striking evidence of chaos, controversy and contradictions since exposing the problematic ways in which course tutors implemented BKS assessments and Functional Skills.

**Practice: ways of engaging:** some approaches to developing learning skills

Action research drew on experience as a teacher and manager in FE and alternative provision in the last 12 years in a wide range of contexts as well as previous research and development of case studies around NEET learners, but latterly with two cohorts of YMCA Norfolk's Life Ready Norwich skills for life project. It was concerned with re-engagement, learning and developing skills of employability and enterprise. There are three main curriculum components to the approach to engagement and re-engagement. These are leadership, employability, and volunteering. Personalised and assignment-based, the approach is learner focused and built on a foundation of agreed and realistic targets that fully takes account of individual learner needs. The engagement project equips learners with personal, learning, thinking and employability skills.

In the time of the pandemic, however, events overtook participants and it quickly morphed into a more practical pedagogy linked to the emergency curriculum for practitioners to use in a variety of ways of engaging with the young people in their care, sometimes planned; sometimes as a means of managing in a crisis; sometimes collaborative, but always as a direct and personalised response to individual learner needs.

# School Scandals – blowing the whistle on the corruption of our education system by Pat Thomson

Pat Thomson is a Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham. She was previously a headteacher and senior public servant in the Australian school system. In this book she exposes the corruptions and irregularities in the England's privatised education system. For those of us who currently work in education we see this acted out every day in the settings and system that we work in.

Each chapter starts with a list of newspaper/media headlines and the opening chapter 'A book about corruption in schools' sets the scene with a shocking set of comments:

"Academy boss ordered school to cheat on SATs tests."

"Disgraced superhead cannot appeal over £1.4 million in unlawful bonuses."

"Banned; Head who gave contract to his mother's firm."

This chapter sets out clearly the basis for what is happening in our education system –

"This book provides additional evidence to show that an apparent political commitment to equal opportunity masks a policy regime which, in best Orwellian fashion, produces the very antithesis of what it claims to promote. I document the ways in which systemic and systematic changes in the cultures and structures of schools, and the education bureaucracy, have led to an ongoing series of 'unpublic' practices which produce and reproduce a highly uneven socioeconomic playing field."

The English education system has been through radical change – when Thatcher was elected in 1979, she introduced the idea of choice and competition. The 1988 education act introduced school self-management by grant maintained or local authority governing bodies – this was the beginning of the rot. The national curriculum was introduced in the late 1980s, and the breakup of local authorities began. This was at the start of my teaching career and I have seen the gradual deterioration of the system over the years I have been teaching. Statutory assessments and key stage tests were introduced between 1991 and 1995 and these punitive mechanisms which do nothing to support children and young people have been used to hold schools to account since.

Chapter 2 of the book highlights the muddle and chaos caused by this fragmentation of the system. In 1997 New Labour was elected and introduced initiatives such as the literacy hour and the national college for school leadership. Then in 2000 they launched the first academies. The aim at this point was allegedly to target 'underperforming' schools however the academies programme has been a can of worms from its inception. Academies grew into chains and multi academy trusts and more and more local authority services were privatised as we were told that choice and opening education to the market would improve efficiency and raise standards.

The notion of an education system being a public good has become contested not overnight but gradually over years. The 1979 Thatcher government wanted the state to become more business-like – the private sector which they saw as sleek and competitive was to be given a role in changing public services opening them up to competition. I remember the rhetoric of the day – public services, education, health etc were badly run, they were wasteful and the trade unions had too much power.

The book also highlights the costs associated with this fragmented and wasteful system. I have always known this but reading chapter 4 reminded me just how shocking it is. The chapter starts with some shocking headlines:

"GMB Scotland reveals Ayrshire Councils pay staggering £32 million a year to

private companies for just a dozen schools."

"PFI firms to get £4.8 billion from schools by 2020, study shows."

I remember when PFI (private finance initiative) first arrived in the education system. I was a local union officer at the time and negotiating with the local authority on a regular basis. I remember raising alongside other trade unions our significant concerns about the scheme – the local authority officers at the time told us it was 'the only game in town'. Several years down the line it was scrapped but the ongoing payments for the new buildings will continue to take money out of the public purse for many years to come. The new buildings were leaking within weeks and on one site the outdoor floodlights, heating and various other items were on 24 hours a day for the first year as the fuel bills charged for the rest of the contract were based on the first years running costs. The book highlights numerous other scandalous stories of waste and at times corruption – "a PFI school with an annual PFI bill OF £132,478. They had been paying £88 a year for the installation of a new sink. By the end of the PFI contract the sink will have cost £2,024. And at Bristol Metropolitan Academy a single blind for a room will end up costing £8,154 under PFI. These charges are not unusual. The head at Malmsbury school in Wiltshire said: 'We had some benching put in the canteen, just along one wall, about 20 yards. We have to pay about £40 a month for the facilities management cost of the bench, on top of the cost of putting that bench in and all the materials.' The secondary school will be charged £6,240 just for the management of the bench.

Chapter 5 'Market mentalities and malpractices' highlights the lack of oversight and accountability in this fragmented system. The scandal of academy bosses' salaries has been in the news for some time now. In March 2019 Schools Week reported that 23 academy 'chiefs' still earned more than £200,000. The highest paid, the Harris Federation head, has a salary package of £550,000. Despite some

attempts by the government to monitor and limit these salaries as the chapter highlights their powers are limited and even getting academies to report their annual financial spending is not easy.

The book recognises that these excessive payments, the mismanagement of funds and the lack of accountability does not happen in all academies but ultimately the marketisation and fragmentation of the system has created a climate where it can and does.

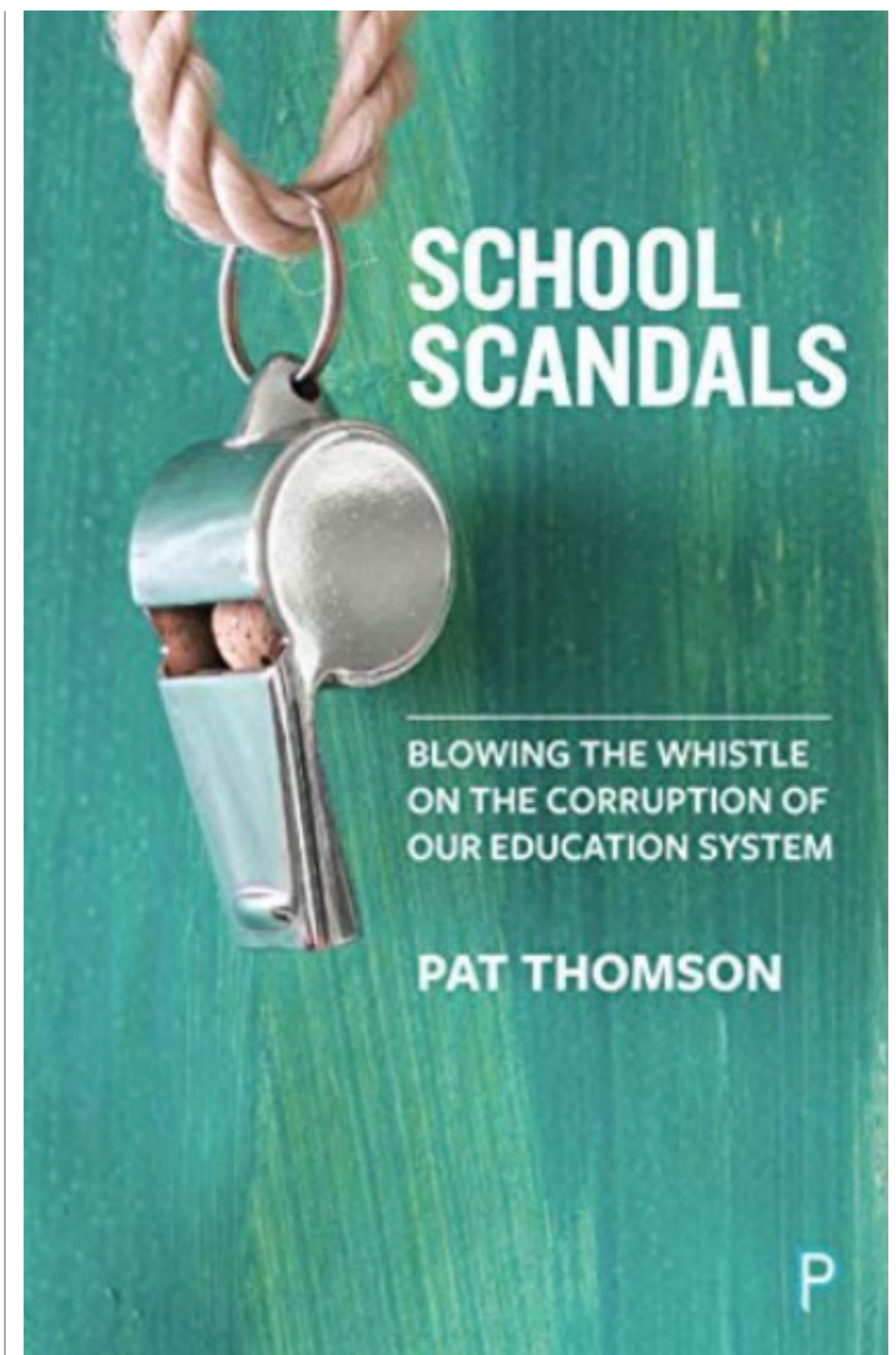
Successive governments have promoted and expanded the academies programme on the basis that they are more effective, more efficient and that they raise standards. Chapter 6 and 7 show how this is not evidenced in practice but also how the system cannot be assessed as a level playing field because it is not. Effectiveness is measured through test and examination results and monitored by Ofsted. When accountability measures are high stake, they lead to pressure on educators to teach to the test. This can skew not only the curriculum but also the way that education is delivered. Borderline children become the target of extra intervention; children who are not going to provide the necessary grades are pushed out either through exclusion or off-rolling. In April 2019 a Guardian headline stated that 'more than 49,000 pupils 'disappeared' from English schools.'

What these high stakes accountability has created is a super competitive system where schools have to 'game' the system if they want to stay at the top of the league tables.

The final chapter starts to look at how we can change the system. Thomson works from the basis of education as a public good. The public good is incompatible with a marketised, punitive, competitive education system and practices of exclusion and selection. She also states that there needs to be much discussion and debate about what is needed. I would certainly agree with that but I would also say that any discussion must have at the heart of it those people who deliver in classrooms every day. For too long educators voices have not been heard, their views and experience not valued and their work and commitment not respected.

This book highlights the failings in our fragmented education system. Our education system is broken – it wasn't broken by educators, by students or by our communities – it was broken by successive governments and their actions.

**Louise Regan, SEA NEC**





# Climate Education

*It is high time we recognised the inter-connectedness of our planet and our people – we are not separate from it or each other.*

The 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26 takes place in Glasgow in November. Many believe this is the last opportunity to mitigate disaster. The urgency of change needed now is Code Red.

The planet is in crisis. We need immediate change to food and energy production, distribution and consumption, and a just transition to climate jobs, protecting the workforce as it upskills and transforms. And of plastics and aerosols, we just want rid.

Communication technologies bringing increased connectivity have simultaneously reduced our connections to our communities and the natural world; broadening access and narrowing understanding. We have lost sight of knowing how much we can take and how much we need to put back. We take from the land, we take from the seas and we take from each other. Without care. We consume.

*“A story matrix connects all of us. There are rules, processes, and circles of responsibility in this world. And the story begins exactly where it is supposed to begin. We cannot skip any part.” – (Joy Harjo, United States Poet Laureate)*

To reconnect to the natural world we need curricula to include natural history, sustainability and community underpinned by values of equality, integrity and shared responsibility. If our young people know and understand their environment they will more likely care for it and be equipped to take care of it, together.

This month education trade unions with campaign organisations launched a set of climate change teaching resources on topics including psychology, health, careers, renewables and more. They are free to download and to share.

Care and responsibility extends to learning past the compulsory school years. Education must be available to everybody, throughout their lives and regardless of age and circumstance. Adults need to be able to upskill and retrain for changing industries as well as to learn to give to and receive from our environment.

Education is the best way to challenge racism and discrimination too. With more and more people likely to face forced exodus from the Global South as a result of climate-related events, we cannot and must not be distracted by ethnic and national identities when we have fellow human beings at risk of becoming climate refugees. A refugee is a human being, no matter who they are or where they are.

People who have been shown how to care and experience care, are far more likely to give care. Charles Darwin discovered more than 150 years ago that compassion (he called it sympathy) was a key survival trait in the living world, necessary for evolution and survival. We survive by helping, by caring for each other and our environment.

To learn to look after the land, the seas, the air and each other is to secure a future for our planet, ourselves and our children.

**We have one planet and we are one people.**

Climate Change Lesson Resources here  
<https://climatelearningresources.org.uk/category/all-ideas/>

**Anya Cook, SEA NEC, UCU activist  
and currently chairing NE COP26 Coalition**

# ‘Real Community Schools’

*A renewed Labour Education Policy prospect proposal for the 21stC*

Among the many school babies thrown out with the political bathwater at the end of the last century was the principal and practice of lifelong learning as exemplified in ‘real’ Community Schools. This is the time for a radical re-launch of real Community Schools. We can and should have schools as the beating hearts of learning for life in each community. This means schools as places providing an integrated focus on academic learning, health and social services, youth and community development and as places for community engagement. We need schools as places of learning for the whole person and which recognise how successfully meeting human needs and development is dependent on strong families and healthy communities. Real community schools are open to everyone as partners in these endeavours. When families are involved with their children and their own learning and development those families demonstrably thrive.

Too many schools today are closed for 170 days each year with their valuable facilities unused – when they could be open, all year long, as hubs bringing together a range of partners to offer appropriate support and learning opportunities. There is a condoned pretence that public (sic) schools satisfy the conditions of ‘charitable purpose’ and yet they exclude the communities which host them.

We have had Community Schools, Extended Schools, and Village Schools/ Colleges exemplifying lifelong learning, all to no avail and sacrificed to the political agendas of reputation seeking, here today gone tomorrow, politicians perpetrating the misconceived ideals of an anachronistic education system. Schools today must not serve the single purpose of a chalk and talk classroom. Schools and communities are interconnected and they must be seen to be collaborating and creating together. Communities and schools can leverage their shared physical and human assets to help all children succeed and provide a platform for learning for life.

Democracy and participation can become the defining cultural and organisational features of our communities in the post Covid world. Participation holds the key to high aspiration, proper inclusion, quality care, high trust and a higher performing education system.

Henry Morris saw that the school should be the community centre for the neighbourhood, providing for the whole person and abolishing the duality of education and ordinary life. Schools should not only be the training ground for the art of living, but the place in which life is lived. The ever present dismal dispute between vocational and non-vocational education would not arise in a community education culture because learning and living would be equated.

Morris envisaged Village Colleges as series of education and community hubs servicing a network of villages. Morris

wanted the colleges /schools to be pivotal in the political, creative and intellectual life of the communities with which they were associated. Morris saw schools as having the potential to integrate vital public services at the point of need, where local debate and decision-making is facilitated and encouraged to crystallise. Establishing Labour policy which extols the benefits of pooling public and civic facilities enabling communities to receive the best possible services must make sense.

Today there can be little doubt that Henry Morris would have concerns about the way that schools with academy status have organised themselves into trusts; increasingly we have education communities without proper forums in which to debate and decide upon the initiatives and priorities that are important to them. Allen and Gann (‘Embedding Democratic Engagement in SchoolLeadership’, Forum 60 p 218-228) have noted how the move away from Local Authority control to Academy trusts has been beset with concerns regarding community and democratic accountability. They contend that the academisation of schools has created myriad autonomous and privatised edu-businesses that have reduced or eliminated stakeholder involvement and democratic engagement. They argue for the reformation of schools into learning communities based on the principles of empowered participatory governance, bottom-up participation, deliberative solution generation and with a practical orientation. The funding agreement between the Secretary of State and every Academy needs to be radically amended to include clear accountability for such Community School practice.

Community schools that have successfully extended service provision to encompass wider needs can retain a clear focus on their primary stakeholders – the pupils in their classrooms. They can benefit their pupils and find a richer and more productive relationship with their communities and their partners. But one of the key factors in such development is the practical reality concerning the design of school buildings which must be such as to enhance and facilitate community use and be able to host the wide and varied set of community relationships so essential to sustain lifelong learning. All proposals for new schools must have a building specification that includes the fullest possible criteria for access to community based lifelong learning facilities.

Such Community (‘Extended’) schools offer a varied menu of activities such as clubs, study support, sports, musical tuition, dance, drama, art and crafts, parenting support and family learning. They have clear procedures for swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist support services such as speech and language therapy, child and adolescent mental health services, intensive behaviour support and sexual health services. And key to lifelong learning opportunities is the wider community entitlement to access to ICT, sports and arts facilities. Of course such entitlement should also extend from schools wishing to maintain their

## **charitable purpose in the private sector.**

The much lamented ‘Every Child Matters’ (ECM) initiative also saw schools as being the most likely bases for the location of services and as the hub of services to children, their families and other members of the community.

Labour Policy should recognise the achievements of ECM and celebrate schools as community resources that can use their facilities and add real value in meeting the identified needs of their communities. Improvements in school standards will follow from greater parental involvement in children’s learning, and from parents themselves making better use of school facilities. Learning in community schools is not just for middle-class families, able to articulate their needs. Community based learning can offer very practical roots to higher attainment for all children but especially those that feel most demotivated by current approaches. In real Community Schools there are also greater opportunities for school staff to develop their skills (not just in ‘teaching’ per se but often so

that their talents can be ‘infectious’ for others).

Community Schools can address some of the significant causes of the lack of involvement in education.

1. Children and parents who do not think education and learning are for them. Teaching and Learning need to reach out beyond the school into families and communities so as to raise aspiration and ambition and to equip all children from all backgrounds to want to make the most of their education.
2. Children and parents who disengage from education at some point during their schooling. They often do so because education seems less relevant or rewarding to them. We need Community Schools that establish collaborative learning plans focused on engagement with families setting the own goals and targets. Community Schools can encourage children and their parents to invest more in learning from an early age and to enable them to sustain that involvement over a longer period by investing in schools which self-evidently belong to them (not a business oriented trust).

The Labour party should extol policy that envisions 21st century extended Community School services and relationships with education as a co-ordinated, lifelong, person centred enterprise. 21stC schools should be seen as being at the heart of their communities with families, professionals and communities working together, creating a culture of lifelong learning success in improved communities. Local leadership of Community Schools as a community development initiative requires consideration of how sustainability really works at a local level. This means generating systems for organising resources in new and more effective ways. No individual school, acting alone, can improve outcomes for all students; collaboration between services is crucial with partners developing a sense of shared goals and a locally-based system to accomplish those goals. Local Education Authorities (Councils) are fundamental to the establishment of such partnerships.

Community Schools in the 21stC need to be empowered and designed to operate as networks that address the multiple emotional, social and health needs of children and their families along a lifelong wellness continuity. These ideals should extend throughout the Local Authority system. We need to understand that competition has been stuffed into the education system and has had a negative effect on choice, quality and the delivery of progressive courses of learning. For example much of the blossoming of adult education in the second half of the 20th century was emasculated by the market-driven obsessions of FE policy development (see ‘Impact of Competition in post 16 Education’, Association of colleges 2020). These ‘jewels’ of adult education need to be returned to us in an essentially holistic view of how lifelong learning functions. FE and Community Schools can play their part again and it is Local Education Authorities that are best placed to facilitate the culture and opportunities required to achieve this at a necessarily local level.

The bounded, stand alone school, as a factory of learning should become a glaring anomaly of the 21st-century organisational landscape. There has been a series of initiatives over the last 50 years that recognised the needs and potential in our schools; too many of these gestating initiatives were cruelly and unnecessarily aborted. There is an opportunity now for the Labour Party to learn from these experiences, rebuild, and aspire to a Community Schooling system that can really prepare all for the lifelong learning and democratic community development demands of the 21st-century.

**Frank Newhofer**

# SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION - MEMBERSHIP FORM

Affiliated to the Labour Party

[www.socialisteducation.org.uk](http://www.socialisteducation.org.uk)

## I WANT TO JOIN / REJOIN THE SEA AND PAY THE FOLLOWING SUBSCRIPTION –

**Single:** Waged £25  or Unwaged £12       **Couple:** Waged £35  or Unwaged £18

**DECLARATION: (please tick one):** I am already a member of the Labour Party   
Or I am not a member of another political party (and therefore eligible to join the SEA)

### CONTACT DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

First name 1  Last name 1

First name 2  Last name 2

Address

Town/City/County

Postcode  Phone

Email

**Please complete and sign this form and send it to:  
SEA Membership Secretary  
c/o 44 Bruce Road,  
London E3 3HL**

My Local (Education) Authority is:

My Parliamentary Constituency is:

My trade union is:

### PAYMENT METHOD (please choose one)

**Paying by bank standing order saves time and money.**

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Postal address of bank/building society

Name(s) of account holder(s)

SORT-CODE

ACCOUNT NUMBER

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please pay SEA the sum of £  and continue paying the same amount each year on the \_\_\_\_ (day) of \_\_\_\_ (month). [For instance, "1st (day) of January (month)"]

**This instruction replaces all earlier ones.**

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### PAYEE DETAILS

**Payee:** Socialist Educational Association

c/o Unity Trust Bank PLC,  
Nine Brindleyplace,  
Birmingham B1 2HB

**Sort Code:** 60 83 01

**Account No:** 50726172

Please quote the reference below  
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