

SOCIAL FRACKING AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Yet another take on the subject

What is a 'conceptual framework' when its at home?

If a concept is an idea and a framework holds things together then we have a cluster of ideas that we can use to make sense of our world. For some years I have been using Social Fracking as a conceptual framework: six ideas that I think have power because of their relationship. In the past I have often seen them as the components in a kit used to frack society.

Let me re-state them as a set of forces damaging society. Perhaps we can identify the hands on the levers exerting these forces and also work out what to do about it. So far the social frackers have been getting away with it. What follows merely sketches this conceptual framework. There are many thousands of words about it elsewhere on this website. At the end I have placed a collection of links to some of those words in case they might be of interest.

1. The Anti Political Force

Before a decision is made affecting public life there ought to be a process during which public values are discussed and arrived at. The narrower the group taking part the less political is the process. Our politicians are often unaware of or ignore this and at times even use the word 'political' as an insult, as in: 'playing politics'. They are talking about partisanship.

Downgrading or manipulating the political process shifts governments to the right. It makes them more absolutist. The further to the right you sat in the French Assembly in 1789 the more you supported absolute government in the form of the king. Tony Blair and the New Labour Project was an anti political force. It attempted to performance manage the country by setting target after target after target. And think how his cabinet, party, parliament, the press and the people were managed in order to follow Blair on Afghanistan and Iraq. Essential to this were truth-bending narratives full of constantly repeated slogans.

Textbooks on government and politics often had chapters on Accountability, by which was meant people holding government to account. New Labour thought it ought to be the other way round.

At times the British body politic was small enough to sit on a sofa.

The following link might be useful. It is a short attempt at outlining what I believe to be the political process.

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

2. The Anti Democratic Force

A good example of an anti democratic force in operation was the referendum on membership of the European Union. Its damage was increased by its pretence at being democratic. It was deceitful. It deceived in that its purpose was to decide the internal leadership of the Tory Party and to stem the haemorrhage of support to UKIP; and it deceived because of the nature and extent of the lies that were told to the electorate.

We may believe that to exercise our right to vote is to participate in a democracy: a votive offering to the goddess Demokratia; but it is the goddess Oligarkia whom we now serve.

Ferdinand Mount was in Thatcher's administration and is related to David Cameron and yet, despite his credentials as an advocate of greed and privilege, he felt compelled to reveal the extent to which small powerful groups operate in Britain. Here is a review of his book.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/25/the-new-few-ferdinand-mount-review>

3. The Anti Intellectual Force

In his book, *A Journey*, Tony Blair uses the word 'intellectual' a lot. He would have us believe that those that can set a target, get people to focus on it, take aim and hit it are intellectuals. They are actually instrumentalists who expunge doubt. Against massive opposition and declared party policy Andrew Adonis, possibly Blair's ideal of an intellectual, persuaded Blair to put up university tuition fees. Now, many years later, he can see the damage to which that has led. If doubt is the mark of an intellectual Adonis has taken many years to qualify.

Blair himself will never qualify. In his mind he has classified all his actions as justified. This is a sign of weakness. Being unwilling to learn from losing an argument is bad enough: closing down the opportunity of others to put those arguments makes it worse.

Absolutist governments suppress difference, dissent, doubt and disagreement. They prefer docility to debate. This Force has a de-intellectualising effect upon the body politic.

The review below of Susan Jacoby's book *The Age of American Unreason* is not entirely flattering but, I think, worth reading and it also provides further references.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/11/books/11kaku.html>

And here is a review of *The Blunders of our Governments* by Ivor Crewe and the late Anthony King. It abounds with examples of clever people in government eschewing doubt in the certain belief that their plans did not need to be up for discussion; very anti-intellectual!

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/04/blunders-government-king-crewe-review>

4. The Anti Educational Force

Education is about growth and development. The more it becomes a commodity the more those taking part also become commodities. Commodities are weighed and priced. Going to school is increasingly preparation for measurement. Schools, colleges and universities lose their connection with communities and with each other as they compete in the market place. Narrow the curriculum and you narrow the mind. Narrow the means of assessment (how we make sense of learning) and you narrow the mind even more.

The purpose of assessing learning is not to produce a rank order. We learned that when we discovered that assessment criteria could be a language to help us make sense of learning, including unexpected evidence for learning outcomes that were unforeseen. But governments wish us to climb league tables. A consequence is that blame awaits those not at the top. Because there is a top there has to be a bottom.

Theresa May wished to reintroduce selection for schools. It did not bother her that the twenty/eighty percentage split between those selected and those de-selected is based upon the dodgy research of eugenicists whose racist belief was that very few human specimens were worthy of a full education. We continue to suffer from that assumption.

Tony Blair detached schools from local government, separated children according to religion and introduced specialist schools, thereby breaking the promise that children would receive a good all-round education. He told us that all this was in the name of 'choice'. Who did the choosing? He was fracking the school system and his disciple, Michael Gove, made it worse.

The following link is to my attempt to draw attention to those that see education, specifically schools, as part of society. There is a further link at the end to a great short book by Stephen Kemmis and colleagues.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/At50.pdf>

5. The Anti Social Force

I could have used the word 'community' instead of 'social'. It is quite possible that Margaret Thatcher did not know what she was saying when she told us that there was no such thing as society. When challenged to define what she claimed to be implacably opposed to, socialism, she could not do it.

David Cameron, however, was very fond of the word 'society'. Remember his 'Big Society'? Although a stated aim of the Big Society was to achieve a transfer of power from central to local Cameron continued the policy of sidelining and diminishing once powerful local government. He did not understand that in order to sustain his Big Society the voluntary groups that he wished to encourage needed the support of local government. They also required funding. So did local government. It was cut for both.

The structure for the Big Society was in existence. Those relying on that structure had plenty of experience. And yet the Big Society was an embarrassing failure. Possibly we can attribute the failure to the incompetence of a prime minister who seldom considered the consequences of his actions but it is clear that in the name of society a force was exerted that hurt society.

A problem with notions such as 'community' and 'society' is that they can be perceived inclusively and exclusively. Fracking divides and separates not in order to celebrate diversity but in order to benefit the few not the many.

The following link is to my review of a book by two Americans that I think is relevant here.

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

6. The Getting Away With It Force

The first five forces combine and reinforce each other so effectively that they enable the social frackers to get away with it. How shall we counter this combination? Where to start?

I would like to revive political education. At one time Government and Politics was a popular subject in schools but, particularly in England, the National Curriculum shoved it to the margins and we were fobbed off with Citizenship.

I would like to greatly increase project/coursework in schools with many more thematic learning programmes. The boundaries between what we have defined as 'subjects' are porous. Children do not have to be given homework when they find learning interesting. They will naturally research, question and find out things. They can set their own homework.

Yes, let us have a Big Society but not as a substitute for properly organised and regulated central and local government subject to public accountability.

A problem identified by Anthony King in his last book *Who Governs Britain?* (2015) is that the tendency of our politicians to hoard power has been growing stronger through recent decades. Unfortunately, as he also points out, the ability to use that power effectively has simultaneously diminished. Under Margaret Thatcher the civil service lost power. Under New Labour its numbers were drastically reduced. The House of Commons is incapable of scrutinising proposed legislation properly and the House of Lords does not represent the electorate.

In 2007, in his book *THE TRIUMPH OF THE POLITICAL CLASS* Peter Osborne concentrates upon the narrowness of the experience of so many of our politicians. This is also a factor noted by King. So many of our politicians studied the same subject at the same university, then worked (sometimes unpaid) for politicians, were selected to stand for Parliament and eventually became ministers.

We forget that we really are subjects and that governments possess monarchical powers. I see so many of our politicians as power junkies. Like drug addicts they eat no decent food and reject the help of experts. What might change this?

We need to get lucky and happen upon a prime minister with no history of power addiction, capable of tapping into the ordinary decent and sensible values of voters and willing to share. At the same time those voters need to be more than mere recipients and receivers of policies. They need to research and evaluate evidence and to articulate their views. Social media is not always a positive but, like the dissident samizdat literature of the USSR, it has the capacity to get under the mainstream radar and change our discourse.

Or does it? Theresa May has indicated her desire to control the likes of Facebook, using the excuse of anti terrorism to silence voices she dislikes. We might be about to go into battle on this.

We live in a stratified world with some very powerful and privileged people. Maintaining and furthering that power and that privilege fracks society. A fracked society is dysfunctional. The more extensive the fracking the more the powerful and the privileged must retreat into their gated communities, physical, mental and cultural. Convincing them to change will not be easy.

A Collection of Additional Links, some of which overlap and repeat substantially the same points.

Here is part of my attempt to revive political education. It is on the website of the International Professional Development Association.

<http://ipda.org.uk/in-political-education-all-are-teachers-and-all-are-learners-a-proposal-for-successful-professional-development/>

More on political education

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frak8.pdf>

I used to set public exams in government and politics so, given the current level of incompetence demonstrated by our recent governments, I thought it would be a good idea to set an examination that we could all have a go at. You may find comforting the words, 'there are no correct answers.'

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

Here I am trying to decode the vocabulary of government and politics.

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

In the link below I have tried to provide an example of how not to do government.

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

Here I am writing about the effect that Tony Blair had on education. There were good things happening but they were despite him.

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

Here I ask who owns education policy?

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

More on policy making in education

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebFor%20DH%20Lawrence.pdf>

This is an earlier attempt to summarise what I have been writing on Social Fracking. Above I do it in six pages. Here there are twenty pages plus yet more links.

www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk

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

I called this a discourse of humanity. I feel we need one.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Counterpoint%20to%20the%20current%20Coalition%20Government1.pdf>

This is about policy making in general. The contents can be skipped electronically.

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

The values of New Labour, this is long but it is easy to skip electronically through the contents. It was written after Blair turned into Brown.

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

'Schools and teachers unwittingly contribute to making society unfair. Discuss'.

These are the last words in this essay, written while New Labour was still in power. Its theme is stratification.

http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/essay_3.pdf

Several years ago I wrote a number of essays in order to stimulate discussion. Here is how I introduced them.

http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/essay_intro.pdf

This link can be found in a number of places but I have singled it out here because I believe that is important to encourage critical engagement. I do not expect that everything I write will always convince but even when it does not perhaps it might stimulate the thinking of others. And I might learn from the process.

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

And finally, here is my letter to Michael Gove when in 2010 he became Secretary of State for Education. There was no reply.

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

For more deathless prose the website address is at the foot of the page.

Cliff Jones 1st. September 2017

