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CHAPTER 4

A modern history of schooling

Chapter overview

The study of education systems, structures and processes cannot be complete without an understanding of their histories. Understanding how schools and schooling developed and what motivated both individuals and various authorities to develop education establishments and systems helps us understand the current state of play in education.

This chapter will explore briefly the period leading up to the introduction of state education as we know it and will chart developments since the Second World War including the establishment of comprehensive schooling, finishing at the inception of a national curriculum (the story of which will be picked up in Chapter 5).

Introduction

The history of modern education has been dominated by the period from 1870 since this was a symbolic 'moment' of huge transition, leading to the present order of things. We begin our overview in the period prior to 1870 when the foundations of the state education system were being laid. The history of this modern period in education can be divided roughly into the following phases:

- 1800–70: towards state education
- 1870–1902: the first stages of elementary schooling
- 1902–44: establishment of secondary schools and local education authorities

- 1944–65: universal secondary education
- 1965–1970s: comprehensive schooling
- 1970s–1988: education policy discord and the Education Reform Act 1988.

Each of these phases represents a significant stage in the development of education, though as we know, events rarely fit into a neat chronology as developments often have various stages and are progressively refined. There is overlap and discontinuity between these stages, as well as progression of linked events. The phase belonging to the comprehensive school does not, for instance, represent the unequivocal triumph of comprehensive schooling.

Considerations when studying the history of education

Already, then, we can see that it is important to consider how we approach an examination of the history of education and to be clear about the pitfalls. We have already discussed in an earlier chapter the need for education researchers to take care to approach sources critically rather than at face value. This is particularly important with historical sources which are by their nature context bound and at a distance and therefore more difficult to expose to the regular queries we might pose about provenance of the source, validity of data, sample size, etc. We need, therefore, to be fairly provisional when drawing conclusions from any historical studies and try to triangulate our sources and our methodological approaches as fully as possible.

Some historians would argue that too much emphasis is put upon education policy developments to the exclusion of individual or localised struggles and achievements. Often these developments are assessed via access to official government reports and quantitative data but Carpentier (2008) reminds us that this raises questions about whether indicators measure the same thing over time. Conventions may change in relation to the statistical categories or methodologies employed but there could also be real changes on the ground in the activities they are supposed to measure. So historians of education must consult these statistics with a clear view of what the categories meant at the time. If we are to meaningfully compare historical data from different time periods we must consider them within the context of their production. 'For example, it is necessary to keep in mind the differences between elementary and primary levels of education, the moving borders between further and higher education as well as the distinctions between the institutions of higher education (universities, colleges, polytechnics etc.). Such caution is also crucial for transnational analyses' (Carpentier, 2008: 706).

The use of quantitative resources such as population growth statistics, economic data on employment, the labour market, prices and interest rates, household finance, etc. is important though as it enables us to contextualise the historical development of education. For instance, it is easy to demonstrate that both contemporary and historical analyses have created justifications for education policy developments using data on immigration, poverty, health and social class. Clearly, then, engagement with political, social, economic and demographic issues is both inevitable and desirable within any history of education. Our understanding of education reform is greatly enhanced by an examination of how social change, economic pressures and political drivers impact upon the funding of education, its expansion and changing structure, curriculum and pedagogic approaches. Historians should take care, however, not to limit their study by over-relying on empirical data and to avoid using historical data to inform or confirm theories and models which may have been taken out of their historical context. In any research there is a danger when analysing information that we may try to shape it to the theory or idea we have already formulated by over- or underestimating certain evidence or even ignoring it altogether. While theoretical findings and conclusions might offer more sophisticated interpretations of historical events, we cannot get carried away in applying a new theoretical model and end up attempting to rewrite history! Similarly we mustn't forget that historical interpretations that have been in the literature for some considerable time are themselves not completely objective and independent of theories that existed during their construction.

Reader Reflection: Analysing the significance of education events



Consider a significant educational development, event or initiative from the past 200 years and apply some or all of the following questions to it:

Did the event occur during a period of economic prosperity or recession?

Was there any impact on demographic growth or decline at the time?

Was the reform contingent upon any significant political development such as the extension of voting rights?

Was there any relationship between the initiative and the level of unemployment?

Now draw up a list of other questions you might apply in any such analysis.

Carpentier (2008) argues for a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to help us understand the structures and processes behind comparative statistics to inform our historical interpretations. Exploring classroom practices, reading teacher diaries, perusal of lesson plans and conducting interviews with former pupils and teachers would help us understand the impact of changes in legislation and in the formal arrangements of schooling on the daily lives of pupils and teachers. Historical biographical accounts can generate very rich, new perspectives on the factual information available via an examination of major legislative changes. See, for example, Jane Martin's account which uses the auto/biographical practices of a married couple who taught in state schools

as a lens through which to explore the larger questions of the intersection of biography and history, the distinction between lived experience and historical experience, the link between generation and social change (2007: 515).

With these cautionary notes in mind we now proceed to an examination of what are considered by most education historians to be the key stages in the development of education and its inexorable reforms.

1800–70: towards state education

Since the Middle Ages the Church had provided some form of rudimentary education to many poor children within charity schools and orphanages as well as more formal education within monasteries and public schools for a small, relatively privileged section of the population. During the early years of the nineteenth century large numbers of children in the new urban centres were working in factories while those remaining in rural areas worked in agriculture or cottage industries of various kinds. The early 'poor' schools of the 1800s were voluntary and funded by philanthropists and religious groups. They were designed principally to train large numbers of urban working-class children.

A monitorial schooling system managed these large numbers via a rank-and-file ordering of all pupils in a single space, using predominantly rote learning. These schools could teach large numbers of pupils with the presence of a single instructor by organising them by ability and breaking down the learning into small elements to be learned by repetition. The teacher selected a number of the most able pupils as monitors who instructed small groups of children while the teacher disciplined them and examined their work before they could progress to the next element. The problem with this system was that it concentrated on the learning

of facts rather than problem-solving or creative activities and made no allowance for the different rates at which children worked and the different ways in which they learned.

Legislation appeared during the nineteenth century to control the employment of children and to protect them from sexual abuse and from exploitation as cheap labour. This was a period of rapid industrialisation, technological evolution and population growth so the changes in legislation on both schooling and child labour are inextricably linked with economic and labour conditions. This has been described as the invention of childhood because, before this, children were generally considered (and dressed) as smaller versions of adults. As such, their characteristics and needs were not generally considered as distinct from those of adults. Hopkins (1994: 6) argued that

the transformation of working class childhood during the 19th century was not the consequence of any profound change in attitudes to children. It was rather the product of philanthropic and compassionate motives together with a concern of social control at a time of unprecedented change: a swelling population, industrialization, urbanization.

The monitorial system thus fell into decline in the second half of the nineteenth century as the government began to grant-fund voluntary schools, which were almost exclusively run by the Church, from 1833. The *ragged schools* established by John Pounds to educate destitute children free of charge were supported and extended by Lord Shaftesbury since there was a need to civilise the masses. Shaftesbury was concerned about girls in mining districts who drank, swore and fought and he felt that education was the way to deal with such behaviour. In order that parents could go to work in the increasingly labour-intensive city factories some form of social control and respectable values had to be instilled in children. Ragged schools were governed by elected boards of prominent citizens and this formed the governance model for the elementary schools that were to follow. It is worth noting, however, that Dick (2008) has argued that while several historians have linked the education of the poor with messages promoted by industrialists and industrialisation, training in literacy was not extensive in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England compared with many other countries and education for the masses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was based on patriarchal social models rather than capitalist ones.

As elementary schooling began to gain pace for five to ten year olds and the hours of attendance were extended, pressure grew on the authorities of education to ensure that schooling was achieving what the various interest groups expected.

To address this, the Revised Code of 1862 laid down conditions for school managers to claim grants for children attending. To be eligible for these grants children had to attain one of six standards in reading, writing and arithmetic. Each standard in each subject was stated in terms of a precisely defined skill to be demonstrated, rather like contemporary national curriculum attainment targets. This imposed a concentration on the basics and became known as 'payment by results' (Martin, 2008). Thus, even before universal elementary education was legislated for, its foundations were well established.

Reader Reflection: Data sources for education reforms

Quantitative sources allow historians of education to identify trends and patterns and can complement the traditional approach to the history of education that is based on institutional and legislative landmarks. 'Payment by results' data is a good case in point.

Consider how comparing and contrasting qualitative and quantitative sources may allow you to refine your analysis of the formation and implementation of educational policies.

Carpentier (2008) suggests we consider the impact on the ground of any given piece of legislation. For instance, through records, statistics and qualitative accounts we could explore whether the implementation of payment by results following the 1862 Revised Code led to cuts in funding or the impact of the Forster Act on enrolment and budgets after 1870.

Choose an education reform and list at least three different sources of data you think would help provide as full a picture as possible of its impact educationally, socially, politically or economically.



1870–1902: the first stages of elementary schooling

Modern education systems across Europe evolved out of various needs that came together through the large transformations of society that took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Industrial development and increasing urban populations drove the development of schooling (Menter et al., 2015). Within a more industrialised society the factories needed literate and numerate workers, especially as Britain's economic position in the world began to be challenged by Germany and the USA. Key political changes had led to most working-class men being granted the right to vote in 1867 so it was important to ensure that their education enabled them to understand what they were voting for.

Education Reform Act 1870

The Education Reform Act of 1870 was designed to legislate for subsidised elementary education for all up to the age of 13. Education reform had been on the agenda since the government started to provide grants to schools in the 1830s. However, opposition from a number of different interest groups delayed it. The establishment of elementary schooling was fraught with contentious issues. Firstly, there were the widespread concerns among the upper and middle classes about the possible consequences of educating large numbers of people, their worries being that an educated population would not obey its 'superiors' and that workers would leave their menial jobs. There was also a deep-seated resistance among laissez-faire liberals, conservatives and working-class activists to the idea of state-funded compulsory education. They were suspicious of the state's efforts to control education on different grounds. Those who believed in laissez-faire values argued that state intervention and funding in education would endanger freedom of thought, reduce personal initiative and, if it involved no cost to people, would be perceived as having no value.

A further set of concerns and political lobbying came from the very powerful voice of the Church, which had dominated schooling for centuries with most education for children delivered through Church of England schools. The importance of educating the masses in Christianity could not be underestimated since it came with a clear message about the lower classes' place in society and a fear of what would happen in the afterlife if good behaviour within that place was not maintained. The Church had the physical and financial means to deliver schooling because those in whose interests it was to educate people in this way, landed gentry and important industrialists for example, supported it. There was also reluctance on the part of government to spend money on education.

Various religious conflicts arose about education. The Church of England wanted to maintain control of its schools so refused to cooperate with government inspectors. Catholics and others wanted single denomination schools. Radicals and non-conformists wanted secular education. These conflicts continued from the 1840s through to the 1860s and delayed agreement on the provisions in the Act. Eventually, as its power declined, the Church of England's ability to influence the education agenda diminished, leading to a universal agreement that public funds would be required if large-scale education was to be developed. This in turn had ramifications for the curriculum because if public rates and taxes were to pay for part of the education a partial withdrawal from religious instruction was possible.

Forster Elementary Education Act 1870

The Forster Elementary Education Act of 1870 required partially state-funded board schools to be set up to provide primary (elementary) education in areas where existing provision was inadequate. Board schools were managed by elected school boards. Children still had to pay a small fee to attend. Though the 1870 Act did not make education compulsory to begin with, by 1880 all children between the ages of five and ten were required to attend school (Martin, 2008). In 1891 the Free Education Act provided for the state payment of school fees up to ten shillings per week so by the end of the century most children were attending schools and were in some form of full-time education for a significant segment of their early lives. The school leaving age was increased to 11 in 1893 and 12 in 1899. The emergence of state education with the rapid development of the school as a central institution of civil society represented a massive change in social order.

Early urban state schools can be seen to have this socially symbolic function in their dramatic and often cathedral-like architecture. The powerful, conservative nineteenth-century idea that education for the working classes was potentially dangerous and might give the proletariat ideas above their station was evident in the limitations of the early elementary school curriculum. Early state educators believed that education was necessarily about making the nation cohesive, fostering and cultivating national identity. There was little embarrassment about the political function of that ideological effort.

Thus the elementary school emerged in the nineteenth century as a new form of institution with a newly formulated social mission. The school as we know it is closely related to this recent ancestor. These 'new' elementary schools that appeared like 'beacons of the future' over the urban landscapes of the industrialised nation were quite different from the 'monitorial' schools that had successfully drilled working-class children in the basics of literacy and numeracy. They were often constructed using a grand architectural design, which strongly resembled the nineteenth-century factory buildings dominating the post-Industrial Revolution skylines of urban industrial centres. Their purpose was to educate and control these newly urbanised and industrialised societies. The schools were designed to represent a new form of aspiration for mass urban populations; their grandiose and imposing architecture was designed to reflect their grand purpose of governing and transforming populations.

They also operated a more subtle pastoral and disciplinary regime than the monitorial system with its huge drill rooms. In the elementary school the teacher was brought closer to the pupils in smaller classrooms and the culture of the children met with the supervisory gaze of the teacher in the playground. The large

space in the hall could be utilised for the promotion of collective identity and moral guidance. Elementary schooling was to be the basis for the development of an entirely new kind of 'human technology' capable of producing responsible and self-governing citizens. This self-governing aspect of the school's characteristic way of working remains very powerful. It is deeply embedded in the work ethic that prevails in schools and in the contemporary drive to develop a self-managing, self-governing citizenry through state-funded education.

Reader Reflection: Ideological basis of curriculum



In the early phase of the elementary schools (1870–1900) the curriculum was largely concerned with the teaching of values, virtues, literacy, numeracy, personal hygiene, physical maintenance, domestic skills and rudimentary knowledge about the world and the nation's considerable influence within it. The pioneers of state education had seen the emergent school as the potential instrument of moral transformation, especially important in relation to urban populations that were deemed to be threateningly amoral and disorganised. The school could be a key instrument in the training of populations and in the construction of the idea of community.

What are the ideological underpinnings of this early curriculum?

The development of the school as a key component of civic life, particularly in urban centres, transformed the nature of society and the individual's role within it. In its early phases (from 1870) the school was primarily designed to produce a new form of citizen who was basically literate, was trained how to behave and had learned some rudimentary facts about the world. At the same time the new urban centres in Britain became governed and organised locally. Amenities and systems for cleanliness and health were provided, for example public baths, drainage systems, new technologies of hygiene and waste disposal. It is possible to see the school as one very important manifestation of this civic concern while also recognising the extent to which it represented a vast extension of government influence on social control and social improvement. The early education system was thus concerned with the moral, physical and spiritual condition of the population. Domestic economy and the civic virtues of cleanliness and personal self-management could be taught and some of the negative effects of urban poverty could be dealt with by health care and large-scale feeding programmes managed through schools.

1902–44: establishment of secondary schools and local education authorities

When, in 1897, voting rights were extended to every male householder living in a borough constituency and those earning over £10 in lodgings, the need to educate for democracy was further strengthened, leading to expansion of the school system.

Pre-First World War legislation

With society having become more accepting of state intervention the Balfour Education Act of 1902 legislated for the development of grammar and secondary schools and developed the free place system, which provided funded scholarships for a few able but poor children to attend grammar school. Despite this, only 10 per cent of children had secondary school places by 1944. Secondary schools were for the fee-paying middle classes. For the remaining 90 per cent elementary schools up to the age of 14 were all that was available.

The 1902 Act also replaced the school boards of the 1870 Act with local education authorities (LEAs). The government's Board of Education would now only deal with 318 LEAs instead of 2,500 school boards and over 14,000 voluntary schools. The act was particularly significant because it legislated for all schools, including denominational schools, to be funded through rates.

In 1904, two years after the 1902 Education Act had laid the basis of the compulsory education system, the Board of Education published an *Elementary Code* and regulations for secondary schools. This continued the tradition of the elementary school stressing conduct and discipline with minor emphasis on subject knowledge. The Act itself spoke strongly in terms of 'self-sacrifice', 'respect for duty', 'respect for others', 'instinct for fair play', 'loyalty to one another' and other qualities that emphasised the personal, moral dimension of the curriculum. More secondary schools emerged after 1904. They mostly tended to borrow the academic curriculum of the private schools, which had modified classical curricula. The Act specified: English language and literature, at least one language other than English, geography, history, mathematics, science and physical exercises. It added the proviso that girls' schools should include 'housewifery'.

Post-First World War development

After the First World War, state-funded education in Britain was regarded as important in improving the quality of life of the oppressed classes. Social reformers and

revolutionaries saw it as a mechanism for enabling class inequalities to be challenged and swept aside. A number of forces and factors combined to pressure for the idea of a type of schooling different from the well-established elementary school system. The war exposed the deficiencies in British scientific and technical education so the Fisher Education Act of 1918 made secondary education compulsory up to the age of 14 and gave responsibility for secondary schools to the state. Under the Act, many higher elementary schools and endowed grammar schools sought to become state-funded central schools or secondary schools. However, most children attended primary (elementary) school up until age 14, rather than going to a separate school for secondary education.

Early primary schooling developed in a learner-centred direction. The Hadow Report of 1926 was an influential document recommending a free two-stage education system to meet post-war demands for more education for older learners. It gave guidelines on primary schooling for the general direction of the curriculum which focused on the need to prepare to live a civilised life.

At this stage access to proper secondary education for working-class children was strictly limited. The vast majority of children finished their education at 13 or 14. It was only exceptionally that successful working-class children could gain access to full secondary schooling and higher education. As the urban populations threatened to become self-organised and a force for radical political change, governments became increasingly concerned to counter political ideals with social values and new opportunities realised through the school. Public debates about the need to change education often took the form of a tension or conflict between ideas about the health and wealth of the nation – education as a means towards economic growth, stability and improvement – and education as a social right. Clearly a major shift in the public idea of education was taking place during this period. At the same time, thought was being given to the kind of curricula that were suited to different groups within the population. Sir Cyril Norwood had read Classics at Oxford and had been Head of Bristol, Marlborough and Harrow public schools. He believed the world was divided into 'men who know . . . and men who don't know' (Carr and Hartnett, 1996). The Norwood Report of 1943 identified three types of curriculum:

- The first type of curriculum is academic in orientation and pursues knowledge for its own sake having an indirect relation to 'considerations of occupation'.
- The second type of curriculum is directed to 'the special data and skills associated with a particular kind of occupation'. This curriculum would always have a limited horizon and would be closely related to industry, trade and commerce 'in all their diversity'.

- The third type of curriculum balances training of mind and body and teaches the humanities, natural science and the arts to a degree which enables pupils to 'take up the work of life'. While practical in orientation it would appeal to the 'interests' of pupils and would not have as its immediate aim the preparation for particular types of work.

The Second World War seriously disrupted educational services and developments. The evacuation of children from the cities to the rural areas led to school closures and discontinuity of experience for pupils. It was recognised that families who had suffered through the war deserved a better future (Menter et al., 2015). There was concern to encourage the 'spiritual, mental and physical' well-being of the community.

1944-65: universal secondary education – the tripartite system

In 1944 the Butler Education Act established a Ministry of Education with the power to influence LEAs and created a universal system of secondary education for the first time. The Act defined the modern split between primary and secondary education at age 11 and created the opportunity for a *tripartite* hierarchical system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools as proposed by the Norwood Committee in 1943. The Norwood Committee had recommended that consideration be given to general needs that would pertain to all, arguing that despite differences all pupils have common needs and a common destiny, so physical, spiritual and moral ideals are of vital concern to all. Explicitly different types of education were deemed to be relevant for these pupils. The civil servants who had forged this new version of the education system drew their authority from the division of humanity expressed in Plato's ancient work, *Republic*:

You are all of you in this land brothers. But when god fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those who are qualified to be rulers; he put silver in the auxiliaries and iron and bronze in the farmers and the rest.

Apart from making religious education compulsory, the 1944 Education Act made no stipulations concerning the curriculum. This whole area was left to the discretion of the teachers and the individual schools. It was seen as inappropriate in this period, as fascism was being defeated, that politicians should 'dictate' any curriculum. Leaving such decisions to professionals operating locally was regarded as a democratic safeguard.

A national system locally administered

The 1944 Education Act is often represented as *the* defining moment in the history of modern education. Chitty (2014: 18) suggests that the Act 'owed much to a growing appreciation among policy-makers, administrators and teachers of the importance of state education to economic advance and social welfare'. Secondary education was to be provided for all according to the age, aptitude and ability of each pupil. This was to be a right for all pupils, rather than being based on ability to pay, as had largely been the case before the Second World War. The Act established a nationally funded education system, which was **overseen** by the Ministry and administered by LEAs. As politicians in the depths of the Second World War considered the peace to come, the vision was to create a prosperous, thriving society. How to do this and what it would look like were seen differently by politicians of the left and the right (McKenzie, 2001). Whatever the political perspective, education was to play an important part in realising the dream. In terms of the division of responsibility for the new national education system which the Act created there was a 'balance of control' (Porter, 2009) between central government, local government and the schools. This system of checks and balances has been portrayed as a period of consensus or, alternatively, a triangle of tension between state, LEAs and teachers, which ensured that no one group obtained too much power in the running of the education system. For Pring (2012: 30):

It was a partnership between Local Education Authorities, locally elected, which maintained the schools, the teachers who were responsible for what went on inside them, the government which provided a large part (but by no means all) of the funding and the Churches in that they owned historically many of the schools.

Labour won the post-war election promising a new welfare state. In a radical agenda of social transformation, nationalisation accompanied a fresh vision for social welfare and social mobility. Thus it was a Labour administration that encouraged the creation of the tripartite system under legislation passed by the previous Coalition government. Labour ministers denounced those who took issue with them for promulgating a social philosophy based on three types of schools. They claimed that by abolishing fees in maintained schools they had ensured that entry to the various types of schools would be on the basis of merit. Education was made compulsory up to age 15 in 1947. The number of young people attending universities was also expanded and there was the expectation that working-class children would have access to education of the most 'complete' kind as well as

of the highest quality. This advance was seen as essential as much on the grounds of realising the nation's economic and industrial potential as on grounds of social justice. A new vision of the nation as cohesive and purposeful with common goals seemed to be on the verge of realisation.

Influenced by thinking at the time that intelligence was relatively fixed and could be measured and having been given the legal responsibility to provide a suitable education, the LEAs developed the tripartite system of education in many areas. In this system pupils went to a primary school until the age of 11 where they were inducted into the school system and began learning the basic skills of the three 'Rs'. This was seen as an important time when the intelligence and aptitude of the child began to develop. In their final year of primary school, pupils took the 11-plus, an intelligence test designed to show both their ability and aptitude. Based upon the results pupils were sent to one of three types of secondary school.

1. *Secondary grammar schools* were for the 'more intelligent' pupils with an academic aptitude. The emphasis was on traditional subjects and knowledge. It was expected that these pupils would be suitable for a university education in the future or would take a career in the minor professions or the white-collar sector.
2. *Secondary technical schools* were for pupils with a practical aptitude. Their curriculum would be based on craft and technical skills. It was envisaged that these pupils would be suited to future careers as skilled workers and engineers in industry after taking apprenticeships.
3. *Secondary modern schools* were for pupils who did not fit either of the above categories and were suited to a more general education to prepare them for their future lives as citizens and (largely unskilled) workers.

Growing criticism of the tripartite system

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the Labour Party continued to defend the tripartite system but the system gradually lost credibility. Concerns were raised about the validity of 11-plus tests, especially since sociological studies revealed that social factors played a powerful role in determining which type of secondary school pupils went to. The new education system was fraught with problems. While it certainly did have the effect of enabling more working-class young people to gain access to an expanded higher education system, it remained shot through with inequalities. Statistics produced by large-scale studies of social differences in educational attainment grimly revealed that significant numbers of working-class

children were failing to succeed, either by not passing the 11-plus examination which determined whether they went to secondary modern or grammar school, or by being unable to capitalise on opportunities that were on offer if they were given a place in a grammar school through a lack of financial and cultural resources (Halsey et al., 1980). The capacity for working-class children to take advantage of the opportunities that were apparently being placed freely before them became the crux of big debates about the state of education. Questions centred on where failure was to be located: the children themselves, the parents and their lack of educational nous, the school system or the whole of working-class culture which became increasingly significant in the discussion (see, for example, Douglas's 1964 study). There were at the same time large-scale popular 'parental' concerns over inequalities in the tripartite system that the comprehensive school was at least partly designed to confront (see Jackson and Marsden's seminal 1962 study).

Criticisms of the tripartite system began to emerge and pressure to change the system grew throughout the 1960s. Though the three types of school set up in most LEAs were supposed to have 'parity of esteem' this was not the case in practice (Jones, 2016). Grammar schools were academic and therefore seen as superior. Certainly parents who had career aspirations for their children needed them to take the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O level examinations, an examination in each subject at 16 which preceded the GCSE. It was designed for the top 40 per cent of pupils and led on to A levels taken in school sixth forms which only the grammar schools offered. Increasing parental pressure was put on pupils, especially middle-class pupils, to gain a place at grammar school. Children were coached for the 11-plus and it was soon realised that this was not an accurate measure of innate ability as had at first been supposed. The whole notion of intelligence being fixed and pupils falling into one of three types became highly questionable. Academically able pupils were often also very practical and technically minded. Likewise lack of academic ability was not necessarily made up for in practical aptitude. The pressure to obtain a grammar school place affected the primary school curriculum, which was increasingly based on preparation for the 11-plus.

Very few technical schools were built. Those that were came to be seen as for those too bright for secondary modern school but not good enough for grammar school. Secondary modern pupils often felt labelled as failures at 11 as they had, from the time of selection, effectively been rejected as lacking in intelligence. These schools became regarded as 'sink' schools with pupils often seeing little reason to work hard. Some secondary modern schools began to copy the grammar school curriculum by developing examination streams to enable some of their pupils to take GCE O levels. The argument that separate schools were required to provide

different curricula for different abilities began to be seriously undermined. There appeared to be a great wastage of talent caused by the poor development of pupils placed in secondary modern schools. This feeling was reflected in the growing unease concerning the validity of the increasingly discredited selection procedure. The argument for abolishing the 11-plus grew. This was especially strong among middle-class parents becoming anxious at their children's chances of entering grammar schools. The more radical versions of this view were expressed by left-wing demands for the eradication of public schools in England and Wales and for the institution of a new 'comprehensive' school system (CCCS, 1991).

Walford (2006) suggested that, as a result of the problems generated by the tripartite system, the pressure for the development of comprehensive education came from a range of groups with different interests and ideologies. By 1965 the idea of the comprehensive school was well established in the public consciousness.

The growth of comprehensive schooling (1960s and 1970s)

After the Second World War education was increasingly seen, in advanced industrial societies, as a key investment in the promotion of both economic wealth and social justice. This was a period of growth after the destruction of the war with full employment and a steady rise in living standards. According to Chitty (2014) both major political parties were committed to the principles of the welfare state, along with full employment and a mixed economy. In education throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s the emphasis was on expansion. The economy was changing to processes of mass production and the growth in white-collar and professional employment meant that these new workers needed to have completed more education. Education became increasingly seen as an economic investment. A link was perceived to exist between an educated workforce and an expanding economy. The future labour force was regarded as human capital and as such it needed to be developed.

The swinging 60s

The 1960s was a time of rising standards of living. It could be summed up by the election slogan of Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that: 'You've never had it so good'. Many factory workers were now earning high wages, and could be seen to be living a 'new lifestyle' (see Goldthorpe et al.'s 1968 thesis of the affluent worker). The structure of society was altering and more people were becoming middle class due to increasing affluence. Certainly the majority were materially much better off and with these improved living and working conditions

came raised expectations for the future. Thus the argument for increasing public expenditure on education became irresistible. The comprehensive school movement was born from an alliance of three groups:

1. leading sections of the Labour Party keen to promote social reform through education
2. the organised sectors of the teaching profession who favoured a more egalitarian system
3. some key intellectuals in the new education-related academic disciplines able to exert some influence on government thinking.

Comprehensive schooling was successfully sold to the electorate as an opportunity for making what was seen as valuable in grammar school education available to everyone. It was also presented as being essential for the needs of industrial modernisation which would enhance the wealth of all. In this it was related to Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's rhetoric of a 'technological revolution' (CCCS, 1981). This revolution would involve the reshaping of the social infrastructure of the country accompanying industrial expansion. Schools and the new universities would be egalitarian powerhouses to effect this dual transformation – a powerful vision. The detail of how investment in education would be transformed into specific economic benefits was never actually clarified and the concept of human capital always remained at a general level of application.

The comprehensive revolution

According to Chitty (2014), Labour was able to put what were seen as the sound economic arguments of developing human capital alongside desires for social reform as justification for the comprehensivisation of state education. Anthony Crosland, the Labour Secretary of State for Education, issued Circular 10/65 and then 10/66 which put pressure on LEAs to reorganise on comprehensive lines (see Lawton, 2005, for an outline of the arguments put forward by Crosland for this reorganisation). Halsey et al. (1997) suggested that the focus on the link between education and social democracy at the time can be seen in the increasing movement for reorganisation of secondary education. It was felt that in these comprehensive schools pupils from varied social backgrounds would mix and tolerance and respect towards each other would be created. Comprehensives would provide greater opportunity as pupils would be allowed to develop rather than being separated out and discriminated against. This in turn would allow the development of social democracy:

From the democratic-socialist perspective of the time it could be seen and still can be defended as a major advance in breaking down the barriers of class, gender, and ethnicity. (Halsey et al., 1997: 5)

The move towards the comprehensive school was designed to heal the divisions of the tripartite system; it was an attempt to provide a form of education that would cater for all. It was conceived of as a major political breakthrough in the development of the principle of equality of opportunity. In comprehensive schools entrance is not by ability as pupils are accepted across the whole range. In the first instance these secondary schools were often neighbourhood schools, taking all pupils from a particular geographical area in which they were situated. The 11-plus was abolished in those areas which introduced comprehensive education. This immediately reduced the pressure on pupils in their final year of primary school and also on their parents. Primary schools were now more able to follow the progressive recommendations of the *Plowden Report* (CACE, 1967). Pupils were no longer clearly stigmatised as failures at 11. They were not divided up into separate schools according to ability and they could not be identified in the street by a secondary modern or grammar school uniform.

Some of these schools were new and were built to cope with expanding numbers of pupils now entering secondary education. They were large and able to offer economies of scale. The raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1970 meant that the curriculum had to be rethought to be more inclusive. This led to increased choice and diversity in the curriculum with more extra-curricular facilities available. A generation of 'ROSLA' (raising of the school leaving age) children caused significant pedagogic issues for teachers who suddenly had to devise educationally justifiable but life-relevant experiences for young people who in many cases wanted to be at work. Schools developed a vocational curriculum for such pupils offering courses in car maintenance, keeping allotments, child care and hair and beauty. There were also differing ways of organising the teaching in these schools. Some used setting, some streaming and, increasingly, in the 1970s, classes were of mixed ability. It is interesting to note that primary schools had always been comprehensive schools in the way this term was now being applied to secondary schools. Pupils in primary schools too had usually been taught in mixed-ability classes.

Although it was never the case that there existed a single and unitary form of the comprehensive school curriculum, there were a number of tendencies that appeared to make the curriculum more relevant to the newly extended school population. This sometimes meant the inclusion of vocational areas of study for the non-academic, but it also meant that subject boundaries began to be less rigidly adhered to. Integrated humanities and integrated science courses appeared,

for example. New, open forms of assessment came into being through the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination and began to infiltrate the socially and academically prestigious GCE. In 1985 these two different systems were unified into the GCSE and forms of assessment became much more liberal, flexible and open. Continuous assessment through coursework and module tests came to have equal status with end-of-course examinations.

'Comprehensivisation' was not to make a dramatic break with the thinking and practice of the time. Although mixed-ability teaching did develop in a number of comprehensive schools, the majority were still to be streamed according to 'ability' (DES, 1965), albeit the divisions between differently labelled pupils would be more fluid and open to movement. It would appear that, while the goal of social mobility dominated, the desire to relinquish ability-based organisational structures was more muted. The comprehensive school was, however, intended to enable greater flexibility and opportunity to those whose fate had hitherto been determined at the moment of the 11-plus examination. The trend with new schools was to make them community schools so that there would be joint use of facilities. This was both a more efficient use of resources and helped promote the social democratic ideals of the Labour Party. In some LEAs the reorganisation of the tripartite system into comprehensive schools did cause problems with amalgamations between traditional grammar and non-academic secondary modern schools. There were issues of split sites and clashes of school cultures. For many, comprehensivisation did not have the successful start that had been hoped for.

The project of comprehensive education, involving a break-up and reformation of the previous tripartite system, was never in fact complete. Comprehensive schools were not universal, though in some areas they became the dominant form of state provision.

Reader Reflection: Selective or comprehensive schooling?



Jones (2016) points out that during the period 1965–88, selective grammar schools remained powerful magnets in many areas and the private/public school system was largely untouched by developments in the state sector, leaving the question about inequality and an elite system open and unanswered.

There is continuing debate as to whether selective or comprehensive schooling is the most effective form of secondary education. In considering the arguments put forward for each assess the dominant underpinning ideologies.

Where do you stand on this issue?

The history of special educational needs: the categorisation of pupils

It is worth taking a sideways step at this point to chart the development of a system of education for pupils who were considered as needing special, often separate, education provision. As with any historical analysis, the development of special educational needs (SEN) is better understood if we first consider its ideological frame of reference. Several key ideological perspectives can be identified in the field of special and inclusive education.

Models of disability

Medical models of disability focus upon diagnosing the 'problem' and providing appropriate 'treatment', cures or strategies of action for individuals. Disability is regarded as a tragedy which unfortunately some people have to live with. While the focus on treatment is viewed as beneficial, individuals may feel that they are only perceived as cases, patients or clients rather than people. They become labelled and are treated entirely in terms of this label. They and their families may feel powerless to make decisions concerning their lives being under the controlling influence of a range of professionals. The medical and scientific evidence behind the professional practice may be generally sound but some aspects of the 'treatment' and the methods used have evolved as bureaucratic and convenient ways of managing groups of people or may even be the result of ad hoc decisions taken by different 'experts'.

Social models of disability switch the focus from the individual to society. This model suggests that we should be questioning, examining and changing society itself. The whole concept of disability and special educational needs is seen as the result of social processes whereby certain individuals and minority groups are identified, labelled and then marginalised. It is the wider society that segregates and encourages the practices of discrimination. Advocates of the social model support moves towards greater integration and inclusion, perhaps where special schools no longer exist, where schools and public places are designed with all people in mind in terms of mobility and access, where teaching and the curriculum is adapted to suit all pupil needs and students are educated together. It is assumed that these integrative processes would ultimately lead to a more open, just and tolerant society. Critics of this model see it as being naive and ignoring the reality of disability. By not taking individual impairment into account all of those with disabilities may become perceived as a uniform group.

Hodkinson (2016) identifies disability movement perspectives such as the affirmative model of disability and the rights-based model of disability that can be seen as extensions of the social model. The affirmative model is built upon the premise that disabled people, not medical or educational professionals, should have control of their lives. The model is based upon firstly identifying and challenging how society excludes people and, secondly, seeking to develop a positive self and public image of disabled people. The rights-based model is a more radical approach that promotes positive legal and political action by those with disability to confront social prejudices and to demand their human rights.

The development of special education

In pre-industrial Britain people with widely differing physical and mental abilities were able to live and work together within the same communities though their contributions may have varied and allowances made for individuals with any extra individual care provided within the family and close group.

The onset of industrialisation and the development of factory working led to radical changes in lifestyles. Work became something that, for many, was done in specific locations away from the home over set hours and consisted of a limited or specialised range of tasks, perhaps part of the overall production of particular goods. Society became increasingly urbanised in the transition from largely rural, self-sufficient, subsistence communities to a cash-based economy. This transition required changes in the workforce. Output needed to be consistent, workers had to be able to follow direct instructions to complete specific tasks. Over time certain levels of literacy and numeracy were increasingly required at work and in daily life; a mass, low skilled, compliant workforce was needed and to provide this a universal system of education was required. As looked at previously the Forster Act (1870) heralded the creation of such a system in England.

From this time all children were supposed to be educated and schools found that some, due to physical or mental differences, were difficult to teach and were not making the expected progress. This became an increasing problem when payment to schools was based on results. Some pupils came to be seen as uneducable and, due to the extra resources they used, as adversely affecting the progress of their peers. The question was what to do with these pupils.

While certain physical handicaps, blindness for example, had led to the creation of a number of residential schools over previous years, they were philanthropic institutions and certainly not designed for the issues being created by this newly evolving education system. A number of committees and acts (the Egerton

Commission, 1889; the 1893 Education Act; the Sharpe Commission, 1898; the 1899 Education Act) now looked into the education of these 'different' children and proposed separate special schools to be set up and run by the local boards that had been created under the Forster Act. So over a comparatively short period of time a process of categorisation was devised whereby children were now separated out into a range of institutions.

What is interesting, and perhaps shocking, is the terminology used to identify these 'different' children and how they have remained in use over the years as forms of insult and abuse. For instance the Egerton commission recommended that each school board should appoint a medical officer to distinguish between children who were 'feeble-minded, imbeciles or idiots'. The 1921 Education Act identified five categories of children with disabilities which included mentally defective and physically defective clearly using a medical deficit model.

The years 1902 to 1944 are a period that Hodkinson (2016) calls the 'zenith of categorisation'. If some pupils were to receive a different/special education, which was more expensive for the school boards to provide, it became important that they could be identified or 'diagnosed' effectively and in the early 1900s medical and psychometric methods were being developed by psychologists such as Burt (1935) and Schonell (1924) which could do this. Forms of intelligence quotient (IQ) tests were used to measure the intelligence of children so that those who could not be educated in normal schools were identified and then sent to special schools. Making such diagnoses using these new scientific methodologies appeared unquestionably sensible to policy-makers of the day.

The 1944 Education Act stated that education should be provided to all pupils based upon their age, aptitude and ability. As we have already noted, aptitude and ability were assumed at this time to be relatively fixed largely as a result of the development of the psychometric movement. LEAs, which had replaced the local school boards, were now to be responsible for ensuring there was local provision for all pupils including those deemed to suffer from any disability of mind or body that would involve the provision of special schools or specialist teachers. The Act established 11 categories of handicap: blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally sub-normal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped, and children with speech defects. Clearly the medical model with its deficit view of the individual was, once again, pre-eminent at this time. Children were to be placed in mainstream education or special schools catering for different forms of handicap. Those classed as 'severely sub-normal' and regarded as uneducable were sent to National Health Service training centres. The 1944 Act thereby created a hierarchy of schools from grammar schools down and, with it, a corresponding hierarchy of pupils into which all children fitted somewhere.

A move away from testing and segregation

By the 1960s, as noted earlier public attitudes had begun to change regarding the classification and dividing up of pupils within the education system which was increasingly seen as unfair. There was growing scepticism of psychometric testing and the belief that intelligence was fixed was shown to be incorrect. In a similar way to which parents were increasingly unhappy if their children went to a secondary modern as opposed to a grammar school, parents with children in special schools were critical of the restrictions, segregation and labelling they were subjected to. It was increasingly felt that many pupils in special schools would be better off in mainstream education. They would not be separated from their wider peer group and the education of pupils already in mainstream would not suffer if teachers and schools were prepared to accommodate a more diverse range of pupils.

A number of years after changes had been taking place in 'mainstream' education, with the large-scale abandoning of the 11-plus and the development of comprehensive schools in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Warnock committee was set up to look into special education, reporting in 1978. The report's findings and the resulting 1981 Education Act will be picked up in Chapter 6.

Major education policy discord of the 1970s - the 1988 Education Reform Act

The post-war consensus has perhaps tended to be overstated. Though there was a move towards comprehensive education this was still not universally accepted. There was some opposition to these new forms of secondary school, particularly within the Conservative Party, where many saw a need to re-establish a Tory identity. Many Conservatives felt that they had gone along with the consensus for long enough and that it was damaging both to the electoral prospects of the party and to the country. They pointed to an insidious move to the left, which had gone largely unnoticed, under the auspices of a national consensus. Britain was felt to be in decline, both morally and economically, by many Conservative politicians from the mid-1960s onwards (see Tomlinson, 2005).

Economic crisis

There was little concern among the general public with problems in education so long as there remained full employment. This appeared to be the case in the 'swinging 60s' with the increasing affluence, a football World Cup win and hope

for even more prosperity in the future. Rising standards of living for all sectors of society, while not reducing inequality, created at least a semblance of unity, according to Chitty. Economic crisis, when it came in the 1970s, had a significant effect and 'fundamentally altered the map of British politics' (Chitty, 2014: 32). Education had been linked with the rebuilding of society after the Second World War, with secure employment, better living standards and the eradication of poverty. When there was recession, however, questions began to be asked about how effective education had been and the value gained from money previously invested. The whole of compulsory education came under scrutiny. Economic pressure to reduce spending focused attention back onto fundamental questions concerning the purposes of education.

Public outcry

Throughout the 1970s there was growing public concern regarding education, which was actively fuelled by the media, the press in particular. There was a public perception, whether based on fact or not, that education was in crisis. Standards were felt to be falling. There are ideological issues here about standards of 'what' and how they are being measured (see Kelly, 2009, for a discussion of the use and meaning of the term 'standards').

'Progressive' and 'child-centred' approaches adopted in primary schools, which had been promoted particularly in the light of the Plowden Report and much sociological and psychological research of the 1960s, were now questioned. It was felt that these approaches had led to indiscipline, lack of direction in pupils' learning and a resulting lack of knowledge acquisition. Pupils were no longer being taught the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic in any systematic way. Classrooms were portrayed as chaotic with little learning taking place.

These public concerns were highlighted by the William Tyndale Primary School case, which made the headlines in 1976 as being overly progressive and undisciplined. Here, despite the worries expressed by parents, the head teacher of William Tyndale claimed the professional expertise to continue with progressive teaching methods. The Auld Report (1976), which was set up to investigate the case, found many faults with how the school was being run. This instance, by the media attention it drew, strengthened the public mistrust of teachers, teaching methods and teachers' control over the curriculum. In secondary schools, in particular, the curriculum was felt to be too academic for many young people. It was not practical and not relevant to their future and appeared to be out of touch with modern life. This was held to account for much pupil unrest, which was perceived to be part of a growing discipline problem within schools that was spilling over into the wider society.

These new **comprehensive** schools now **came under** increasing criticism and teachers and teaching methods were seen as the **prime cause**.

Mixed ability

Mixed-ability teaching practices in secondary education had expanded throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Informed by child-centred ideologies which aimed to motivate pupils and encourage an individual approach to pupils' learning, they were increasingly criticised by traditionalists. Having to cope with such a wide range of ability in each class put a great deal of strain on many teachers, whole-class teaching being inappropriate. Pupils still often felt labelled within their classes and disruption was made worse as the able were often not challenged while the less able could feel left behind. The perception was that comprehensives were producing mediocrity by teaching to the 'middle', with ability and potential being wasted as it had been in the tripartite system. Thus, as well as the secondary curriculum not being relevant, academic standards were felt to be falling. By emphasising individual development and equality, it was felt that comprehensives and primary schools were discouraging the very competitive spirit that was needed to improve the economy. Comprehensives were at a further disadvantage in that they were often compared to, and in fact in some areas were in competition with, grammar schools that only taught able pupils.

The curriculum

The curriculum had changed in many comprehensive schools. Critics saw the traditional subjects and their content being diluted into themes or topics. History, geography and religious education were now often combined with aspects of sociology to form 'social studies' or 'integrated humanities'. Some felt this led to important traditional knowledge not being taught and being replaced by the transmission of what were portrayed as left-wing egalitarian beliefs. Teachers were not felt to be upholding traditional stable values and were stereotyped as 'lefty', indoctrinating, long-haired and lazy. Schools and teachers were apparently to blame for many of the country's problems. In a seminal article in the *Times Educational Supplement* (Weinstock, 1976: 2) entitled 'I blame the teachers', key industrialist Arnold Weinstock blamed them for the economic and social problems of the time. These criticisms were cited and much of the growing unrest captured in a series of Black Papers written by a group of right-wing politicians and thinkers published between 1969 and 1977 (Cox and Boyson, 1975; 1977; Cox and Dyson, 1969a; 1969b; 1970). They 'provided a hostile critique of comprehensive

trends in Britain' (Pring, 2012: 34). They criticised falling standards and an associated moral decline and put both down to progressive teaching methods encouraged in the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967). The Black Papers claimed this ideology led to sloppiness, lack of rigour, decline in discipline and disruption in the education of all pupils.

The 'great debate'

The Black Papers critique can be seen as a humanist backlash against the prevailing progressive and social democratic ideologies of the time which had also been linked to the reconstructionists. The solution suggested in the later of the papers was to take control of the curriculum and the running of education away from the teachers and the educationalists and place them in the hands of the parents and employers. Thus a policy of market forces was proposed, where the power of the consumer, not the producer, determined the 'product'. These criticisms of the education system and those who had been running it reflected the growing importance of what became known as the 'New Right' within the Conservative Party. They raised questions about the purpose of education in society including issues of what and how pupils should be taught. As value for money came to be seen as increasingly important in the growing recession, these questions were also asked by the Labour Prime Minister of the time, James Callaghan.

Under increasing economic pressure and with growing public concern being expressed over education, a speech made by Callaghan at Ruskin College in 1976 marked a significant point in the history of recent education policy. Callaghan's intentions for the speech are still debated (see Ball, 2013, and Lawton, 2005). It could be taken as a critique of a system in crisis or it could be interpreted as a desire to move to a more radical agenda. He did not openly condemn education; in fact he noted achievements, though this was done with faint praise.

Callaghan spoke of issues that caused him concern and that needed attention. He felt that the curriculum was not appropriate for the needs of a modern economy and that many of the brightest pupils were not being encouraged and were even being discouraged from taking up courses relevant to careers in industry. He noted the great strides in social aspects of education but was also worried that a number of pupils were not acquiring the basic academic skills needed in later life. Though teachers were professionally involved in the curriculum, he felt it should not just be left to them – others in society needed to be involved. To this end Callaghan proposed a 'great debate' concerning the curriculum. Certainly this can be seen as the first significant occasion since the 1944 Act on which teacher autonomy in curriculum matters was questioned by the government in power.

What this speech signified was the growing public feeling stoked by politicians and the media that the education system needed to be more accountable. It was felt that teachers and LEAs needed to be responsive to the wider society which was, after all, paying for education. In ideological terms the focus was shifting away from the individual pupil and more towards society and the importance of traditional knowledge.

When Labour lost the general election of 1979 there followed a substantial period of Conservative government up until 1997. The early Thatcher years were a time of economic and social upheaval. There was a change in emphasis from the social democratic policies of the consensus politicians to the rigours of monetarism and the free market. This was reflected throughout government policy and so too in education. Education had come to be seen as part of the national problem and it provided a convenient scapegoat for intractable economic and social issues. Education could also, while undergoing a process of reform, be seen as a future solution to many of the economic difficulties of the time. It could prepare suitable workers and instil social responsibility and respect for authority among the young. What had previously been an education programme for a new affluent society had come to be seen as politically biased and damaging to the nation's development. It was claimed there was a need to get back to basics, to eliminate political meddling in education, to return to traditional values and at the same time modernise education for the needs of a changing economy. There was an ideological shift taking place in public life from progressivism to (classical) humanism alongside instrumentalism and economic revisionism.

The post-1944 period began with what has been portrayed as a general consensus in terms of the desirability of development and expansion in education. There was hope for the future and for the development of a better society. By the early 1970s there had been rapid curriculum development, an increase in the 'pupil-centred approach' to learning and the implementation of the first wave of comprehensive schools. By the mid-1970s there was an economic downturn and education increasingly became a focus of national concern through the 'great debate' on education. In some quarters it was felt there had been a fall in academic standards and that teachers, with their progressive teaching methods, had played a major part in the nation's moral decline. The stage was now set for the demise of the comprehensive school system and the increasing importance of the market in secondary education.

Following the 1979 general election, when the Conservative Party regained power, they implemented two key policy changes. New vocationalism was expanded. Labour had made some efforts beforehand, but the Conservatives expanded it considerably through initiatives such as the Technical, Vocational and

Educational Initiative (TVEI), which existed to advise schools on relevant curriculum changes. There was scepticism that the true reason for this scheme was one of a series of attempts to reduce the power of LEAs, which the Conservative government felt had too much control at a local level (Phillips, 2001). Initiatives such as Youth Training Schemes were devised ostensibly to improve the vocational training of 16 year olds but additionally, of course, to reduce the high youth unemployment, which was regarded as one of the causes of city riots in the late 1970s. The Conservatives also introduced the assisted places scheme in 1980 which allowed 'gifted' children who could not afford to go to fee-paying schools to have free places if they passed the school entrance exam.

By the 1980s the political ideology that drove the Conservative government, that is, competition through market forces, alongside a desire to return to traditional values began to spawn a series of policies which were to dramatically change the face of modern education in Britain. These became manifest mostly through the 1988 Education Reform Act (DES, 1988) which introduced both structural and curricular changes. These were aimed at creating a 'market' whereby schools competed with each other for 'customers' (pupils) and ensured a traditional subject-based curriculum for all pupils. The (rather crude) theory was that, in exposing the achievements of schools through close inspection of a tightly controlled national curriculum and league tables of examination results, weaker schools would lose pupils to the good schools and would be forced to improve or close.

At this point we leave our historical overview and pick up the story of ideologically driven competition and diversity in Chapter 6 because the policy initiatives that have shaped English education since the 1988 Reform Act need careful and thorough examination within prevailing political and socio-economic influences. Meanwhile, we pause to examine notions of curriculum with a particular emphasis on the English national curriculum as a case study.

Reader Reflection: The history of English education – a sad story?

In the conclusion to his book, Gillard (2011) assesses the history of English education as a long struggle to create an education system which values all and says it has, in many ways, been a sad story. He goes on to explain:

In the 19th century there was hostility to the very idea of mass education and, when that argument was eventually won, the system which evolved was based on the entrenched class divisions of English society.



In the first half of the 20th century the divisions continued, only now they were presented as being based on theories of intelligence rather than on social class.

By the middle of the century these theories had been shown to be spurious, and for a brief spell – in the 1960s and early 1970s – it looked as though, finally, England might get a truly comprehensive public education service.

But since 1976 (when Callaghan gave his Ruskin College speech and started the 'Great Debate') the trend has been back to division and elitism.

Prime ministers from Thatcher onwards have sought to replace public service with market forces.

To what extent do you agree with Gillard's assessment?

Conclusion

This historical appraisal has revealed huge ideological shifts and conflicts that can still be felt in contemporary values and ideas about education. We have seen how nineteenth-century concerns about education for the working classes being dangerous have given way to powerful, often socialist, pressures to make education accessible to the people and to reconstruct the curriculum along more inclusive and liberal lines. The seminal 1944 Act seems to have instigated many of the themes that still haunt debates about education. A central issue remains the provision of differentiated schooling. While liberally providing education for all, the Act ensured that differentiation of provision would be structurally established, a legacy that remains powerful. The contemporary curriculum, with its tensions between academic knowledge and life skills, liberal conceptions of learning and vocational training, bears something of the unresolved tensions of that history (CCCS, 1981).

We might conclude that, since the Second World War, industrial societies have seen the development of education systems in terms of the social democratic ideals of social equality. Schools and the processes of schooling are viewed as instruments of social advancement. Expansions of the higher education system during the late 1940s, the 1960s and the 1990s represent significant phases in the development of this ideal. During these periods the school was increasingly seen as a route towards the social advancement that higher education appeared to offer. This represents a very significant change from the situation before the Second World War under the elementary school system. The transition to the

tripartite system and later to comprehensive schooling was designed to enable greater numbers of working-class children to make progress through the school to higher education and thereby to social advancement. The education system, at least in the state sector, was being redefined in this process as ostensibly meritocratic. Reay (2013) has argued that this meritocracy was never realised and remains a powerful myth that helps hold the social hierarchy in place – little change then from the power that church schooling exerted to keep the working classes in their place 100 years earlier.

In this chapter we have taken a fairly standard chronological approach in which we have looked at the large-scale legal and societal changes that have impacted on the school system. There are, of course, other ways of viewing this history. Important areas of educational history have been opened up by a cultural studies oriented approach where questions might be asked about specific histories in the field of education. For example, the study of the role of women in the management of early board schools would help uncover the unwritten gender politics of a small but significant segment of the history of education. Exploring the practices of schooling after the First World War in the cultivation and promotion of ideas of the nation and empire, for example, might necessitate doing some archaeological or genealogical research into textbooks, recorded events, ethnographic work with the elderly and so on. Recent historical studies include accounts of the education experiences of traveller and refugee populations in England and Wales, studies conducted of teachers' roles in resistance in Europe during the Second World War, analyses of early school photographs, and studies of the cultural and social implications of school architecture. Thus different historical studies provide different perspectives on the complex interactions of policy, institutions, practices, individuals and social groups within the field of education. Overarching histories of education may still provide useful accounts of larger movements, surface trends and changing legislative frameworks for education.

It seems self-evident, perhaps, that the study of history should be central to education studies. It is necessary to understand the ideological context and political motivations for education reform and the changing social and economic conditions which helped shape them. This helps us make sense of the various educational processes, pressures, events and developmental stages that have given rise to the contemporary education scene. Studying even what may appear now as remote examples may provide useful points of reference to review and rethink contemporary dominant practices.

Student activity



It is interesting to research the history of schooling through individual case studies. Find out what you can about the history of one particular school. Evidence consisting of statistics, written accounts and pictures can be found in local and national archives, newspaper records, public libraries and perhaps from the school itself. Relate any data you find to broader social and economic events of the time and also to the history of the education system.

Recommended reading

- Chitty, C. (2014) *Education Policy in Britain*, 3rd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. In this very useful book for the education studies student Chitty considers the nature of education before giving a historical overview of education policy from the 1944 Education Act onwards. He then looks at developments in certain key areas such as the compulsory school curriculum, pre-school provision, higher education and citizenship.
- Gillard, D. (2011) *Education in England: A Brief History*, www.educationengland.org.uk/history. This is an excellent online text which, remarkably, charts the history of education from 600 AD to the present day. It is full of helpful facts, detail about all the education acts and includes some commentary. It has a very helpful timeline which includes the key events, acts and individuals within the story of English education.
- Jones, K. (2016) *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Polity Press. In the decades after 1944 the four nations of Britain shared a common educational programme. By 2015, this programme had fragmented: the patterns of schooling and higher education in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England resembled each other less and less. This new edition traces and explains this process of divergence, as well as the arguments and conflicts that have accompanied it.



Access the companion website to this book and find SAGE journal articles exploring this chapter topic in further detail: <https://study.sagepub.com/bartlettburton4e>.