

ANOTHER EXCERPT FROM MY DRAFT PROFESSIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My first attempt at a PhD was concerned with Quality Assurance in Education. Having done some work on this while an LEA advisor part of my early retirement severance packet was the payment of a year's fee. I have written elsewhere about my futile attempt to prevent the concept of Quality Assurance in Education becoming captured and I shall concentrate upon my second PhD. First, just a reminder that to make sense of how governments see QA it helps to think of military hardware. Pick up your rifle, point it at the chosen target, pull the trigger and the bullet should be on its way. The trigger mechanism must work properly, the bullet cannot be a dud and the aim must be true. That, I believe, is how governments perceive education.

My second attempt concerned the concept of Impact. If ever a concept needed widening it is that. Narrow its definition and you serve only the interests of politicians desperate for headlines shouting to the world that while everything was rubbish under their opposition predecessors measurement now clearly demonstrates the positive impact of their policies. Just think for a moment of teachers in your past. The impact that they had upon you was not confined to their pushing you to get an extra five percent. If you did get that bit extra it was more than likely because they made you believe that you were not as thick as you thought you were. They did something to boost your self-esteem.

In other words, I felt that there was a lot in that word 'impact'. By then I was the Director of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the Faculty/Department of Education at the University of Liverpool. Briefly, because I have written about this elsewhere, the plan was to bring together five Local Education Authorities, three universities and a number of masters degree students to look at the impact that CPD was having upon the professionalism of schoolteachers.

Ofsted, the government's educational traffic warden, got in the way. The letters stand for Office for Standards in Education. We were about to have a life-threatening inspection spread over two years carried out, under the aegis of Ofsted, by HMI. Those letters stand for Her Majesty's Inspectors and, compared to ordinary Ofsted inspectors, they are trained assassins. They are also, by the way, much easier to get on with because they believe in education and are good at their work. It was crucial for our survival that we did well and as I was in charge of the inspection away went the PhD.

We did do well and so did the entire sector, so much so that all the universities in England specialising in CPD for schoolteachers were invited to take part in a programme called Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). This funded masters and doctorates for schoolteachers. The programme lasted ten years and must be a record for the lifetime of a New Labour Educational Initiative. Except, of course, that all the work setting it up was done by the Training and Development Agency for schools working with others, especially with the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET). Perhaps we should have involved a politician or two so that they could have taken all the credit and so raised its profile.

As the current chair of the UCET CPD Committee I was very much involved in setting it up. I had written a paper on evaluating the impact of CPD and it was adopted as the basis for the annual impact evaluation reports that each university had to carry out for PPD. Just imagine between twenty five and thirty five thousand schoolteachers every year registering for masters and doctorates. Many, of course, dropped out and many more failed to complete an entire programme so any guess as to how many words in total were written by professional educators making critical sense not only of their professional anxieties, concerns and interests but also, crucially, of government policy has to be uncertain. It is, however, likely to have been a lot. On top of the ordinary annual impact evaluations there were others. I am willing to bet that not one word of either the work of schoolteachers or of the evaluations was read by a single policy-maker.

Many of the evaluations are filed away on my computer and I also sent them to the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) for safe-keeping in case they were of interest to researchers. What have I learned from all this? In terms of my personal professional career I never needed a PhD. My parents had died by then so their pride in their son was not a factor. The biggest thing that I learned was that you can be involved in the most wonderful, fulfilling and, you tell yourself,

valuable project but, unless it somehow, briefly, chimes in with the image government wishes to construct for itself then tough. Estelle Morris, a former schoolteacher, was my favourite Secretary of State. She was not a Blairite. She believed in the profession.

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