

"All education is despotism. It is perhaps impossible for the young to be conducted without introducing in many cases the tyranny of implicit obedience. Go there; do that; read; write' lie down; will perhaps forever be the language addressed to youth by age." Godwin (1788)

Radical Educations

Educational Alternatives
Progressives, Libertarians and Anarchists

Aims of the Session

- To debate the key theories in relation to progressive and libertarian education
- To critically explore a range of educational establishments founded on the principles of alternative education

The Libertarian Critique of British Education

- Paradox of British educational system
- 1536 – Calvinistic Geneva
- 1717 – Prussia
- 17th century - France

Education as a Private Venture with Public Help: The Case against Free Compulsory Schooling

"I think that it is wholly inapplicable to the present condition of the country, and the actual state of education...suppose the people were taught to bear it, and to be forced to educate their children by penalties, education would be made absolutely hateful in their eyes, and would speedily cease to be endured...I don't well perceive how such a system can be established, without placing in the hands of the Government, that is of the ministers of the day, the means of dictating opinions and principals to the people."

Robert Lowe

"Political power is henceforth to reside in the poorest class of householders. We dare not place it in the hands of men who cannot read and write. The most ordinary principles of self preservation will soon make popular education the first and highest of political necessities."

What do we mean by progressive education?

- Essentially – child centred education
- Considerations of the rights of the individual are placed above all others
- Links between progressive education and socialism – both linked to the notion of the possibility of social amelioration

- 20th century – limited examples of progressive education in state schools but some existed in private schools
- Existed primarily to test the theories and practices of child-centred education
- Often promoted by left-wing as a means of rescuing the disadvantaged within society

Characteristics of progressive schooling

- Mixed ability – flexible, vertical groupings working together and/or individually in an open plan classroom under a team of teachers
- The day is integrated, the curriculum concept or problem based.
- A wide range of resources is drawn upon (audio visual equipment etc. but also the local community in various ways)
- The teaching-learning is child-centered, based on the pupil's interests, needs and skills
- The teacher is a guide and supporter to the child's pursuit of learning
- Academic learning is balanced by social and emotional learning, emphasising creativity and self-expression
- Decisions in the school are made by all those involved in it

- First socialist critique of state education was developed by Socialist Sunday School movement 1892
- 10 precepts rather than 10 commandments
- Set the tone for future critiques of the education system

1890 – 1920

- Movement for libertarian education in Europe
- New Schools Movement
 - [Abbotsholme \(1889\)](#)
 - [Bedales \(1893\)](#)
 - [King Alfred School \(1898\)](#)
- Establishment was reaction against classical education and Christianity

- Limited examples of these people working within government or having significant influence within the state
- First wave of progressivism – 1809s +, mainly related to kindergarten and nursery schools
- Second wave – 1922 + - upsurge in child-centred education following First World War

- Hadow Reports 1931, 1933 – talked of development of children in stages and pedagogy needs to be built around this recognition. Based heavily on psychology and science. Birth of the modern primary school
- Third wave – 1967 + Plowden Report, links with Piaget. Again talked of child centred initiatives

The work of Edmond Holmes 1850-1936

- Route to salvation was through suppression and adherence to rules.
- Scripture lessons, rote learning, payments by results, rewards punishments and examinations were the norm
- Holmes and Utopia – pedagogical system based on self-realisation and enlightenment

'I write as one who is championing a revolutionary movement...which in its attempt to get to bedrock, threatens to undermine the very foundations of our western way of life.'
Holmes (1914)

- New Education Fellowship - 'New Ideals in Education' 1914
- *The Times* monthly supplement
- Prof Culverwell March 1916 *'The most important of all educational questions hinges on that of freedom.'*
- Quarterly journal 'Education for the New Era' 1920 Beatrice Ensor
- Opening editorial – *'Freedom, Tolerance and Understanding have burst the doors so carefully locked upon them in the secret chambers in the souls of men...in all realms of thought and action they move: not least in education.'*

- Establishment of Summerhill (1924), Dartington Hall (1926) and Beacon Hill (1927)
- 1890-1930 – emergence of series of Libertarian Sunday Schools in certain areas
- Schools were often the creation of the children alone and were for the working class, not of it

The work of Paul Robin

- 1867 - following collapse of the Paris Commune drafted report on integral education for First International's Second Congress
- 1879 - became Inspector of Schools then began to develop his educational philosophy at Cempuis
- Removed from post 14 years later '...refused to teach the orphans that France is bigger than the world or that God is bigger than man.' Liberty (1894)
- 1897 - League for Libertarian Education formed

Libertarian Education

- Education needs to be free from all - including the teacher!
- Francisco Ferrer - La Escuela Moderna 1900
- 1907-1921 - Modern Schools in UK
- Ferrer & Godwin - learning can only flourish in a libertarian environment
- Removal of all coercion in education
- Learning as a spontaneous process

- 1908 Freedom published circular addressing the question of teachers and teaching
- Number of schools began to emerge Ferrer Schools or Modern Schools
- 1900 The Labour Annual - Alfred Russell 'The Social Teaching of Children'

'...Teaching, to be effective, should take growth of the child mind into account. Teachers need to pay attention to the child's mode of looking at things. Use of graphics, simple language conveying word-pictures and expressing thoughts within the child's ordinary knowledge and experience leads the child naturally, almost inevitably, to more far-reaching conclusions...Teaching should be free from bookishness and elaboration and should be human and direct.'

- Evidently there was a demand for libertarian style education spreading across the UK during 1890-1930 period
- Demonstrated a clear need for knowledge and cultural considerations of education
- Modern schools generally had own characteristics, no requirement to follow particular curriculum, range of subjects enabled pupil choice
- Commonality in attitude to discipline, rewards, punishments and coercion
- Showed an active and coherent critique of the current education system

Libertarian Education 1920-1990

- Historical context of many of these schools reveals much about their origins
- 1920s – sought to escape barbarism of WW1
- 1940s – reaction against WW11
- 1960s – general more widespread awakening of liberal ideals, founding of Kirkdale school for example
- Number of schools established looking at educating the 'unschoolable'
- Problem is there is no standard definition of a libertarian school
- Deschooling movement in the 1970s began having significant impact on state education rather than private schools

- Underpinned by a fundamental respect for children as individuals by adults
- Not a charter for human rights but a belief in equality
- Who do children belong to?
- Charles Fourier – libertarian educational theory extols virtues of an integral education that cultivates physical as well as mental skills and develops all aspects of a child's personality
- Paris Commune 1871



- Free School Campaign 1968
- Supported development of schools outside of the state education system
- Ran by teachers and existed to link initiatives and disseminate information and ideas
- AS Neill Trust 1974 – looked to raise funds to support groups who were developing libertarian ideas on Free Schools
- 1977 Campaign for State-Supported Alternative Schools

The nature of Free Schools

- By mid 1970s number of free schools in working class communities in many major cities
- Acknowledged need to become open ended centres which enabled learning to take place
- Looked to develop resource banks for community use
- Teachers acted more as guides and enablers
- No specific curriculum offered
- If progressive education is about training and teaching to accustom children to reality of working life then Free Schools are about putting these principles into practice outside the fault-ridden state system (Shotton, 1993)



- Free school practice learning was about the interaction between the learner and the environment
- Breaks down barriers in education between children and adults as well as in the home
- Replace competition with cooperation

Libertarian Education

(Lib Ed 1988 Vol 2.1)

1. Libertarian Education is against authority
2. Schools and colleges use their authority to grade and to discipline in order to transform the learners into the sorts of products the state demands
3. In contrast, libertarian education sees education as liberation. The learner, young or old is the best judge of what they shall learn next. In our struggle to make sense of life, the things we most need are the things we most want to learn. The liberated learner controls the process – no longer the victim.

3 areas of libertarian education and schooling

- Variety of free-standing alternatives – the Free School Movement
- Private adventures in education – Homer Lane and the 'Little Commonwealth', Dartington Hall, Monkton Wyld, Beacon Hill.
- Awaits discovery inside the state education system – Braehead, Countesthorpe Academy, The Sutton Centre

- History of such schools is difficult, not a lot have been written about them
- Mainly through personal accounts, diaries and interviews.
- <http://www.libed.org.uk/>

Question

- What can you see as criticisms of progressive education?

Critiques?

'Pupil centred learning... has dethroned the teacher...this misplaced ideology has let down generations of children. It is an approach to education that has been called progressive but in fact is anything but. It privileges temporary relevance over a permanent body of knowledge' Brighton College 2008



- Generally it is the influence of politics that has led to approval or rejection of child-centered approaches
- 'a delinquent's paradise of smoking, swearing, window breaking and free love' or else 'a society of sages communing with nature, children partaking in games playing, dictating their own curriculum' (Skidelsky 1969)
- High point of British state sanctioned progressivism 1960s Labour Governments, contrasting sharply with Thatcher's Britain



- www.cre.org.uk (Campaign for Real Education)
- Melanie Phillips (1996) – progressive teaching methods are unsuitable for children, not ready both morally or intellectually
- Subversive nature of the progressive agenda – responsible for shifts in social attitudes
