

# **Autobiography of a Professional Educator**

## **A tale of a eugenically defined poor racial specimen**

### **Preface**

I began to write a critique of my CV at a time when there was some interest in the writing of negative or anti CVs. For me this would have meant raising all the awkward questions that I would ask if I were interviewing myself. They would include:

“So why did that initiative end so early? It seemed to have the potential to be developed further.”

and

“You do not appear to have published very often in conventional academic journals. Why is that?”

or

“There is a lot in your CV. What themes connect all these items?”

.....return to this at the end

Years ago I learned to make much use of the word ‘include’ or ‘includes’. A very clever word because it suggests to the reader of a CV or an interviewer that if required you could produce much more. A clever word but it carries the risk that you may be asked to provide those further examples. From experience I believe that no interviewer wishes to hear more than three examples. At interview I would offer three, then pause to ask if that answered the question or would they like more? Always the answer was that they did not need to hear more. It is, therefore, a risk worth taking.

Not every plan comes off. Many years ago, having been interviewed by a far too large group of councillors, each one of whom seemed to have been given an ill-understood question to ask prepared by someone else, and seeing the job going to someone who had no clue but was clearly favoured, I later asked the chair of the panel if he wanted feedback from me on how the interview had been conducted. Not a single councillor had responded to any question from me. He did not want feedback. But I felt better for having made it clear

that not only was I dissatisfied for myself but also concerned that the authority (Liverpool LEA) was losing its way. It did not know how to stand against government or how to articulate an alternative progressive set of values. Early retirement followed.

The purpose of this attempt to write a professional autobiography is to make sense of my career. I do not know when it started or when it will finish. I imagine that my dying words will be 'assessment criteria'. For now at least making sense is my purpose. Until I approach the end of this account I won't know if there is more to it than that.

## **Introduction**

I don't think what I am about to write will be overly negative or anti. I shall cling to the word 'critical' in its best meaning and, I hope, make an attempt at producing a professional autobiography that might make sense. My too long CV I have placed as an appendix.

As a schoolteacher with young people doing coursework/projects I always told them that the introduction was the last thing to write because you were telling the reader something about what they were going to read. As ever, I have not entirely taken my own advice. In my ears are ringing the words of a girl I had taught years earlier. At a reunion she told me that I taught her the difference between a preface and an introduction. I ought to have told her that if she had not asked me the question I would not have had to think of a response: a case of learning from the questions of the learners. I said that a preface is personal in that it tells the reader why you want to write and an introduction simply tells that reader what they are about to encounter. Of course they overlap and I don't think that George Bernard Shaw ever stuck to any such 'rules' in the famous prefaces to his plays. If only Shakespeare had written just a few of the same.

I have divided what follows into a number of episodes. They are not entirely chronological partly perhaps because I know that I have a tendency to write in order to discover what it is I want to write. I was once shoved onto a dance floor with a young professional instructor who said, "I will follow you". I told her that my dancing was somewhat post-modern. "Yes", she said, "I can see that."

Come to think of it, perhaps that describes my career, especially if you define career as the dogged pursuit of a clear ambition. At the sherry party for the start of my masters degree a deputy head asked me why I wanted to do the degree. I replied that I was doing it because it looked interesting. I asked him why he was doing it. He replied that it was to obtain a headship, that he had promised his wife that they would only move house once more.

Once upon a time as a Liverpool schoolteacher our school underwent a five week long inspection by local inspectors. The report on me said that I was an enthusiast for my subject (mainly government and politics and integrated humanities/environmental studies). It took me years before I guessed that this was not a compliment. They thought that if I wanted to get on I should seek to be a head of history in a more mainstream school. That was not for me mate. I wanted change, not the reinforcement of a status quo.

Of course, I got change, revolutionary change, from a Thatcher-led government determined to force teachers to collude with a government that, apart from a public school elite and a grammar school sub-elite, treated as commodities the majority of young people, particularly those that I taught. At that point I realised very clearly that most of my career would be against the grain of government. That, I regret, included New Labour.

There was that moment in 1997 when Thatcherism was overwhelmingly rejected by the electorate (where you up for Portillo?). It seemed to be the dawn of a wonderful future. I don't suppose that I was the only one to suppress for too long my doubts about Blair. I admit that I was too late to realise that he was about to do government without politics, to stand upon its head the concept of accountability. We, the people, were to be held accountable to government for not hitting the targets that they had given us to hit. As a specialist in government and politics who had written the first draft of the last GCSE syllabus (specification) in the subject and made the accountability of government to the people a strong feature I was far too slow to come to terms with a government that saw things quite differently.

I begin seven years in. The earlier years I shall fill in later but the story of Miss Pickering resonated with my brothers Trevor and Ivor and me till close to the end of their lives. And I suppose it will to the end of mine.

## **Episode One**

### **Did Miss Pickering teach you?**

#### **And a note about Bootle**

Others may have experienced or remembered my junior school differently. I began there in 1949, the year that Russian Hero won the Grand National and the year before Al Jolson died.

Beach Road Council School in Litherland segregated boys and girls from the age of seven. The girls were downstairs and had a separate playground

where they always seemed to be playing complicated skipping games accompanied with songs. Boys were taught upstairs and, observed from above, our playground must have looked like midges swirling around on a summer evening. We played lamp post tick, off-ground tick and relieve, also called allalio (alladio in a nearby Catholic school so I have recently been told). When we played ollies no fudging was allowed.

***It has been pointed out to me that not everyone might have a complete grasp of the meanings of these terms so I shall add some explanation at the end.***

If two lads had a fight the chant 'big fight' went up and a circle was formed. Honour was very important in that playground, as was the ability to take the cane, mostly on the hand, without crying. I can remember only once getting 'six of the best' on the backside up on the huge table that served as a stage in our assembly hall. The reason for that particular caning escapes me but I seem to remember it gained me kudos. Almost every day I was, however, caned on the hand. I went home for my dinner, which meant that four times a day I crossed the Leeds, Liverpool canal usually over the swing bridge. Even if the bridge was not swung out of the way to allow barges through there were plenty of distractions and most mornings I joined the queue of lads waiting outside the office of the head Joe (not his real name) Lowe to be caned for being late.

There was always some discussion going on about where it was best to be in the queue. If you were near the front Mr. Lowe might not yet have warmed up and got his eye in so that might be a good place to position yourself. On the other hand, if his aim was not good he might catch you on the tips of your fingers or close to the wrist. Neither was desirable. Perhaps he might be getting tired when he got to the end of the, usually long, queue. That could be a good place. But he might be bad tempered by then and hit harder. Probably, I used to conclude, it was best to be in the middle and hold my hand steady so that he would hit it on the palm. To the people who assert that the cane 'did me no harm' I would ask what good it did. Strangely, it may have provided us with one strength: the power to show authority that, do what it might, it could never completely subdue us. 'Didn't hurt' was a phrase often heard.

Now I have problems with my fingers. Perhaps backside is best.

### **Positives?**

Mr. Lowe read Percy F Westerman to us; from time to time he used to pull me up by my shoulders onto the stage at assembly to sing a verse from a hymn, almost certainly by Charles Wesley; he was embarrassingly pleased when I saved a boy from drowning in the canal. The lad was so strong that all I did

was to hold his hand while he climbed out, though the lads who I had shouted at to shut up offering him pointless advice and hold my jacket so that I could lean out to catch his hand let go at that point to jump up and down and cheer so I nearly went in myself; and when George VI died in 1952 Mr. Lowe walked along the corridor opening classroom doors, putting his head round to say, 'The King is dead.' I was still mourning the death of Al Jolson.

Mr. Lowe drove me to the house in which that lad lived. I thought I knew about poverty. My family had lived in houses like this until the late twenties. But this was 1951, the Festival of Britain year. In my playground I knew kids that came to school in cheap pumps without socks in the winter. The gratitude of the lad's mother was almost unbearable to me.

### **Miss Pickering?**

I believe she had been at the school almost since it opened before the First World War. I remember that she was slim and taller than my mother and so to me at the time she appeared very tall with grey hair pulled back. She was very famous locally and had high status. My mother once stopped her in the street to ask how I was doing. Miss Pickering's response was blandly reassuring. I suppose that like my mother I never thought to question this. In fact she only taught me once or twice. I remember she showed us how to grow something in a jam jar. It involved blotting paper. She taught the clever kids and I was in the class on the other side of the corridor.

When my brother Ivor was dying we sometimes talked about school. He was twelve years older than me. One day I asked him: 'Did Miss Pickering teach you?' 'Only once or twice,' he said, 'because she only taught the clever kids and I was in the bottom class.' 'So was I.' I replied. Twelve years apart Ivor and I had sat at the same desk, the one that indicated you were second from bottom. There were thirty-three in Ivor's class but there were forty in mine so I claimed the family honour of being the thickest. I don't know what happened to the lad next to me who was bottom of the bottom class in my day but Allan Williams, the lad next to Ivor, became the pre-Epstein manager of the Beatles.

I like to believe that it secretly pleased Allan that whenever the Beatles played at Litherland Town Hall they were performing on the site of what had been the farmhouse of Pickering's Farm where Miss Pickering had grown up. Perhaps it consoled him for not being considered good enough to be taught by her.

I had long suspected that my eldest brother Trevor was taught by Miss Pickering. It is no longer a secret because when he was dying I asked, 'Did Miss Pickering teach you?' he admitted that this was so. 'Put your hands on your desks' was apparently her favoured way of quietening down boys who became obstreperous. Somehow though I cannot help feeling that Trevor let

the family down by being selected to be in the top class. Perhaps turning down the offer of a peerage was some recompense.

I learned nothing about the girls school from my eighteen years older sister Olwen but unlike me her children Elaine, David and Paul went to the mixed infants where on his first day David, seeing his sister, went to sit by Elaine. Being forcefully dragged away established in his mind what school was about. Perhaps I should have spoken more to Auntie Cissie from Belfast. She went to the school in 1912 I think.

Going back about fifty years later was a shock. I had won a contract from the Government Office on Merseyside for the University of Liverpool to evaluate the impact of its funded educational initiatives. Beach Road had money from that fund to work on a collaborative venture in Africa. I went to interview the headteacher.

The playground seemed to have shrunk but climbing the worn steps that turned to the right and looking again at the glazed brown bricks on the wall to my left I knew that my classroom would be the first on the right. Well, it sort of was. There was no wall. It was now open to the corridor. A man who I later learned was the deputy head was teaching. But children were asking questions. Really! The head's office was opposite. It was where Miss Pickering's classroom had been. We chatted amiably. In the school where every teacher had been in the all-encompassing category of 'grown ups' this man was younger than me. He showed me round. We went downstairs to what had been the girls school. But the school was now mixed. A little girl approached the head and asked a question about what was going to happen later in the day. He did not shut her up. He did not cane her. He responded to her question as though she, a mere child, had the right to engage him in conversation. It was like all of the schools I had worked in and visited. But it was not my Beach Road.

When I went to Beach Road at seven I could write in cursive double, do long multiplication and division and enjoyed playing the piano. I was told at the school that at my age I should only be printing and it always seemed to be the case that if I was allowed a dip-in pen half the nib would be broken. Within a year I could hardly read, write or do sums and I was actively campaigning for my mother to stop my music lessons. I preferred to play out.

I had, however, built a cultural archive upon which I could draw when my school teaching career began in Balliol Boys Secondary Modern in neighbouring Bootle. I was the only member of my family not to have lived in Bootle so it felt good to work there. Sitting in my classroom, a hut by the bins and the coke for the boiler, as befitted a probationary teacher of low status who had no legal power to use the cane, waiting for my first ever class to arrive, I walked the head. He had been there since 1937. He presented me

with a huge cane saying, 'Here you are lad, you won't survive without using this.' I never used it and lived to tell the tale.

## **Ah Bootle!**

We hear about the London Blitz, the Liverpool Blitz and the bombing of Coventry and more. Seventy four percent of the houses in Bootle were uninhabitable after the bombing and only seven percent undamaged. There was a good military reason for this. Although officially part of the entire network of Merseyside docks, thirty-seven miles in length, the docks in Bootle were deeper, more modern, closest to the mouth of the river and usable at any state of tide. They were crucial to the survival of Britain in the war and it was from Bootle that the frigates and sloops sailed to fight the Battle of the Atlantic. The town has, in my view, never recovered from the war and given its absence from the national narrative of World War Two I doubt it ever will.

There were a number of Welsh churches in Bootle and, having left Wales in 1909 when the English-imposed rule was that kids were not allowed to speak or learn Welsh in school, my father actually improved his Welsh grammar at Sunday school. Brother Ivor told me that he and Allan Williams saw themselves as Bootle Welsh though by the war we had moved a crucial couple of miles and escaped the worst of the bombing. We did, however, have an incendiary bomb in the garden and Olwen was hit by shrapnel. Beach Road School was close to the border with Bootle, very close to the recently closed Litherland Library that I loved and only a short distance from what must have been the most spectacular bombing of the time.

Fortunately there were no workers in Bryant and Mays Matchworks that night but imagine the sight of a factory full of wood and phosphor blazing away. My recently deceased neighbour lived a few hundred yards away and remembered it clearly. I keep wondering what the smell would have been like had the Richmond Sausage Factory opposite the library been bombed.

Miss Pickering was probably born around 1890. Her life saw the death of Queen Victoria, the beginning of National Insurance, two World Wars, the Depression, the General Strike, votes for women, the transformation of her family farm into a park and the demolition of the farmhouse to build the town hall. The year before I started at the school came the NHS making antibiotics available for the first time to those previously unable to buy them.

She would have seen probably fifteen different prime ministers, some of them doing the job at least twice, seven monarchs and one abdication. Powered flight was in the future when she was little but by the time she retired breaking the sound barrier was routine. I imagine her listening to George Vth's first Christmas wireless broadcast in 1932. My father told me

that he put the earphones in a large plant pot to amplify the speech for the family. Or might that have been 1924 when the King made his first broadcast? In 1953 Miss Pickering could have watched the Coronation on a television set.

## Empire Day

This was celebrated on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, Queen Victoria's birthday. We wore white and lined up at the bottom of the playground so that we could see Mr. Lowe break the union flag from the top of the school flagpole. Ivor's birthday was the 25<sup>th</sup> May and for years he believed our father when he said that all the flags and bunting you saw everywhere in those days were there just for his birthday. I can't help wondering when schools like Beach Road dropped celebrating Empire Day. What might be the reaction of today's schoolteachers if asked to make a school ready for such a celebration?

## Horizon

I learned the meaning of that word in an art lesson. I liked art and we were told to paint a landscape, whatever that was. I listened to Miss Allen (she may have moved to the girls school later). So I painted some brownish land with some brownish and greenish trees and a bluish sky with some whitish clouds; but horizon? Miss told us that it was a line across the picture and that it should not be in the middle; it should be two thirds of the way up or down. Well that was what I understood her to say. I waited till the paint dried, got a ruler and a pencil and drew a line across the painting. It seemed strange but if Miss said we should do it we had to. I think I have always taken my teachers rather literally.

What would my life have been like if Miss Pickering had taught me? I might have passed the scholarship, as we referred to the 11-Plus examination that purported to test our general intelligence. If I had passed I would have gone to Waterloo Boys Grammar School where Trevor's speciality best subject was playing truant and Ivor's was thinking up excuses for his absent brother. Mr. Lowe told my mother that it was a mistake to take me from the school. Eventually it was a good decision and yet I am proud of having been to Beach Road School where I learned that horizons could move. I even boast that Miss Pickering did not teach me.

## My first big word

My mother asked a young man over the road to help me recapture my ability to read. Part of his help was to give me *Biggles Sweeps the Desert* by 'Captain' WE Johns. The book begins with the words, 'So slowly as to be almost imperceptible....'. Look at all those syllables! And what a concept to

capture and store in the mind! I have loved the word 'imperceptible' ever since.

## **Explanations**

I wanted to make a link to the work of some of the relevant writings of Iona and Peter Opie but since Iona's recent death for the moment that is not possible. Their work shows the part of the UK that for some strange reason refers to the evening meal as 'dinner' and shows where 'tick' becomes 'tag' and more such.

Everybody knows that the proper order of meals is breakfast, dinner and tea, supper being a piece of toast after you have put your pyjamas on (don't forget to clean your teeth afterwards). Here is the irrefutable proof that there is no such thing as 'lunch'.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Binnie+hale+I+like+a+nice+cup+of+tea&&view=detail&mid=D1B849318148F617BBD0D1B849318148F617BBD0&&FORM=VRDGAR>

Relievo/allalio/alladio were versions of gang tick in which even if only one person in a gang was free they could release the other members who were imprisoned in what had, I suppose, once been Beach Road's bike shed by evading all opponents and, with arm outstretched, run past shouting 'allalio.'

'Ollies' were what posh kids called 'marbles' and was played in two forms. One was along the middle of a back entry/enog/jigger and the other, in the playground, required a chalked circle with two ollies inside the perimeter. One boy standing opposite outside the circle tried to flick his olly to knock the other two out of the circle. The owner of the two stationary ollies would stand behind them with heels together, toes apart so that no ollies would be scattered across the playground. 'Fudging' was when he stood too close so that when hit his ollies stayed inside the circle; hence the cry of 'no fudging': a useful piece of advice to get you through life.

I freely acknowledge not only a fading and unreliable memory but also that what may seem to be fixed rules and terminology change with time. Here is the Opie link in case it works.

<http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/opies-biography.html>

P.S. I am sure that Mr. Lowe drove a Morris 8. It was not the Series E version so must have been pre-war (yes I do know that the Series E came out in 1938).

## **Episode Two**

### **Cyril Burt and my part in his downfall**

#### **The arrival of the letter**

**From our back kitchen was one step down to the outhouse. I was on the bottom step and my mother on the top one having just brought the post through the house. I could see the brown official envelope in her hand. I knew that in it was the result of the test of my 'general intelligence' (called 11-Plus) but I prayed and offered deals to what I had been taught was God so that instead of the letter inside telling my mother that I was a failure it would be magically turned into something that would make her happy. My prayers and offered deals were unsuccessful and rejected, as I was about to be labelled and treated.**

**That was in 1953 and I shudder to think how many eleven year olds, before and since, have had similar experiences that have stayed with them throughout their lives. Designing school systems to run like that and apply labels signifying inferiority sucks the humanity from education.**

**Below is the frontispiece to Burt's book on 'Backward Children'. When the picture was taken the school leaving age was fourteen. I wonder if the boy knew that his photograph was going to be used to illustrate backwardness or if his parents gave permission.**

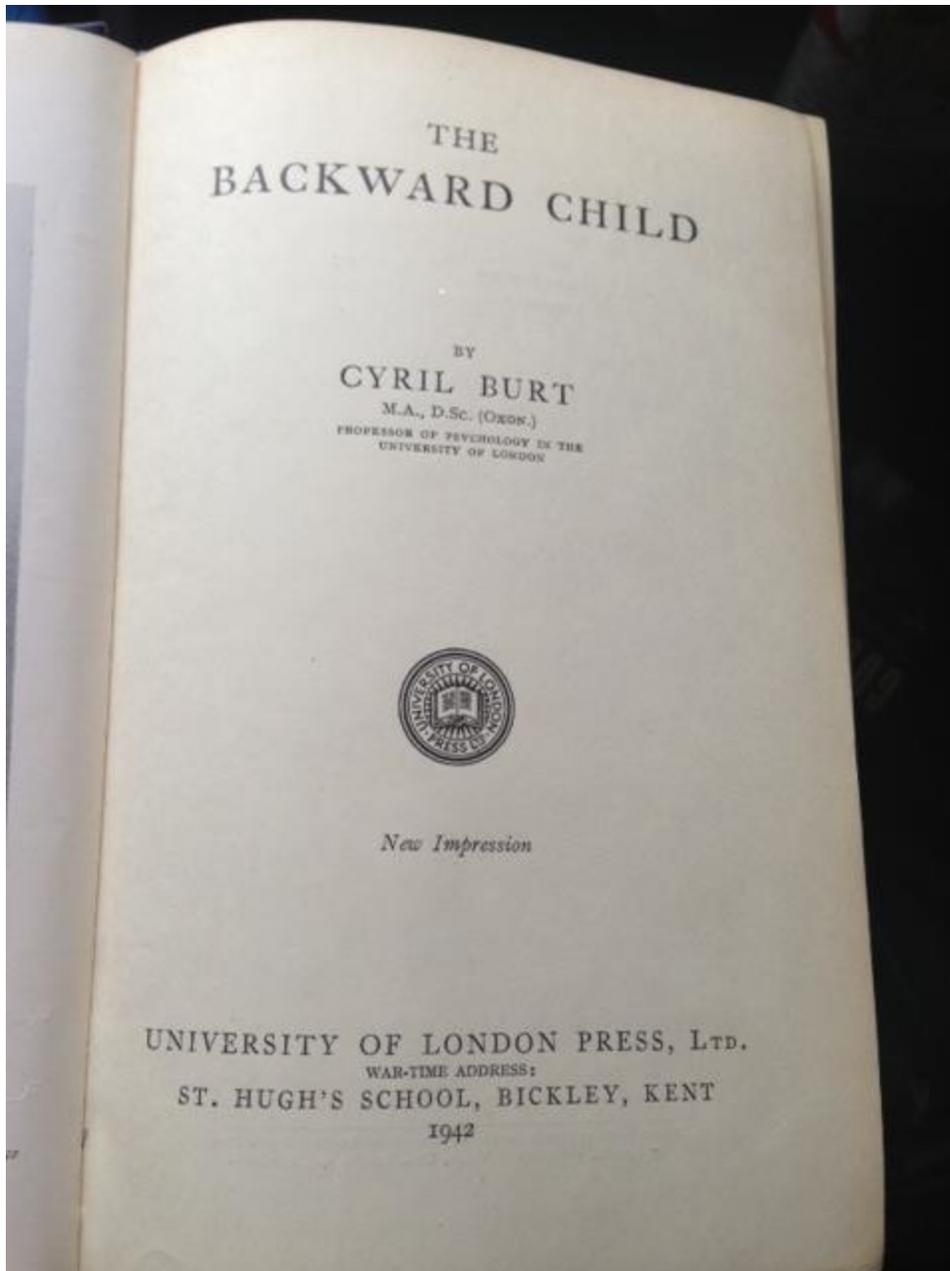
**Briefly, Burt was part of the widespread eugenics movement that sought to improve the quality of racial specimens among the general population. His strongly challenged research work as a psychologist provided much of the justification for the educational selection of children at the age of eleven. Another prominent member of the eugenics movement was Marie Stopes who remains famous for the work she did to encourage family planning. Her motive was, however, to reduce the number of poor specimens being born. She did not approve of her son marrying a woman who needed to wear glasses: racially inferior! Her son's wife was, by the way, the daughter of Barnes Wallis.**

**We can be sure that the boy pictured here was intended to illustrate what could go wrong if the eugenicists were ignored and also to support the belief that providing for the education of such children to the same extent as what were taken to be good racial specimens was a waste of resources.**

**If you are looking for a reason to justify greed and privilege eugenics is a handy notion. The rich are rich and the poor are poor, the privileged are privileged and the unprivileged are unprivileged because nature has determined that this should be so. Education was (is?) intended to play its part by separating the 'top' twenty percent capable of benefiting from a well resourced school system from the 'bottom' eighty percent who at the age of eleven were (are?) deemed too ignorant to require more than a basic education; always leaving to one side the six or seven percent in private UK education whose social privilege was such that they required no testing.**



**Below is the facing page revealing the date of publication to be the same as that of the Beveridge Report. We, including me, have almost sanctified Beveridge but like so many influential people of his generation he too was a believer in eugenics.**



Perhaps I ought to be comforted by remembering that as a member of staff of the University of Liverpool I walked the same streets as Cyril Burt when in 1908 he was appointed to be an assistant lecturer in the Faculty of Science.

**I almost forgot to mention that Irish Christian brother who at the age of seven I outwitted. Many of our neighbours were Catholic who sent their children (girls) to Seafeld Convent run by nuns of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and (boys) Saint Mary's College run by the Irish Christian Brothers. Cherie Blair went to the**

**convent. In his autobiography Blair seems to believe that his wife was a working class Liverpool girl. The school was highly selective and nowhere near Liverpool. It is virtually over the road to St. Mary's where her father went along with John Birt, Roger McGough and the sociologist Lawrie Taylor. I once asked him how he survived being in a school run by sadists who ought to have been sued under the Trades Descriptions Act for being neither Christian nor brotherly. He said that he did it by building a counter culture inside his head.**

But how did I survive? My mother took me along to take the entrance exam for the preparatory school. While we were being examined all the mothers went to the chapel to pray that their sons would get in. Not being a Catholic my mother stayed out to wonder if she was letting me down by not praying. After a while the mothers gathered to listen to this brother read out the results. When he finished my mother piped up, "But you have not mentioned my Clifford." "Well", said the brother, "he does not seem to have answered a single question."

You can imagine the scene on the bus home. She wanted to know what on earth had happened and felt that I had made a show of her in front of all the other mothers. I explained that 'this man'-I did not understand the use of the word 'brother'- who was tall (to me) and frighteningly in black from head to toe had placed me at the back of the room and threatened us that if any boy copied the work of any other boy his paper would be taken from him, torn up in front of all the other boys and he would go to hell.

I told my mother that I knew that five nines were forty five but sitting at the back I could see another boy had already written that so clearly I couldn't. To play safe in case anything I wrote was the same as any other boy I decided to write nothing. As a result, so far, I have escaped hell and congratulate myself on outsmarting an Irish Christian Brother.

## **THE INKSTER YEARS**

Along the road in which we lived was a kindergarten run by two sisters, the Misses Inkster. Even at the age of three and a half when I started there I found their name amusingly appropriate for teachers.

Down the left column of the pages of our exercise books the sisters would write in lower case cursive the letters of the alphabet. We had to fill the rest of the line with repeats of each letter. They taught us the piano using a form of notation in which the thumb was a plus sign and the other fingers were one, two, three, four. We also learned to embroider the outline of a chicken

and other animals on a piece of card. As I have mentioned earlier, I left there confident in my ability to do long division and long multiplication. And I never forget running home to tell my mother that I could spell my first word. "T,H,E, spells THE, T,H,E, spells THE, T,H,E, spells THE" I repeated all the way home.

On the other side of the road lived Vincent O'Brien my mate. His big sister's name was something like Estelle. She walked past our house to the same school that Cherie went to and, for some reason not at the same time, so did big brother Raymond to the school that Cherie's dad went to. Raymond had a red sledge. It was the cause of me nagging my father and brother Ivor to make me a sledge. The winter of 1946/7 was not only cold but the snow stayed on the ground until May. Repeated promises to make me a sledge were finally delivered on the day the snow melted. It was a converted step ladder. Might have well stayed as it was.

Many years later Raymond became Chief Executive of Merseyside County Council. His wife asked my brother why, since everyone called him Ray, Trevor always called him Raymond. "Because", said Trevor, "that is what his mother called him."

### Episode ???

I wanted to study government and politics at university. Not noticing that the full title of the LSE was The London School of Education and Political Science (I would not have wanted to go to London any way) I applied to the only three universities that offered such degrees. In those days they were Swansea, Leeds and Liverpool. There was no way that I was going to apply to do Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford. It did not seem to be a degree that you could take seriously. I was offered places in all three universities and chose Liverpool partly because of its options (what today we call modules) and partly because although my parents had decided to retire to Beddgelert, near to where my father was born, I was familiar with the city. The early sixties were a good time to be in Liverpool.

I also knew the university well because my first job on leaving school had been as a library assistant in its Cohen Library. After changing the date stamp on arrival every morning I used to hope for someone to come and ask me a question that involved getting out of my seat in order to search for something obscure. The supervisor (deputy boss I suppose) was Mr. Ricketts who had a tendency to tell jokes in Latin. I knew enough to work out where the punch line was and laugh in the right place. Then I would spend the rest of the day translating his joke so that before the end of work I could respond in Latin. My pay was seven pounds, ten shillings a week. As a factory hand in Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight I was on eleven pounds a week. The pay for helping my dad on the docks, including my time as a night watchman on board a ship in Birkenhead, I cannot remember. That was an interesting time.

The shore gang never lashed everything up before knocking off so when the weather was bad I had to do it. I would then lock everything up to settle down to read Strindberg's Miss Julie and perhaps have a snooze before almost every morning the police would somehow find a way in. As they were coming to the end of a shift what they wanted was a pound of bacon and some sausages from the galley to take home for the family breakfast. They could not say that outright and being only young I played the innocent lad who knew nothing of the world of co-operative corruption. ....

More on university....guild gazette etc... jazz ...

My first degree was what was known as a 'good honours degree', a two-two. The starting salary for a schoolteacher was about £650 p.a. Because in those days my degree was classed as good it meant an extra £220 on my salary. Perhaps I can mention that Liverpool University was notoriously stingy with its degrees that, compared with other universities, were often lower than A-Level performance predicted. Firsts were like hen's teeth. And a two-two meant you had never missed a party. I seldom did.

When comparisons with other universities became public Liverpool attempted to come into line. The Academic Secretary was not amused that the university was then accused of dumbing down.

PGCE stands for Post Graduate Certificate in Education. We called it a Cert Ed. In those days it was not necessary to have that award in order to teach. I did it because I was engaged to be married and my fiancé had one more year before graduating and it meant I could be near her.

In the previous vacation I earned a lot of money (with overtime £28 per week) cleaning inside the pipes and the boilers of Lever Brothers power station in Port Sunlight. It was extremely unhealthy and I missed a lot of the course with very bad breathing difficulties. One assignment was to have been a long essay. The idea was that at the start of the year you submitted a title and if approved the department would structure your teaching practice so that you could carry out relevant research. My chosen title was The Teaching of Government and Politics as a Non-Examined Subject. It was accepted but in every school placement I was required to teach history. At the end of the year I asked the head of department what I should do since I had been given no chance to do the research. He said, "Oh just get something down on paper." So I did and he failed it, without any feedback at all.

I had to repeat it a year later before getting my PGCE and an extra £50 a year on my salary. I did, however, get my revenge on that head of department. Many years later I saw him at a talk he was giving holding up with approval something I had written and when he retired I hired him for some work.

What I had written by the way was on behalf of three teachers associations, the Politics Association, the Economics Association and the Association of Teachers of Social Science (ATSS). At that time the curriculum was being narrowed while it was being nationalised by Kenneth Baker. We agreed to draft and submit for approval a National Curriculum programme of study covering our three areas. I wrote the first draft using as a guide what to me was clearly the best written programme I had seen, Mathematics. Hilary from ATSS then polished it off in her fluent sociologese. It was, of course, rejected by government.

It was interesting to me how government went about constructing the National Curriculum. A lot has been written about this but perhaps I can contribute a little perspective of my own. I knew Denis Lawton because we were both members of the Politics Association that was involved in the research for and the writing of the Report on Political Literacy (1978). In 1975 Denis proposed a national curriculum that instead of being devised at the top and handed down to those at the bottom would emerge from widespread discussion of social values. This was not in Kenneth Baker's mind.

My Masters in Education I loved. The tutors were great and the course was very well constructed. By then I had been closely involved in the political education movement for some time so that was a theme of my dissertation. The external examiner was Lawrence Stenhouse who asked a gathering of the students why we were not doing more empirical research. I thought I was but did not argue. Also in 1975 Stenhouse had proposed that schoolteachers be regarded as researchers in education and supported in that role by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). His book became an Open University approved text and was expected to be very influential: a delusion.

A failing of the Education Department then was that in terms of providing written feedback and feedforward it was well behind what I was used to. They simply pronounced on you. My supervisor told me that my dissertation had been singled out for publication (still not published). We waited until the secretary guarding the filing cabinet holding the reports on students was out, got into her office, pinched her key, found the report on me (the size of a post card) and there were the words 'recommended for publication'.

Sub-head???

Quality Assurance (QA), features quite a lot in my CV. At times I have attempted to capture a concept for the profession before government turned it into a stick with which to beat us. Quality Assurance in Education was one of those concepts that, having a background in government and politics, I felt ought to be humanised. To find out how the British Standards Institute trained people to operate its QA standards I enrolled on their course and obtained a qualification. I put it in my CV with the thought that it might

impress but actually most of the course concentrated on being able to demonstrate to an inspector that you were doing what your mission statement said you were doing. No one questioned the wisdom of that mission statement. Documentation was the most important evidence that you could present. I wonder if all of Tony Blair's New Labour apparatchiks had been on that course.

A feature of the course was that when it came to the use of personal pronouns they were all masculine: 'he', he', he'. I don't think anyone else noticed. There were two women in attendance. They were the silent secretaries

There is no PhD in my CV. More on why later.

## **I hate that word MARKING**

It looks like in addition to twenty two years of public examining (CSE, 16 Plus, GCSE plus Key Stage One assessment) I have also had twenty-one years of external examining in higher education. A friend once asked if the standard was higher at Russell Group universities. Interesting word 'standard'; to what does it apply? Cleverer students? Cleverer tutors? Tougher marking? None of those. For me it is the seriousness of the effort to enable students to fulfil their potential. Pressurising both students and tutors is not the way to do this. I only experienced directly one example in HE of an institution not caring to enable students to be fulfilled. As an external examiner I always hoped to leave an institution a bit better when I left. For this one I failed.

Later, a university whose masters I had validated as an external and whose staff were great, suffered from a dean whose policy was to pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap. As I write that dean is in prison for what we might call fiddling the books. And no, the standard, the standard that I feel is important, is not higher at Russell Group universities.

A developing theme of those years was what I saw as a sense of isolation throughout universities. Once upon a time staff would be allowed to play out more. As external examiners they swapped and pinched ideas from each other. It is a very good under the official radar means of professional learning. Today that is happening less and less. I would often turn up at a university to do my job only to be asked to sit in for a couple of other externals that could not make it. In one year I think I stood in for seven externals. The isolation leads staff to believe that if things are going wrong it must be their fault. My job often amounted to reassuring them that they were not alone. I would quote Young Mr. Grace of Grace Brothers:

*"You're all doing very well."*

**Which leads me to another theme: senior management. If at interview a candidate for vice chancellor utters the word 'reorganisation' they should be shown the door immediately. To begin with, these people believe that all students come in a package at eighteen to stay three years. They are a tidy package. Education, particularly professional learning, is untidy. Add on overseas students and it becomes more so. And yet staff must work to a QA system that keeps spitting them out. The consequences are more time on administration and less doing what they were appointed to do. I have been at examination boards that were totally given over to complaining about a reorganised system that was driving people demented.**

**I found the work fascinating. A good question to ask a collection of students if you get the chance is, do they learn from each other? Faces really light up when you ask that question. Unfortunately, it is not easy to define that kind of learning as an intended learning outcome when drafting modules for approval, let alone to grade it. I have learned so much from reading the work of students. They are professional critical sense-makers. It is not simply a case of them being taught a theory and learning to label accordingly something in their professional lives. If you have, say, twenty years of professional experience you don't simply learn a theory, you engage with it, challenge it and even formulate your own theories to be tested. When you see students doing that staff and externals can learn so much. As for what they have to say about changing government policy!**

**My biggest frustration was the failure to open the ears of policy makers to those professional voices. ....!!!!!!!**

### **A story of contrasting secretaries and ministers of state**

**At one time I chaired the CPD Committee of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) which represents ninety three universities in the UK. This is, however, a story of my personal perceptions and must not be taken to represent the views of UCET or any of its officers or members.**

**When Charles Clarke was Secretary of State for Education he happened to make some public remarks that revealed a considerably out-of-date view of how universities provided masters-level programmes for school teachers. This is not unusual. It was as if he had a picture in his head of Brideshead Revisited: universities as remote ivory towers accessible only to a very socially select few. UCET asked for a meeting and I wrote the briefing paper that would frame the discussion. When we met him he made sure that he had with him a civil servant who was aware of all of the issues. During the course of the meeting not only did Clarke admit that he had been wrong but he enthusiastically asked for more meetings like this. He was, I felt, not**

frightened of losing an argument if it meant that he learned something and gained another perspective.

He was, in my view unfortunately for us, moved and replaced by Ruth Kelly who cancelled all of the meetings that Clarke had scheduled. It is my belief that she was given the job as a Blair apparatchik tasked with driving through target-led policy and could, therefore, never take the risk of, or waste her time on, learning from losing an argument or having to look at education from another point of view.

David Miliband, as Schools Minister, presented himself differently when UCET went to see him on a related subject. He had written positively in response to a significant and highly favourable report on masters-level provision by universities for school teachers in England. This was the Soulsby and Swain Report which used to be available via the following link but, along with much useful material, disappeared after Michael Gove became responsible for education. On receiving our copies Mary Russell as Chief Executive of UCET and I as Chair of its CPD Committee read the report simultaneously and were constantly on the phone celebrating as we read different sections of what seemed like a love letter. We were both in danger of running out of high lighter pens.

[www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/4129/INSET%20REPORT.doc](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/4129/INSET%20REPORT.doc).

We found a very relaxed Miliband; so relaxed that he had not done his homework and had not taken the precaution of calling in an expert civil servant. Discussion was pleasant and wide-ranging but hampered by his ignorance of the very report about which he had written to us. I had to give him my own copy, unfortunately not the one covered in my notes and highlighting. That might have taught him something.

In those days David Miliband wore glasses and was the spitting image of Clark Kent. Coming out I remarked to my colleagues that we had just been in the presence of a clever and cocky sixth former who believed that he could wing it. We did not check to see if he wore his knickers inside or over his tights.

It is dangerous to generalise from such brief encounters; but, just possibly, they illustrate something. Perhaps they represent three kinds of people in government: those who are prepared to learn from mistakes; those who are so wedded to their targets that they cannot allow any deviation from the path laid out before them; and those with such an arrogant belief in their own abilities that they do not bother to make the effort. Maybe that makes them a typical cross-section of humanity but it seems to me that we have lived with governments that have included too few of the first kind. We should not listen

to their words but look at their actions. What can we expect when we hear the phrase 'lessons shall be learned'? Inaction!

I think the Miliband D combined the last two types. He loved targets but seemed not to reflect upon them once they were set. Once he did close down an initiative. It was the Best Practice Research Scholarship (BPRS). He closed it down just as it was becoming effective. He could have asked about it but did not.

## **COMMENT**

*I keep repeating that my CV includes a lot of Quality Assurance stuff, exemplifying the kind of things I did in Liverpool LEA and then at the University attempting to embed systems for humans rather than robots. I felt that once the University officially discovered QA its systems became more robotic and, to me, the quality was lessened. Filling in the form correctly seemed to be the most important requirement; although, many years ago, someone did insert the word 'normally' into university regulations. That word would often come in handy when I needed to break the rules.*

*I .....mention GCSE or the General Certificate of Secondary Education. ....appeal.....I have never seen anything in education that exceeded the level of care taken by public examination boards to get things right. To be involved in GCSE from the stage when we were drafting syllabuses (now called specifications) and papers and mark schemes for the training of teachers was so exciting. Instead of the Ordinary-Level emphasis upon the arrival at a rank order based upon the ability to recall knowledge it was more like the far superior Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE). Questions were more varied and open, enabling candidates to respond with unexpected evidence with which examiners had to engage. As with CSE, coursework encouraged research and sustained learning. We differentiated by outcome which meant that examiners had often to follow where the candidates took them.*

*GCSE provided me with what I regard as my best ever and most pleasing professional evaluation. I asked a teacher how his kids had felt about a paper I had set in Government and Politics. Normally candidates come out of an exam telling each other about the mistakes they think they have made. They are worried about their grades. His kids?*

*"Hey sir, that was a really interesting exam."*

*The thrill of professional fulfilment ran through me when I heard that. Maybe I am easy to please. But that feedback illustrates my hopeless wish that instead of giving instant grades we could visit candidates twenty years later to see what use they made of their learning. I know that is impractical. Instead of giving a grade I would also prefer examiners to write responses*

*(feedback and feedforward). Given the numbers taking exams and the shortage of examiners none of this is likely to happen soon. In the days of Mode-Three CSE and GCSE teachers could do something like this, subject to the visit of an external moderator. No government would allow this today. We also have a cultural expectation that young people must be graded. Why? Because our educational system is really a series of selections providing differently valued labels to wear for life. My wife, teaching about Anglo-Saxon kennings asked her class to devise a kenning for schools. 'School', came the response, is a 'grading place'.*

*I tried to make examinations part of the learning process. A speech by John Major in 1991 gradually turned GCSE into a measuring process. Around that time I moved from being a chief examiner writing papers and mark schemes that allowed for consideration of unexpected responses to chairing the meetings of three related subjects. They were Law, Welfare and Society and Politics. Another reason for stopping writing papers was that, no longer being a schoolteacher, I had lost the confidence that I instinctively knew what phrases would and would not work with sixteen year olds.*

### ***My last school***

*The last school in which I taught was in a community that competed, often successfully, for the title of highest unemployment in the land. Connecting that school with the community was very important, especially when local people began their fight back and began to create what became the largest housing co-operative in Western Europe. For a while government allowed us to design Mode-Three GCSEs. So, with help from a friend in an examination board, I designed one that, among other things, allowed young people to go out of school to sit on committees with architects and others to make decisions about the kinds of houses that needed to be built. Writing about, for example, their study of demographic trends in their community and how decisions were taken was made credit worthy.*

*It was the first Mode-Three GCSE in the social sciences to be approved under Section Five of the 1988 Education Act. Before it moved from being a Bill to becoming an Act it was known as Kenneth Baker's GERBIL or the Great Education Reform Bill. The Act was an enabling act meaning that it gave a Secretary of State the power to change anything at a whim. Section Five, empowering teachers to be creative, was swiftly removed. I felt swallowed up by a pet governmental gerbil. I suppose gerbils have to be fed.*

*I was also asked to help writing a Mode-Three GCSE in Women's Studies. All Liverpool secondary state schools had women doing gender related work. They became involved and the result was impressive. Had boys in schools and male teachers participated in that GCSE the consequences could only have been positive. I did very little of the work but, one night, I had to meet all*

*of these women to tell them that government did not regard Women's Studies as a subject worthy to be studied and accredited. You might imagine my feelings: I was the only man in the room and as such playing out the stereotypical masculine role of the expert explaining something complicated to women. I left that room not only unscathed but impressed that we had progressed well beyond such stereotypes. Well, we had. Government had not. The more recent attempt by our current government to virtually erase feminism and women from the Politics A-Level syllabus reinforces for me a view that for far too many Tories the role of women is to be ready with a G&T when hubby comes home after doing serious but so important work in the City. G&T does not, by the way, stand for Gifted and Talented. I learned a lot from the work done on this project. I had published on equal opportunities gender but learned that I had lots more to learn; so, I thought, did others. Government ensured that blissful ignorance was officially to be preferred.*

*Not too many references to the CV...*

*I wrote the paper that became the basis for the annual evaluation of masters and doctoral programmes provided for schoolteachers in England (see Miliband D below????). Those programmes lasted ten years. For an educational initiative under New Labour that was a lifetime. The paper emerged from the work I had done on professional learning journals and accompanying portfolio evidence. And the theoretical roots of that work were in political science. For me education and politics are entwined because they are about the inclusive discussion of and arrival at public values. They both ask what it is important to know, understand and promote. Despite much effort to penetrate the force-field around policy-makers the voices of professional educators remained unheard and Michael Gove killed off the programme. At its highest thirty five thousand teachers enrolled every year. They enrolled and were silenced. ....more!*

*My question is: "Education, is it just about obtaining a graded qualification?"*

*My CV also mentions links with what was then the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and various subject associations running programmes for members. The idea was to multiply their effectiveness and impact by means of bridging assignments that could link them with postgraduate professional development (PPD). These were the masters and doctoral programmes offered to schoolteachers in England.*

*This began with a phone call from the National College hoping for agreement that their programmes were at masters level. They were certainly not. They had no literature base and no discussion of theory. On behalf of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) I designed those bridging assignments so that teachers could critique their own work. I*

*remember as external examiner at the University of Newcastle being presented with an essay by a student. At first it looked to have an unusual format but as I read it began to make lots of sense. Then I realised that it was one of my bridging assignments. I felt very pleased. Unfortunately, UCET did not have the power to insist that every university followed the protocols agreed with the National College and a few simply granted the credit without requiring the bridging assignments. As a believer in the relationship between reputation and quality I continue to find this depressing.*

**Back to Bootle, motto: Respice, Aspice, Prospice. To which was often added, Old Spice.**

*I have mentioned that I began school teaching in a boy's secondary modern in Bootle. My classroom was in what were known as HORSAs. The initials stood for Huts Organised for the Raising of the School Age. ??????The leaving age had gone up from 14 to 15. I knew my status because outside my classroom was the coke for the boiler and all of the bins.....Dave Mumby.....the real professional.....*

*We merged with the girls' school next door the following year doing a lot of team teaching that I thoroughly enjoyed, especially as Ada, my second wife who died in 2018 was part of the team.*

*Merging boys and girls schools is very interesting. At eleven the kids have been together since they were five and are just mates. The older ones can have some problems. They won't sit together. Boys try not to cry anymore because they think they should be manly while girls try to be ladylike. These are just my impressions of course and I have never forgotten a moment when the notion of ladylike girls of thirteen or fourteen was smashed to pieces.*

*June Pritchard and Gail Sweeney were inseparable and sat at the back. Suddenly June dashed to the front, turned her head back and shouted at her best mate, "You farted!" Back came Gail's response, "I never farted, you farted!" June: "You've got farteritis you have!" And so on. Neither the class nor I found a way to appropriately respond. But I have never forgotten it.*

*Four years later, during comprehensivisation and, simultaneously, The Raising of the School Leaving Age (ROSLA) from 15 to 16, I unwillingly moved to a school whose library was perfect because taking books off shelves was discouraged.*

*In my previous school the librarian was Harry (also known as Sid) Battersby. He had represented Britain in the 1936 Olympics as a gymnast but his limbs not being what they were he was now a librarian. As a teacher he was a natural. Having to teach 'Horatius at the Bridge' by Thomas Babington Macaulay he told the kids about his best mate during the war who had held off an entire SS battalion in a narrow place so that his mates could escape. "He had a favourite poem", said Harry, "but you won't want to hear it". Of course all the boys shouted that they would. And so they were introduced to*

*Macaulay's famous poem. What, today, would Ofsted have to say about that way of teaching?*

*If young people needed to do specific research you asked Harry for help. The library was seldom closed.*

*A year later, after comprehensivisation in Bootle, I moved to a girls Catholic secondary modern in Scotland Road, Liverpool. As it was a very Catholic area there was no sense of social division. But why go back from a mixed comprehensive to a single sex selective system to which I was opposed?*

*First, I was asked to apply and second, like so many Liverpool schools at that time, it was taking part in really stimulating curriculum development linked to Mode-Three CSEs and the production of programmes for Radio Merseyside. The work was called the Childwall Project and the Director of the Teachers Centre had been Eric Midwinter. He applied to become overall Director of Education, which I think was regarded as presumptuous by the powers of the day. Instead he went off to become world famous. Our loss!*

*The school had nine Mode-Three CSEs but I regarded that as unwieldy and reduced them to three. ....*

*I shall mention my last and favourite school in my next episode.*

### **Comment**

*I was appointed in 1984.....??? Explain job.... I think it was around then but both my parents died in 1983 and I was doing my masters and dates did not seem important. The job seemed a natural for me because it carried forward the work I had been doing in my last school and gently blew on the embers of the work of Eric Midwinter. That school was a mixed but small comprehensive, which was unusual in the Catholic sector. There had been lots and lots of consultation prior to comprehensivisation and I attended many meetings and made copious notes (all lent to someone who lost them). I am absolutely certain that the majority opinion was in favour of mixed gender schools but some religious orders did not want that and I witnessed lies and manipulated voting at a level I had never before witnessed. A dog collar came to signify falsehood to me. Although a confirmed atheist I had been elected to both the Education and Community Councils of the All-Souls Deanery containing thirteen parishes.*

*At one point Archbishop Worlock came to conduct a mass for the Community Council. (An irrelevant piece of knowledge is that the church was next door to the school that Elvis Costello attended- just thought you might like to know that.) Although he had replied to every letter with which I had bombarded him about how the reorganisation was being handled he was put out that I made my letters public. He did not, I am glad to say, know my face. When the service reached the homily stage he stood up to square the circle with best quality religious bullshit. There we were, engaged in what was supposed to be an honest and open consultation exercise including teachers*

***and parents and in one short speech he knocked it on the head, kicked it into touch, reminded us that the guardians of faith had more power than the followers of faith.***

***From memory, he said***

***“Expert and informed opinion may indicate that the way forward lies over there”, waving one arm, “but religious intuition may indicate that the way forward lies over here.” He waved his other arm. “And it is for those of us who are in receipt of religious intuition to take our brethren in the right direction.”***

***I may have one or two words wrong but that is essentially what he told us. I immediately thought of 1870 and the Declaration of Papal Infallibility. What was the point of holding a long and costly consultation exercise? I remember one large meeting full of parents and some teachers in which the clear decision was that mixed gender schools were what was wanted. The priest chairing the meeting transformed this clear positive vote into a negative by saying that he would report to the Archbishop that we were not against mixed schools. I even heard one head of a boys’ grammar school tell his parents of the terrible consequences for their children of having to mix with the likes of my kids who lived down by the docks. I would have my kids any day and St. Brigids, which was in the area I had taught in for ten years, was the only school to which I applied during the reorganisation.***

***It was in this context that St. Brigids, motto Pax, came into being. It swam against the official mainstream.***

***.....changed management....best ever staff meeting....closed by the Catholic authorities....no gaffer at the meeting....Doug Hele....***

***....introduce this.....Working as an advisor on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies was great. As a schoolteacher I did not think I could work much harder but as an advisor I did. Lots of authorities were taking part in what was called a 14-16 Low Attaining Pupils Project. Unlike other authorities Liverpool was not given any money to take part but decided to do it anyway. Its Director of Education, Ken Antcliffe, may have been on a bottle of whisky a working day but he was very creative.***

***Mandy...re-read dissertation 19 years later in Athens....Masters a lost archive...***

***I do not know how many millions were spent but I think the national report could be summed up as, “If you made your lessons a bit more interesting young people might want to come into your class.”***

***Like other Local Education Authorities Liverpool was coping with government policy. On the one hand services such as the provision of supply teachers were being privatised so that profit could be extracted from money***

***intended for public service and simultaneously headteachers were gaining much more control over their budgets. Previously LEAs could order materials in bulk and save money but not now. And previously a small secondary school might manage with a part time secretary. Today they not only need a bursar but also a room full of administrators. All of this costs money. Can we justify it all on the basis that we now offer young people an improved educational experience? I am not talking about standards or expectations. The research basis for claims about improvement made by politicians is not just dodgy; there is no basis. For me the phrase 'educational experience' remains of paramount importance.***

***The notion that 20% can be chosen at eleven to go to grammar schools is based upon the highly questionable research of Cyril Burt. The positioning of what we used to call Ordinary Level (O-Level) General Certificate of Education (GCE) matched that dodgy research. The further positioning of the far more educationally superior Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) as addressing the needs of the next 40% was based upon zero research. We were told that a Grade Four CSE represented the performance of an 'average' sixteen year old. Not only did government do no research to discover and make this assumption but they could not have done: 80% of young people left school at fifteen. ....bottom 40%....***

***Appointing people better than me....a mere secretary....etc.***

***In contrast to the policy of creeping privatisation both the curriculum and the means of assessment were being nationalised. Kenneth Baker went round the country with a thin red A4 booklet telling us what we could expect. Sitting next to Ray Derricott (more on him later) on the front row at one meeting I asked the first question. I pointed out that he was differentiating schools so that different 'kinds' of young people went to different kinds of school while at the same time he was making both curriculum and assessment uniform. How, I asked, could he hold in his head at the same time the concepts of differentiation and of uniformity? His reply?***

***"That is a very interesting question."***

***He then spoke for a minute or so and made no sense at all but it enabled him to call for another question. It was not quite a master class in political bullshit but, nevertheless, impressive. For me the truth was that making the schools different enables social stratification while making the curriculum and method of assessment uniform enables government to measure and select which young people go along which educational route. As with the 11-Plus we are told that selection is only about finding out what is appropriate for each young person. Most days I pass the school in which I 'failed' to demonstrate that I could be counted among the top twenty per cent of what***

***Cyril Burt and members of the Eugenics Movement regarded as good racial specimens.***

***Having spent time introducing GCSE to teachers in the LEA I joined a team that did the same for National Curriculum Assessment. This involved being a research associate working with the University of Leeds looking at how to assess at Key Stage One (largely 7 year olds). We learned a lot. Government learned nothing. It ignored the research.***

***Among the teachers to whom my colleagues and I presented our wisdom on National Curriculum Assessment was someone from the other side of the corridor.....a member of Miss Pickering's class.***

***Couple of anecdotes...***

***As what in those days the University of Liverpool referred to as a Recognised Teacher of the University I made sure that our LEA training programme was validated at postgraduate certificate level. We must have trained most of the teachers in Liverpool.***

***The Authority was, however, in need of making cuts. That and my sense of dissatisfaction meant early retirement for me, my first of three retirements. ....payment for first year of PhD.....plus my Ofsted experience.....***

***Comment episode***

***When I retired from the Authority supply teachers were on £150 a day. Today, working for a private profit-making agency, the pay can be as low as £50 per day before stoppages . I suppose I thought that I would be some sort of wandering advisor. My wife was still teaching full time and the mortgage was under control.***

***Then the phone rang. It was the Director of CPD in education at the university. He suggested that whatever I did in future I might like to use the Education Department/Faculty as a base. Some years earlier the Liverpool Authority and the University had agreed that Liverpool's official educational evaluator-someone with whom I had frequently worked- would be given a room in the Department paid for by his ability and willingness to do some academic supervision so this kind of thinking was not new. The offer to me was not on such a grand scale. Besides which, neither of us had a clear plan. I was, however, very keen to accept the offer. For one thing, David had been very kind to me when I asked for an extension on my masters on the grounds that when my mother and then my father were ill before they died I had spent a lot of time visiting hospitals in Wales.***

***Then David became ill and I tried to help out. By then our head of department was David Hamilton. I owe him a lot. He gave me a room and some money to plan a future for CPD in the Department. This led to a rather daunting meeting***

*of everyone in the Department at which I presented my paper. David Hamilton asked the room if the Department/Faculty should retain CPD. There was a unanimous 'Yes'. He then asked who wanted to direct it. I held my breath. No-one wanted to take on the job. Eventually I was interviewed by both the Academic Secretary of the University and the chair of the Academic Committee. The job, by the way, was not advertised though if any member of the Department had raised a hand they could have got the job over me. I was appointed by the University, not by either the Faculty or the Department of Education. After a while I think I was the only one who remembered this.*

*It began as a short term contract with the proviso that every year I raised £15k for the Academic Committee. It took me years to work out that my £15k was the only income that the committee had. I think they thought they had pulled a fast one. No wonder they were nice to me. At the interview I also pulled a fast one. I suggested that after six months they might like to review my appointment against a number of 'performance indicators'. They were puzzled by the phrase. It was new to them. I said that I would draft six performance indicators that they might like to use. So I did: six performance indicators that I knew I had already met. Well, I did have a degree in politics.*

*I was fifty one with an office that had once been the bedroom of Britain's first ever medical officer of health, overlooking Abercromby Square, with ancient furniture including library steps, in a building famous for supporting the South in the US Civil War (the emblem of South Carolina is painted on the ceiling of the vestibule), that had once been the Bishop's Palace and home to a First World War double VC and where the wonderful Olive Banks had praised an essay of mine on Marxism. I was doing subsidiary sociology whose department then used that building. Olive said that she had told the Politics Department that she thought I was good but, she said, she had not convinced them. Reviewing Miriam E David's book on feminism provided me with a chance to say nice things about Olive.*

*By the way, on the opposite side of the square, in a back room, had worked the man who not only established the Manchester University School of Management but also became chair of Manchester United and of British Aerospace. Judged by rooms I was way ahead of him.*

*Ray Derricott, a predecessor of mine as Director of CPD in education, once said that you reach your intellectual peak in your early fifties and then the important thing is to work at staying at that level. Every so often I remind myself of what he said. He also told me that an essay of mine read like a draft of something I proposed to write. Then he softened the blow by saying that his writing was the same.*

*The job re-connected me with teachers that I had known as an advisor and many others throughout the country. It felt as though instead of shrinking I*

*was expanding. Today I remain in touch with former students from within and beyond the UK who inspire me. Perhaps I should work harder to let them know that.*

### **Comment**

*In 1995/6 the Education Department and Faculty of the University of Liverpool responded to an approach by an Israeli bloke who had spotted an opportunity. Schoolteachers in Israel, irrespective of their cultural, racial, religious and political backgrounds, were not only entitled to a year long sabbatical every seven or so years (shades of the never implemented James Report in the UK) but also to a wage increment and improved pension if they had a masters degree. Understandably, there was a demand for such degrees. It was, however, a demand that could not be fulfilled within Israel. If anyone reading this works or has worked in universities you will know that at times they can behave rather selfishly. Universities in Israel had the power to prevent what in the UK we used to call Teacher Training Colleges awarding masters degrees. It was a case of demand exceeding supply and control of the supply was in the hands of the established universities of Israel.*

*A number of overseas universities, including Liverpool, obtained approval to set up extensions in Israel to satisfy that demand, bringing down on our heads annual inspections within Israel by a body controlled by the home universities. They were, however, the kind of inspections that concentrated upon ensuring that you stuck to what you originally said you would be doing in order to obtain approval, including using the same texts. As it is impossible to teach creatively by sticking to the script we didn't; but we said we did.*

*This, by the way, was 1996 when the phrase 'peace tomorrow' was so frequently heard. Later, reading Ilan Pappé, I discovered that what we were hearing was a phrase empty of meaning.*

*At first the programme involved a summer school in Liverpool and a winter school in Israel. After a short while it was realised that it was far cheaper for the students if all the work was done in Israel. There was, however, a lovely Friday night in Liverpool's oldest synagogue when the place was full of locals and Muslims, Christians and Jews from Israel all together. I cannot be certain but this could have been the synagogue that Herbert Samuel, first Governor General of Palestine, went to when young. Liverpool being Liverpool, his family would have had to walk past a Welsh church to get there.*

***For the first six months my involvement was peripheral but after a bit of a dust up the programme was brought inside my area of responsibility. Looking at it closely I realised that it required more detailed costing and that cost had to be demonstrably linked to a plan to always work on the improvement of quality. What follows are two of the reasons for the dust up.***

***On arrival for my first trip I found waiting for me in my hotel room some details of an extra programme I was there to validate. I noticed that the person I had gone there to train to become an associate tutor, as a preliminary to validating the programme, had already told his students, none of whom were registered with us, that they would get a qualification from the University. He had been teaching a programme that had not been approved. When we arrived for the meeting I was further disappointed to discover that, despite my repeated messages about needing an overhead projector and about how I wanted matters to proceed (I had previously asked if they were happy with this and was told 'yes'), the table was groaning with food and there seemed to be no intention of doing any work. I felt that they believed that they had simply bought the right to use our name. The person I was supposed to train was a well-known professor in Israel who's CV was so long you could have wall papered our house with it. Perhaps he thought he was above all this.***

***A few days later my deputy who did most of the heavy lifting on the programme in its early days had to meet a student we had decided to fail after he had re-submitted an earlier failing piece of work. He was an internationally famous football referee. When he said he should be allowed to continue she told him that his first fail was his yellow card and his second was his red card; the possibility that we might do this and require him to take the work seriously seemed not to have crossed his mind.***

***For me it was the response to such incidents that was most important. It was not simply a case of me/us insisting upon a high level of quality but the realisation by all involved that doing so was very fulfilling. I don't wish to make extravagant claims but the programme brought together tutors and students with widely differing religious, ethnic, political and cultural backgrounds and provided the opportunity to create personal and professional fulfilment.***

***IPDA prize...***

**Comment**

**Comment**

**Comment**

**COMMENT**

**Fifth section**

- *Educational policy and issues of ownership*, 2016, in *Mental Health and Well-Being in the Learning and Teaching Environment*, ed. Colin Martin et al, Swan&Horn (2016).

**COMMENT**

**OVERALL COMMENT**

**A tale for teachers.**

**My wife used to tell this tale. It was from something she had read but I am afraid I cannot provide the reference. Perhaps someone can.**

**An officer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) was invited to a school to give a talk. He agreed but was nervous. He had never done this before. He knew he had to talk for a while and then invite questions. So he imagined every possible question that young people might ask and then did prodigious research to ensure that he was ready for anything, for anything!**

**To illustrate his talk he took along a stuffed animal. He gave his talk. "Any questions?" he asked. Hand goes up.**

**Pointing at the animal first young person asked, "What's it stuffed with?"**

A SHEEP, A PIG AND THE MEANING OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

## Note

I have told this story in a number of places on this website but given the determination of so many governments to impose restrictive anti creative systems of learning and assessment I think it is worth singling out for circulation.

Some years ago, in a Liverpool Nursery School where the headteacher was very keen on Records of Achievement, a four-year-old child asked the headteacher if she could put one of the two pictures she had done that day into her portfolio. The answer was 'Yes, which one?'. Now the child had done one picture of a sheep and one picture of a pig. The picture of the pig was really very good: clearly a well-delineated and recognisable pig. The picture of the sheep, on the other hand, was not very good at all.

When she asked the child which picture she wanted to choose the head was surprised to be told "The sheep, of course".

Being an experienced teacher, and remembering that a purpose of Records of Achievement was that the child should own the decision about what went into the portfolio, the head refrained from intervening at this point. She did, however, ask the parent who came to collect the child why she thought her child had chosen the poor sheep rather than the much better pig.

The mother replied, "Well you see, she has been doing pigs for months. Our house is full of her pictures of pigs. That's her first sheep."  
In other words, the achievement identified by the child as worthy of celebration was the taking of a first step towards new learning.

Having heard the headteacher tell this story it has stuck with me for a long time and I often wonder what happened to that four year old girl when she 'progressed' through a school system that required her to submit the equivalent of better and better pictures of pigs and hide her pictures of sheep.

Cliff Jones, with thanks to Rita McCogley, the headteacher from whom I pinched the story that I have used repeatedly. As far as I know no policy making politician has heard or read the story. Imagine how different our schools might be.

November 2016

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebipdaAbstracts.pdf>

My secondary school.

It was a private school. I am opposed to private schools. Why do I praise it? For me in a very strong sense it was a remedial school. It took boys that had been labelled

as failures by the prevailing system, found out what they were interested in and developed them from there.

We had just moved to live in the Wirral. My parents applied for me to take the entrance exam. My father got lost. We arrived too late. The head, John Philip Fogg, met us. He asked me if I had a hobby. I told him that I did, that I painted in oils. He then asked me to sit on my own in a classroom to write an essay about it. He liked it and I was in to be taught by some great teachers; not, however, this one.

Eric Glasgow, PhD, did not last long as our history teacher, just long enough for my class of fourteen year olds to set a standard for misbehaviour so low that when I became a teacher I swore to myself that if kids behaved to me like that I would get out of the profession. Many years later I came across him again. He was to give a talk on local history in Bootle Town Hall in the presence of the Mayor, Mayoress and civic dignities. He droned on way beyond his allotted time. People got up to help themselves to tea and butties. The Mayor and Mayoress tried to stick it out but eventually succumbed. I, meanwhile, stolidly remained in place. I even offered him a lift home afterwards. Perhaps I was visited by Methodist guilt.

It was during his brief tenure as our teacher that Foggy approached me saying, "You like history don't you? Well, I have entered you for 0-Level History". I protested that this gave me just over two months instead of two years to prepare. He believed I could do it. My first decision was to ignore my teacher. My second was to go to Philip Son and Nephews bookshop in Liverpool and buy a booklet with all of the questions from the last five years. I simply spotted the questions. You had to write five essays in two and a half hours so I guessed that if I prepared for eight there would be bound to be five on the question paper that I could manage.

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**Having bought lots of quarto sized paper (no such thing as A-4 then) from Mr. Tapley's art shop I would get up at 6AM to write, write, and write, then go for a run before cycling to school. I repeated the sequence in the evening. After I had generated plenty of drafted and re-drafted essays my first and last tasks of the day were to read what I had done, taking care to retain every crossing out and blot because I imagined myself in the exam room prompting my memory with recall of them.**

**The weather remained brilliant until the day of the exam, 27<sup>th</sup>. June 1957. I got the bus instead of cycling. Hearing the words, 'You may turn over your paper', I discovered that my question spotting had been pretty good. I ticked the five I intended to go for and decided, in the manner of an athlete to first warm up and then, having reached a peak, try not to burn out before the end. In other words, I found it helpful and de-stressing to make use of other contexts: to trick my own mind. How, for example, would I behave if I were in a race and needed a sprint finish?**

**So I chose my second best question first and what I expected to be my best second. Thoroughly warmed up and confident by then the last three caused no problems. Two months later, I was woken up in my aunt's house in Onchan, Isle of Man to learn that I had got 60%. The pass mark was 45.**

**I had in fact got an O-Level in Question Spotting and Memorising. Three days after the exam most of that stuff had left my brain. I had learned 'what'. At Advanced and State Scholarship levels I was required to discuss 'why': far more interesting.**

**15040**

## **An accidental head prefect**

**Bob Breary had left. Very popular he would have made a good head prefect. Ian Crow had left. Popular and efficient I assumed he would have been chosen. I was in the front garden when up came Brian (Bunny) Warren our geography and games master to tell me a secret. I was to become head prefect at the age of sixteen. That was early. I don't think I have had such power since. Well, probably I have but to effectively be in charge of most of what happened outside the classroom, where people walked, how much noise they made, how they should behave towards each other at the age of sixteen was quite something. I did that job for two years. I learned, or I think I learned, that the**

**secret of power is that it demands consent from others and that the more you have to use it the closer you come to losing it.**

**The job entailed making my first ever speech. The Gladstone Hall in Port Sunlight was packed with boys and parents. On the stage were the staff. The head had made his speech. Professor Porteus, as guest of honour, had made his speech and handed out prizes and then I had to make my speech. It was not long but I took a lot of trouble over it and had underlined in red the first three words of every sentence so that if unsure I could glance down and find my place easily.**

**As I walked onto the stage I could see that both fellow prefects on the front row and staff on the stage were tucking their chins into their chests. In their minds I imagined them telling themselves that Speech Day had gone well so far but now Jones was going to ruin it. This actually gave me confidence. What the staff did not know was that earlier in the day I had lined up the entire school in the playground and issued instructions. I told them that when I walked onto the stage I wanted a cheer; that when I said A I wanted laughter; that when I said B I wanted another cheer; and so on like that. I told them that I would be asking for a day's holiday but that we would probably get half a day's holiday if we played our cards well. This was very popular and all my instructions were carried out. To warm the boys up I had earlier stood up in the audience to get them to cheer after the head's speech.**

**When I got to the point of asking for the holiday I said it was not for the boys but for the staff. They work so hard I said and turning towards them I said, 'Look at their faces, they look so tired. They deserve a holiday.' We got the holiday.**