

Some reflection on some of my publications

Stage five of critiquing my curriculum vitae

There are only nine items in my CV list of publications. The words 'relevant' and 'include' are prominent as I hoped to create the impression that there was much more. There is much more. For over twenty years I wrote public examinations and mark schemes. Do they count as publications? My subject was government and politics. I wrote lots of reports on those examinations. I wrote letters, pamphlets and articles campaigning on issues such as education and unemployment. I am particularly fond of one that I called 'Conforming or Transforming?' or some such title, complete with a diagram setting out the policy options as educators in Liverpool (well, some of them) confronted the consequences of unemployment. I wish I could find it now. Like lots of my stuff it is probably somewhere in the loft.

When I was a local authority advisor I was writing curriculum materials and position papers and plans for coping with changes of policy by central government. Moving to work in a university made a difference. Suddenly the personal pronoun changed from 'We' to 'I'. If a local government person had a good idea the ownership was collective. I preferred it like that. Although, noticing a schoolteacher enthusing about a diagram I had created showing how to humanise or educationalise what passed for government education policy I am afraid that I did assert my authorship. Perhaps I wanted to impress her.

Maybe the loft is where I carefully filed my views on how I thought it would be best to examine my first PhD candidate. The only official criterion was that the thesis should be 'An original contribution to knowledge' but I felt in need of more so I used my experience of teaching and examining sixteen-year-old kids to devise a set of assessment criteria, really a structure for a chat. I would be interested to read them again.

After I took early retirement as a local authority advisor David Hamilton who was head of the Department of Education at the University of Liverpool asked me to write a paper on the feasibility of CPD in the Department. Eventually I became the director of CPD and one of the first things that I did was to introduce assessment criteria and guidance for our masters provision. I am sure that some members of staff felt that this challenged their academic authority to pronounce a judgement with very little explanation. I wanted a language of assessment. As an advisor I had written a paper on it that people read, said nice things about and, smiling to themselves, continued as before. Once introduced in the education department, however, I felt that over the years that language developed as new tutors and, especially, students gave it wider and deeper meaning. It also improved conversation with external examiners and, I believe, de-mystified what was taking place. I never quite got rid of that feeling that academia was a club with secrets not entirely shared with me. It seemed to me that such a feeling was likely to be even stronger for

part time and overseas students. A secret language of assessment maintained academic mystery.

For the Childwall Project, an educational initiative full of materials supporting curriculum development, I wrote about the Equal Pay Act of 1970. My contribution was written in 1974 as the Act was being implemented. Like others I expected a positive social good from the Act. Change, however, requires more than legislation. Nevertheless, writing teaching material on feminism made me realise its potential as a subject of study. It opened up so much. It could change how we looked at history and literature and much more. My later involvement (others did most of the work) in an attempt to gain official acceptance for a GCSE in Women's Studies not only reinforced that belief but also brought home the official attitude. It was not considered to be a subject worthy of study. Today official policy remains the same. Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, virtually banished women from the A-Level Politics syllabus. He saw them as an interest group. He did, however, encounter effective resistance.

Helping (mostly watching) my mate ruthlessly re-organise my office I encountered all sorts of plans, papers and, perhaps most precious of all, ideas written on the backs of large brown envelopes. That most difficult of life's problems then confronts me: do I embolden myself to throw away my forgotten work of genius (for surely that can be the only designation for it) or do I lovingly retain it in a place where again it shall remain inaccessible until the forensically-minded executors of my will discover and publish for an eager audience my thoughts on how the Liverpool Local Education Authority should quality assure Records of Achievement in 1986?

When I was editor of **CPD Update** every month I was sent several copies. I discovered that instead of retaining one of each I had kept several. The rational thing to do was clearly to throw away the superfluous ones so I did but the sight of these precious editions in my recycling bin was almost too much. Explaining that one front page had been displayed on the wall as you walked into the offices of the General Teaching Council for England cut no ice with my determined mate.

A question is, why do I not scan or photograph all this stuff to file on a memory stick or something? Why am I so attached to pieces of paper? In my defence I believe that I am not on my own. I am working on the affliction.

From time to time I write for The Word newspaper and for Post Sixteen Educator. I have also written for Breaktime Magazine and others including blogs for the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Mostly I write for my own website. I shall try to explain my motivation.

First I must remind myself of the time a girl in my classroom asked me a question only to be nudged by another girl and told,

Don't ask 'im a question. You'll get a bleedin' lecture.

But I ask the question of myself and since Ray Derricott once said of an essay I had submitted that it read like a draft for something I intended to write I shall proceed with an enquiring mind. Ray added to his remark by saying that the same applied to him. Later I got his job.

When I edited CPD Update I used four styles of writing underpinned by decisions I had to make about what was currently important; what might be of interest; what needed to be brought to light; and what was professionally useful. Yes, they can be mixed up. Reporting a change of educational policy by the Blair government (there was a lot) required me to keep apart what seemed or purported to be straight facts and my comments upon them. Comments were needed because it is usually necessary to explain, even to guess, the professional implications of what government seems to be requiring schoolteachers to do. It is also important to spot, translate and critique what is often a misuse by government of words such as 'reform', 'modernise' and 'improve'. To make comment is also to transmit personal values so the rule of Be Fair To Your Readers has to be kept in mind. Never pass off or treat as incontestable fact personal opinion, although you can deceive yourself when following this rule.

At times I was, I hope, providing professional advice. I might take some technique I had designed and used and offer it for others to use. Because I had used it I would be able to write about its benefits and point to any pitfalls. The most enjoyable writing was, however, the editorial: about nine hundred and fifty words (a page) letting off professional steam.

So, my stylistic categories are as follows.

- Reporting news
- Commenting on the implications of news
- Introducing new (sometimes old) professional techniques
- Letting off professional steam (also known as ranting)

Perhaps the above provides some clues to my motivation or motivations. I want a thinking educational profession and I want that thinking to go far beyond submissive implementation of the latest policy wheeze or unquestioning acceptance of concepts such as leadership. In my experience most politicians believe very deeply that education is about preparing students of every age for measurement so that they can be selected to fit approved categories.

Politicians need to boast about improvement and it is very important for them to manage this measurement business so that current policy can be made to appear better than previous policy. They select clear 'subjects' for this, especially the ones they remember from the timetables of the schools they attended. There will be none of that 'integrated humanities or science stuff' and coursework must be discouraged because it allows young people to learn away from the text book and the teacher: less control. Music and art do not count because it is difficult to confine them within an approved assessment template and as for sociology!

Next there must be baselines so what shall they be? What might we think up? This is something else that motivates my writing: the sheer effrontery of governmental assertions regarding their baselines. I suppose the 11-Plus must be the most socially damaging of all the devices designed to classify and separate children. Not only was the research behind it dodgy but also its eugenic racial assumptions were and continue to be shameful. Eighty percent of the population were assumed to be inferior racial specimens and, therefore, less money would be spent on their education. But who wishes to be reminded of the contrived link between educational grades and our perceived racial value? Instead we are supposed to fall for the assertion that grammar schools are a boon to social mobility. They actually maintain social immobility: a small group labelled superior atop a large group labelled inferior.

I cannot get over the empty or wrong-headedness of politicians imposing norms upon public examination systems without bothering to do any research. I write with a growing sense that I may be one of few left who is concerned when a politician tells us where to find an average before any assessment takes place. As the years go by people forget, for example, that we were told what grade represented the performance of the average sixteen year old at a time when the leaving age was fifteen. Not only was there no research but also there could not have been any research to establish that average. And who now remembers that Kenneth Clarke ignored the research that was taking place on the performance of seven-year-old children and simply told us where to find their average? Statistics have histories and delving into those histories can uncover a dodgy foundation upon which we have built admissions to higher education, career decisions and personal value. So I write about it: not too often because it bores people. It does not bore politicians because they haven't a clue. They tell teachers what grades they must get or else and waiting to enforce the 'or else' are the educational traffic wardens called Ofsted.

I should mention my deathless poetry.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebConDemNationJan2012.pdf>

Although I had started earlier it was 2010 and our disastrous Coalition government that, with the encouragement of friends, persuaded me that ranting and writing bad poetry to match bad politics was essential if I was to stay sane. I think I did stay sane but the UK Body Politic has now clearly lost its marbles. I shall not cease to make jokes but the phrase 'This is beyond a joke' keeps popping into my head. Today it is difficult to write even very bad poetry about our politicians. I remember Tom Lehrer's reported response to Kissinger's Nobel Peace prize. Sometimes satire does not satisfy.

If my writing has had a theme with a name since 2010 that name must be **social fracking**. As I began to write on this theme it was impossible to ignore the part played by Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair as frackers of society. Gordon Brown just might have repaired at least some of the damage as he

began, rather late, to realise that light touch regulation had released the greedy to prey upon the unprotected. I used his book as a prism to help me make sense of what had been happening since 1979. I called that piece of writing, **Government With Or Without Politics**.

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

I believe that government without politics is bad government and that since 1979 we have become more and more politically illiterate because governments prefer to rule and manipulate than to expose themselves to arguments they might lose. As a result public discussion of public values seldom goes further than moaning and shrugging shoulders. Our mainstream media do not help.

David Cameron was Prime Minister for Oxfordshire whose priority was to maintain his position within the Tory Party, hence THAT referendum. Inside his bubble he seemed unaware of his disconnection from other parts of the UK that were even prepared to vote against their own self-interest as an expression of 'them and us' frustration. As I read for review the book on Brexit by Cameron's spin-doctor it became more and more clear to me that for Cameron and crew the rest of us were not a priority. The book, **UNLEASHING DEMONS, The Inside Story of Brexit** by (now Sir) Craig Oliver unwittingly reveals just how 'inside' was that 'inside story'. That disconnect cost Cameron his job and placed power in the hands of one of the few prime ministers capable of making him look less incompetent.

As New Labour was in its last year or so I wrote **The Values of New Labour, A discursion on its approaches to schooling in England and to government and politics in general**.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/The Values of New Labour.pdf>

Schooling is, by the way, what is done to horses. I confined most of my comments on education to England where the effects of government policy were particularly damaging, including the separation of children according to religion. I feel that I was writing about failure. Instead of transforming we were conforming: conforming to whatever was today's target. Blair's government failed us by incorporating failure into the system of government. If a school or a teacher or a student failed to hit a governmental target they were made to wear a sticky label telling the world that they were failures. And who set those targets? Were the targets good and wise? We were not allowed to question them. The people that sat on Blair's real and metaphorical sofa set those targets. Government was the real failure because it did government without doing politics. Instead of inclusion it gave us exclusion. As I have written so many times, Blair and New Labour turned the concept of accountability on its head. The people were made accountable to government: the very opposite of real politics. It could all have been so much better. Had it been so, had John Smith not died, had Gordon Brown not deferred to Blair we just might

have had thirteen years in which the values of 1945 could have been restored to the political lexicon.

Today Labour has as its leader someone we might call a Forty Fiver, someone who is moving the political discourse away from a narrative that justifies greed, war and austerity. The hugeness of the task of the Forty Fivers is indicated by the efforts of Blairites to get rid of Corbyn. Partly this is because with Blair they became used to government without politics and partly because a surprising number of Labour MPs support Israel, so much so that they are prepared, like Israel itself, to falsify history and pretend that a religion is a race in order to justify land theft, murder, torture, apartheid and genocide. I happen to know Israelis who are extremely supportive of Corbyn and have reviewed some of their books. Those few put to shame far too many members of our Labour Party.

Meanwhile, I discovered the Samizdat potential of Facebook. Exchanging with people mostly on matters political became intense and far more widespread in 2014. What Israel was doing in Gaza that year while Tony Blair the Peace Envoy was throwing a birthday party for Cherie hugely increased the number of people with whom I was exchanging on Facebook. At times the defenders of Israel would draw opponents into a pilpul type of argument in which disputes on matters of substance were sidetracked into fruitless discussion of tiny items of fantasy posing as history. There is really only one issue: one question: which do you prefer, imperfect humanity or perfect inhumanity? I am, by the way, rather fond of fantasy. Father Christmas is a really nice fantasy. He, however, drops no bombs down chimneys. Too often the fantasies of some people are lethal.

Facebook has also been useful because it provides opportunity to try out, receive feedback and edit drafts of what I am writing. After all, what happens when you lose an argument? You learn!

Recently I have been trying to stimulate responses about Yanis Varoufakis. I see him as a Keynesian and, therefore, a supporter of rather than an enemy of our imperfect humanity. It now looks as though I shall have to write something of blog length about his book. What is 'blog length'? No idea!

Varoufakis interests me not simply because of the common sense reasonableness of what he is saying but because of the various reactions to him by opponents. When I began to write about social fracking my final question was about why we allowed all this to happen. It seemed as though some people, when they saw a reasonable argument approaching, automatically erected an impenetrable force field. In the case of Varoufakis the force field keeping out reason is composed of out and out misrepresentations such as, "He caused all the problems"; irrelevant changes of subject such as, "He is a narcissist"; and, my particular favourite, "What kind of a finance minister rides a motorbike?"

Actually, I have some sympathy with that one though I would change it to, "What kind of finance minister would ride a Yamaha when he or she could be riding a far superior Triumph?"

I need to say something more, especially about the items in my CV list. But I shall leave that until later and a revised version of the above. This is only a first draft.

Cliff Jones 23rd. August 2018

Relevant publications include:

- (with Arnold, J, 1988) *Towards a Transforming Model of Curriculum Change*, in Smith, D, (ed.) *Partners in Change – Education in Industry Collaboration: S.C.D.C.*;
- (with Arnold, J, 1989) *Modular Approaches*, in Warwick, David, "Linking Schools and Industry", Oxford, Blackwell;
- (with Strivens, J, 1992) *Unit Accreditation: a response to a curriculum and assessment need*, in *Studies in Education Evaluation*, Vol.17, pp 275-289;
- (with Strivens, J, 1992) "*Citizenship in the National Curriculum – A Struggle for Survival*", in *Themes and Dimensions of the National Curriculum – Implications for Policy and Practice*, ed. Geoffrey Hall, Kogan Page (1992);
- (with Davis, O.J, Derricott, R and Toma, S, 1996) *In-Depth Analysis of Government Office for Merseyside Funded Developments in Education: Centre for Continuing Education, University of Liverpool*;
- (with Johnston, K, 1999) *Modular Advanced Professional Studies (MAPS), Assessment and Results at Level Three (MEd), The Liverpool Extension in Israel, 1998/99: Analysis of the Assessment of 111 Masters Dissertations*, Department of Education, University of Liverpool'.
- *The Use of a Professional Development Portfolio within a Masters Framework*, 2002, (an ESCalate report);
- *The Future of Masters in Education*, 2003, (Escalate commissioned paper).
- *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).