

After Retreat Advance

Can we imagine ourselves writing the education component of the next Labour Manifesto? We shall have to concentrate upon England because it is the biggest UK country and has suffered most from shortsighted instrumentalist policies. Here are some assertions to consider and a few comments on each.

1. Let us not isolate schools. They should be part of society, part of communities.

But is my community equal with your community? Yours looks gated to me and I am on the outside. Can we change that?

2. A re-connection with local democracy is essential.

Remember all those clerks and secretaries and librarians servicing local government? Can we bring them out of retirement? Can we train up some new ones over a weekend? Local democracy simply ain't what it used to be. It is in need of restoration. That will take time.

3. Further and higher education must be included in any manifesto alongside schools as partners. There has been far too much fragmentation.

Do you remember when professional educators from every phase, including teacher education, could be brought together to exchange concerns, ideas, anxieties and expertise; all under the umbrella of a Local Education Authority? You don't? Well, it was a while ago, in the days when the profession was more proactive. For some years now being a professional educator has meant doing as you are told, or else! It has also meant working to values that are more selfish and separatist.

4. Faith schools and academies have made fragmentation and disconnection worse. How quickly can we re-establish local community comprehensive primaries and secondaries? And, for that matter, FE? And HE?

Bearing in mind the comments above we cannot throw a switch and get rid of faith schools, academies and colleges and universities that seem only too happy to behave without regard to public values. They do, however, respond to a potential loss of money. Can we match greed with public values? Demonstrate your public values and the cheques will arrive. Fail to do so and they shall not.

5. Professional experience and expertise in all phases of education must be respected and made use of in policy making.

Michael Gove, remember, cringed when he heard any one of these E- Words: EVIDENCE, EXPERTISE, EXPERIENCE; and professional

educators were THE BLOB. Under New Labour the experience and expertise of professional educators was limited to the hitting of targets given to us by those sitting on Tony Blair's sofa.

The question is: how embedded in today's Labour Party is that way of thinking? If it is can we change it?

6. I suggest Angela Rayner gives Estelle a call and asks her about her CPD Strategy. It was very collegial but never happened.

For me Estelle, while doing her best to implement agreed party policy, fell foul of the creeping Adonisation of the Department and government in general. Her CPD Strategy would have restored some professional confidence.

Remember Best Practice Research Scholarships? David Miliband scrapped them just as they were getting good. Remember Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD)? That meant up to 35 thousand schoolteachers a year for ten years registering for a masters or a PhD. It was funded by 23 million transferred to government by the universities. It was also evaluated every year. Michael Gove scrapped all that. Both those initiatives cost peanuts and would be easy to bring back.

7. As one of many LEA advisors working with the University of Leeds research team looking at how we might establish reasonable expectations for 7 year olds I was astonished that Kenneth Clarke ignored its work. He plucked expectations out of his head and set up Ofsted to judge children and teachers on how they fitted his personal template.

The ongoing damage has long been incorporated into the system. And we have forgotten all about this. In fact our system is strewn with un and badly researched assertions such as the average performance of a 16 year old (Grade 4 CSE) and the eugenic assumption that only 20% of 11 year olds have the potential to be good racial specimens and, therefore, deserving of a full education (Cyril Burt). We may tell ourselves that all this was in the past but statistics have histories and quite unknown to today's politicians some are so embedded that policy makers go on their merry way completely unaware of the dodgy foundations for so many of their decisions.

8. If any new inspectorate is to be established (surely Ofsted must be abolished) all inspectors should be made to read the words of Lawrence Stenhouse in 1975 on how inspectors could partner teachers in research.

Today it is scarcely necessary for an Ofsted inspector to visit a school. Checking the figures is what counts. Learning from a mutually informing chat with an HMI has long been at the bottom of history's dustbin. Can we

make inspectors part of the education profession or must they remain a judgmental thing apart?

9. The new Office for Students should be re-designed with education as a public good as its purpose, not value for money. Michael Barber should not be allowed anywhere near it.

Barber's most famous book is called 'Instruction to Deliver'. He sees educators as instructors and he loves the title bestowed on him when he worked for Tony Blair: 'Mr. Deliverology.' He has also been called 'The control freak's control freak'. Master of PowerPoint and flow chart he lives and breathes the data that demonstrates how near professionals are to hitting the targets set for them. As chair of the Office for Students should anyone accidentally discover some educational penicillin he would probably mark it down as a failure to hit the designated target.

How do we de-Barberise education? First, we should never allow him near the levers of power. Second, we work hard to re-humanise educational discourse.

10. In 1975 Denis Lawton proposed that a national curriculum should be built by means of a collective discussion of our public values. Professional educators in all phases are a huge resource if we wish to do that. Including the unions and parents and students in all phases this would be a magnificent project that could become socially embedded and resistant to today's terrible trio of targets, measuring and the commodifying of both educators and learners.

At present we are suffering yet more use of education to separate us. T-Levels are the latest wheeze. I have lost count of the number of times a politician has announced that technical and vocational courses and programmes are going to have parity with academic courses and programmes. It is always nonsense. When GCSE was founded you could have written a syllabus for anything. Why not now? Because our system of education is socially discriminatory.

In terms of education probably the most socially awkward question we can be asked is: 'What school did you go to?' Add university to that. Theresa May wants more grammar schools. That means more secondary moderns. All this is sold to us in the name of social mobility: allowing a few to climb the ladder while the vast majority are forced to slide down the snake. That mobility is a malign mobility making wider the gaps between rich and poor and privileged and unprivileged. Agitating for an educational system devoted to narrowing those gaps risks the accusation of social engineering. What have we got now? Our system has been engineered to separate. It produces a social rank order. It fails to fulfil. We have been in retreat. We must advance.

Cliff Jones 8th June 2018

