

4 A modern history of schooling

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 why things in education are as they are now.

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, and will finish at the inception of a national curriculum (the story of which will be picked up in the next chapter).

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: establishing 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.

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 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 5–10 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, we could explore through records, statistics and qualitative accounts 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. 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.

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.

The *Forster Elementary Education Act 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 5 and 10 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

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 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 postwar 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 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

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. 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'.

After the First World War, state-funded education in Britain was regarded as

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. One of the consequences of the Second World War was a public demand for the postwar world to be better than the prewar world (Carr and Hartnett, 1996). 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.

The 1944 Education Act is often represented as *the* defining moment in the history of modern education. Chitty 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' (2009: 18). 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 was 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.

Labour won the postwar 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.

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 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, 2003). 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 (2001) 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 (2009) 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 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 thesis of the affluent worker, 1968). 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:

- leading sections of the Labour Party keen to promote social reform through education
- the organised sectors of the teaching profession who favoured a more egalitarian system
- 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 (Chitty, 2009) and the concept of human capital always remained at a general level of application.

According to Chitty (2009), 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 had also 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 General Certificate of Education (GCE). In 1985 these two different systems were unified into the General Certificate of Secondary Education (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', though, was not to make a dramatic break with the thinking and practice of the time. While there was the development of mixed-ability teaching in a number of comprehensive schools, the majority were still to be streamed according to 'ability' (DES, 1965), though 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 a more efficient use of resources and also 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 (2003) 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?

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

The postwar 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, 2009: 31). 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 case which made the headlines in 1976 as being overly progressive and indisciplined. Here, despite the worries expressed by parents, the head teacher of William Tyndale Primary School 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 which 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 also 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. Thus schools and teachers could be seen to be 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 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 thus 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 Lawton, 2005, and Ball, 2008). 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 that there had been a fall in academic standards and that schools had played a major part in the nation's moral decline. Teachers and their progressive teaching methods were depicted as being largely responsible. 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 TVEI, the Technical, Vocational and Educational Initiative, 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 also, 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* 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: