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The Values of New Labour :

**A discursion on its approaches to schooling in
England and to government and politics in general**

*Part of a series of writings and activities designed to encourage
critical professional conversation and learning*

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	2
New Labour	5
The moving finger writes: a story	6
The label	8
A campaigning government	9
So farewell then Sir Humphrey	11
Avoiding accountability and passing it on to others.....	12
Licence to teach, a further shift in accountability and the manipulation of evidence	14
Nationally shaming consequences of New Labour	17
Declaring war on abstract nouns.....	19
No professional ghetto	21
Agents of government.....	22
A story of out-sourcing policy-making	24
No real consultation but lots and lots of consultants	25
More on Government and Politics.....	26
A story of contrasting secretaries and ministers of state.....	28
Dynamism and sense of purpose of the Gadarene Swine	29
Initiative fatigue and initiative <i>withdrawal</i> fatigue.....	30
A borrowed educational vision	32
A story about a gerbil and a dextrous and verbally agile secretary of state	33
The model.....	34
Loud but shallow	35
Professional Life	36
Gurus and consultants	39
Faultlines, flaws and a poverty of purpose.....	42
A story from Key Stage One	54
Judgment	55
How can we rise above current party political values?.....	56
A critical professional conversation.....	59

Preface

I used to teach in a secondary modern just off Scotland Road in Liverpool. The area competed, often successfully, for the prize of highest unemployment figures in the country. Like other schools of the time it kept a book in which were recorded the names of pupils that had departed before their due date and where they had gone. Page after page was full of the names of children who had left because of illness; until you got to the page for 1948. That was empty. It was the year that the Labour government of Clement Attlee, against considerable opposition, introduced the National Health Service and children from that area qualified for free medical treatment.

I tell this story partly to illustrate what I think the values of a Labour Party ought to be but also to show how a political party can shift the centre ground so that other parties seek to go there. Despite its initial opposition to the NHS the Conservative government that replaced Labour in 1951 made absolutely no attempt to abolish it. They accepted the new consensus. Labour had, if you like, made the political weather and established a set of values on the left to which even its opponents felt it necessary to subscribe. I believe that, by contrast, New Labour has, probably in pursuit of Conservative votes but also because it has no socialist hinterland, shifted even further to the right the already right-leaning consensus as it had been re-constructed by Margaret Thatcher.

Professional educators now work to a more extreme version of Thatcherite values. Democracy has been diminished, dissent dismissed and professionalism perverted. Government, politics, education and society itself have suffered as a result. The only value left to be nurtured, protected and cherished by New Labour is the value of retaining office. In the interests of children, society and our own professional dignity we should attempt to rise above this.

The word 'schooling' in the title has been chosen deliberately: it is what we do to horses.

Introduction

When writing about education in the UK these days you have to be careful to distinguish the different countries so I wish to make clear that in terms of education this is a personal, though incomplete, discursion upon what has been happening in England. I believe that it has relevance for the rest of the United Kingdom, and maybe beyond, but because of the way that devolution has been managed under New Labour we are now in a situation where central government writ in education scarcely extends beyond England. The other countries of the UK now have more scope to make their own mistakes.

You may detect my feeling of frustration: a feeling that activity has been misrepresented as progress; that the professional lives of school teachers have been mis-directed; that society has been let down by the failure of government to think deeply, sensibly and critically about education; that there has been too much blaming and negative labelling; and that the educational legacy of New Labour has meant the de-professionalising of school teachers whose experience and expertise has been harnessed to deliver too many poorly chosen government targets. Recent attempts to return some proper professional decision making to school teachers by, for example, deciding to end the National Strategies have not only arrived too late but also run counter to other policies that are being enforced more strongly than ever: as some targets are removed others are reinforced that continue to create policy faultlines and contradictions. It is now being signalled that the National Strategies were a waste of time. I do not believe they were because they were doing nationally what at one time LEA advisers did locally; but the means of judging their professional usefulness was flawed.

I do not confine myself to matters educational because I believe that it is important to keep reminding ourselves that, like all areas of human activity influenced by governmental policy-makers, school teaching does not take place in a value neutral vacuum. In 1997 Tony Blair said that his priorities were 'Education, education, education'. This was really a slogan that ought to have been 'Society, society, society' because that is what school teachers were being asked to shape.

In order to cover New Labour in all of its aspects, however, I would have to have gone into health, transport, housing, industry, finance and the economy, pensions, the legal system, student grants and much else besides. I have not done that. But to achieve some illustrative perspective and set education in a larger context I have looked at the item in New Labour's political portfolio that probably reveals most about its values and its approach to government and politics: the one thing that for many years will colour the accounts of historians writing about this time: the misuse of evidence in a determined and deceitful pursuit of badly chosen, morally disturbing and, in terms of national self-interest, totally foolish targets. Yes, I do mean foreign policy and, in particular, our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. If the leaders of our New Labour government were not deliberately deceitful in the way that they presented evidence to justify the invasions of those countries then the only other

conclusion is that they were easily deluded. I am not sure if it is better to have a government of rogues or a government of incompetents.

The way that foreign policy has been constructed and pursued in order to justify those two wars provides pointers for our understanding of educational policy and much else besides. Both of these major areas of government have witnessed much sloganising and heavy and intense pressure to 'deliver' policy irrespective of its wisdom. Critical reflection upon policy, particularly from the professionals, has not been encouraged. This is a feature of how New Labour has worked; policy really means targets.

You may think (I hope you won't) that juxtaposing education, foreign policy and the New Labour approach to government and politics as I do represents a self-indulgent, personal sounding off about areas of policy making and implementation. If you do you may be right; but for me it is important to place my personal professional interest in education in the context of those areas of government that most clearly reveal its values. In that way it may be possible to weigh and assess more completely and accurately what we have all been recruited to do in education for far too many years; hence my discursive approach to this writing.

Teachers have been kept busy responding to the ideas of the policy-makers, whether they were a series of curriculum and assessment initiatives or a restructuring of the school system or the required acquisition of yet another professional language to describe what generations of teachers have been doing for years. All of this action, however, signifies something un-professional or even anti-professional when the accumulated impact of policy produces a less fair society. This, I believe, is *not* what school teachers are for. They are *for* fulfilment; and without fairness it cannot be achieved throughout society. That is my value position. There have been non-educational policies at play that have done damage to society but the approach to schooling adopted by New Labour has contributed to this. In fact, apart from the foolishly innumerate notion that everybody must be simultaneously above average, there has been little about the educational policies of New Labour that might have brought about a more fair society; and a more fair society is, I believe, what any kind of Labour Party, irrespective of its revised nomenclature or how desperate it is to win votes, should stand for and strive, above all else, to bring about.

I am now very concerned because severe economic conditions generate fear leading to extremism, prejudice and wider social gulfs and I cannot see a possible future Conservative government adopting the French Revolution slogan '*liberty, equality, fraternity*' as a set of values upon which to create educational policy. So far what we have seen of the detail of Conservative Party educational policy is that it will further the party's historical agenda and maintain a stratified society that benefits some more than others; and all we have seen of its foreign policy is that it will ruthlessly link overseas aid programmes to its preferred form of free market capitalism and align itself with racist parties in Europe. For us to be governed by a political party like this could be the ultimate New Labour legacy; and I, for one, despair.

I advocate values and policies similar to the Every Child Matters agenda and an end to league tables, inspection, the de-stabilisation caused by re-structuring and blame; an end also to the kind of grandstanding and sloganising that not only demeans professional educators but also damages the practice of government and politics.

In writing this I hope to encourage critical reflection. In other words, I would like this discursive paper to be read in order to stimulate discussion. It is certainly not intended to be either exhaustive or definitive and I guess that you will find much within it to dispute; and please do engage in dispute because I believe that far too little of public values and policy is subject to serious questioning. So, as a questioner of public values and policy, I invite you to subject my writing to serious scrutiny. Maybe, in the process, we can, between us, do something useful.

As an aid to critical reflection upon this paper I have included an exercise at the end that I hope will assist the critiquing of this and other similar papers.

I have chosen a discursive style because I feel comfortable mixing up themes to see where they take me. In a sense this allows me to write in order to discover what it is I wish to say. Readers who like a clear and logical structure supported by frequent referencing may be resistant to the charms of this approach which can also be described in places as polemical.

My belief is that over a period of more than twelve years New Labour has, in the interests of being elected and re-elected, pursued a set of policies that have diminished the professionalism of teachers, damaged society and damaged democracy. The values from which those policies emanated are worthy neither of a Labour party nor of society.

In my view we need educational values built around fairness, democracy and fulfilment.

Please note that some of the web references that I have included may be subject to change.

New Labour

New Labour was presented to us as a *modernisation* of the Labour Party that would reconcile **individualism**, which emphasises personal ambition, competition and conspicuous consumption, with **social fairness**, which emphasises inter-personal co-operation, compassion and public service: not the easiest of tasks but one which its creators hoped would, if achieved, convince the electorate for a long time and change voting habits.

Making play with the words 'modernisation' and 'new' enables 'modernisers' to place defenders of old values at a disadvantage and seeming to be irrelevant to the 'needs of today' as defined by focus groups and think tanks. Presenting yourself as a 'third' or 'middle way' also provides the opportunity, on the one hand, to steal the political clothes of opponents while, on the other hand, making all others appear to be extreme. This was the effect of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Alliance; although I believe that its leaders were far more ideologically driven in the direction of a fair society and had greater records of political achievement behind them than those of New Labour. The work of Roy Jenkins as Home Secretary, for example, set a standard for humanity, liberalism and fairness that contrasts starkly with recent occupiers of that post.

The notion of reconciliation can generate high-sounding rhetoric with pious, religious overtones but it can also create policy faultlines. Repeated exhortations that schools should compete in the league tables and diversify while, at the same time, collaborating professionally illustrate the central difficulty of achieving such reconciliation in the sphere of education.

The idea of 'branded' federated schools as set out in the White Paper *Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a '21st Century Schools System* is a further example. At one time you could have imagined a cluster of secondary and primary schools brought together by a Local Education Authority (LEA) to work to a common, community-led, purpose but, in the meantime, policy changes have meant that many of those schools have become faith schools or academies and are less connected to each other in terms of both purpose and democratically accountable service to the local community; and LEAs, subject to local democracy, have been abolished.

To see the White Paper go to www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolssystem.

The moving finger writes: a story

Early in 2009 I bumped into a former colleague with whom I had taught in the early 1980s in the area of Liverpool that I talk about in the preface and later worked with as an LEA advisor. He had just retired as a headteacher and had a story to tell. Before retiring he had been invited by government to stay at a posh hotel with a cross-section of other heads covering different phases and kinds of schools. The big question that they were asked when they got there was 'Do you agree with the idea of federated schools run by super heads?' My friend said that every headteacher present responded with a loud 'No'. After a while, however, he noticed that the person typing the notes of the meeting only became active whenever something was said that chimed in with government thinking; the fingers ceased to move when dissent was expressed.

This is no more than a second hand anecdote but it rings true to me. I have taken part in a number of government consultation events where the questions were all about implementation of policy and never about its wisdom. Often when I read a report on a consultation in which I have taken part I feel that it must have been written beforehand because views that were off-message have somehow not been recorded. It does nothing to enhance a sense of being respected as a professional when you are regarded as a mere implementer; and, I suggest, it does nothing to improve policy when professionals are treated like this.

Managing consultation in order to achieve the desired result is now a substitute for democracy: when attacked for poor policy politicians can always reply that they undertook a consultation exercise; but doing this is not always so clever: some results cause problems. Having to 'drive through' policy so determinedly that consultation must be managed in this way is an outcome of the 'third way' approach. Insufficient trouble is taken to ensure that the foundations are well laid and as a consequence government and its agents have to build faster and with less care.

Ed Balls, the current Secretary of State at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), recently proposed that he can help Britain out of the recession and save money from his budget by federating schools under a single super head plus assistants who are cheaper than headteachers. This is like a gambler producing an ace from up his sleeve to push along his policy. He has not won the educational argument about federated schools and has failed to convince the profession of their worth so he tries to win by deploying an economic reason. I suppose that he is prepared to pay the price of alienating the leaders and managers that his predecessors did so much to encourage. The result will be another policy built upon shaky foundations: actually built over a faultline. Not very long ago we could have said that to an extent schools were 'federated' under Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which were democratically accountable to the communities in which they operated. We can no longer say that.

An example of how consultation is managed was the introduction of the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL). Many people thought that, although suffering a somewhat quaintly old-fashioned name, MTL might turn out to be a really good idea eventually creating an entire teaching profession qualified at least at M-level. It could build upon the enormously successful postgraduate professional development programme (PPD) of the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) and introduce the critically reflective values of masters-level work to the profession. This would encourage the growth of critically informed and widely disseminated professional voice: a voice that might be listened to by policy-makers.

It will not, however, be like that. In my view MTL is being introduced simply in order to increase the focus of schools and teachers upon the targets set for them. It will be a very instrumental degree with little space for critical reflection, especially upon policy. The series of MTL consultation events brought to the surface a number of legitimate issues and many good ideas; and yet, when the summary of those events was published by the TDA, it was as if all of those issues and ideas had never been expressed. University departments, schools and faculties of education that have over committed themselves to MTL may find themselves repeating for M-level CPD what they did for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) when it became, at government behest, Initial Teacher Training (ITT); that is to say, squeezing out theory and avoiding critical reflection from different perspectives. Schools, teachers and universities will be locked in to another form of performance management. The message is 'we are giving you the training so that you can reach your targets and if you fail you will be held accountable'. Government could have listened to well-informed criticism during the consultation on MTL but it did not wish to hear dissent: it did not wish to find any faultlines.

You may find it worthwhile to visit the TDA website to look for material on both PPD and MTL. Go to www.tda.gov.uk and search for PPD. The annual summary impact evaluation reports are not displayed as prominently as they used to be. Anything to do with MTL is, however, on the front page. I suggest that you also go to the UCET website, www.ucet.ac.uk, to look at its advice on MTL to the TDA and the DCSF. For a list of some of the issues and links to other comments go to the website of the International Professional Development Association (ipda), www.ipda.org.uk. Look under 'news'.

The label

Like Thatcherism ('The New Right') before it the New Labour 'Project' has given students of government and politics a fascinating few years to play at defining a new label. There has been much analysis, assessment and evaluation of the thoughts and values that lay behind the construction of the concept of New Labour; and there has also been considerable scrutiny of its performance in office. We have experienced a marked shift to the political right and now that the global economy is indicating to some of us that we need a shift to a political left with a greater emphasis upon fairness and public service it is interesting to watch the responses of those who committed so much of their political careers to confidently taking us in the other direction. So far they seem to be simply seeking for a way back to a better yesterday when maybe they should be acknowledging that it was all their yesterdays that helped to cause our problems.

Peter Osborne in his book, *The Triumph of the Political Class* (2008, Pocket Books) describes convincingly the emergence of a group of politicians who are almost free of ideology and, therefore, scarcely bound by any previous party commitments or values. He concentrates on New Labour as the party in power but finds the phenomenon in all major parties. I do not, however, believe that this makes the old left-right value spectrum redundant and I continue to use it to locate the values of politicians.

We tend to forget that Thatcherism was also something of an aberration for the Conservative Party that had grown used to staying within a consensus that allowed a degree of social fairness. The experience of seeing social deprivation, extremes of poverty and high unemployment between the two world wars; and also of fighting alongside people of different social classes and seeing indiscriminate death and destruction in at least one of those wars had a socially sensitising effect upon Conservative politicians such as Harold Macmillan. This set them apart from the ministers later chosen by Margaret Thatcher. We may caricature Conservatives like Macmillan as merely the aristocratic providers of nutritious scraps to the poor but, as exemplars of compassionate conservatism, I think that they have a lot to teach party leaders whose only experience of actually earning a living is working in public relations or having been young assistants to MPs. This is something that New Labour and the Conservative Party have in common: the encouragement of a breed of trained party political apparatchiks who are not civil servants but, nevertheless, provide advice and guidance; who serve the interests of party politicians; who go on to become politicians; and who are, amazingly, often paid out of the public purse. Osborne has a lot to say about this and the role of special advisers. Reading *Cameron The Rise of the New Conservative* by Francis Elliott and James Hanning (2009, Harper Perennial) made me feel, furthermore, that the roots of the Conservative Party leader's values were planted in very shallow soil: that his experience of education, growing up and the world of work have provided him with very few points of connection and engagement with most of us.

A campaigning government

New Labour found it difficult to make the change from electioneering, which involves much use of exciting rhetoric, sound-bites and promises, to the boring business of government and politics which, by contrast, demands, or used to demand, the careful construction of consent. This may be a truism for all parties as they gleefully gain the seals of office but it seems to be the case that New Labour in particular invested enormous energy in changing itself in order to get elected and simply could not stop using that approach after the 1997 election victory: it seemed to know no other way and so it became a campaigning government; always seeking new frontiers and addicted to green papers, white papers, bills and more and more legislation: activity masquerading as progress. Education suffered from a surfeit of initiatives and targets. The civil service and democracy itself also suffered because the greater the number of targets that have to be reached and initiatives that have to be brought to fruition the less time there is to stop and think; and needing to stop and think is one reason for having a civil service rather than consultants on short-term contracts and for trying to follow due democratic process.

Another criticism that can be made is that the process of trying to reconcile opposites from a basis of weak values created a potential for policy uncertainty so that there was an opportunity for clear-headed and glibly convincing consultants to capture the discourse. It is fair to say that many of New Labour's education policies, if not also the values behind them, emerged not from discussion and debate within the party, with reference to long and deeply held values, but from listening to consultants and advisers who calmed the policy oscillations by saying what party leaders wanted to hear; and, having acquired the ear of the leadership at a time when only the headline rhetoric had been formulated, were hired to flesh out and vigorously bring about the implementation ('delivery') of its plans. It is almost as if policies could be commissioned.

I say more on this in **A story of out-sourcing policy-making** and **Gurus and consultants** where, in particular, I draw attention to the influence upon education of Michael Barber and Andrew Adonis.

Margaret Thatcher had also come under the sway of plausible experts, particularly in the field of economics. Without the influence of Sir Keith Joseph and others and the luck of having North Sea oil revenues to cover the cost of massive unemployment it is doubtful if there would have been such an attack upon industries, unions and communities or that major state enterprises would have been privatised. The major damaging influence came from Milton Friedman of the Chicago School of Economics. It is instructive to read Andy Beckett's *Pinochet in Piccadilly: Britain and Chile's Hidden History* (2002, Faber) on this subject and to realise the extent to which implicit in such doctrine was a willingness to allow disadvantaged and dissenting people to suffer for the sake of a free market economy. Thatcherite economic policies were effectively trialled for us in Chile. What is there to admire about the free market when it is seemingly dependent upon torture, false imprisonment and exploitation? Naomi Klein provides more evidence of this in *The Shock*

Doctrine (2008, Penguin) She also provides a chilling account of how the physical destruction of city run New Orleans schools during the flooding of the city was exploited by the Bush administration as an opportunity to privatise them. The principle of providing the same standard of education for all was abandoned.

Thatcher's time as Secretary of State for Education under Edward Heath showed that she had once been content to operate within what, looking back, seems to have been a relatively leftward leaning consensus, following, for example, Labour Party policy and creating more comprehensive schools than all other secretaries of state for education, irrespective of party affiliation, put together. She did not invent Thatcherism; she learned it from others and harnessed to it her natural determination to suppress dissent and vigorously implement policy. Her early caution in moving to what we now see as a fully Thatcherite approach to government may have partially derived from her intellectual inability to grasp the meaning of her own rhetoric. She knew that she wished to destroy socialism but, as reported by John Campbell in *Margaret Thatcher, grocer's daughter to iron lady* (2009, Vintage), when challenged she did not seem to know what it was or how to implement what she thought she believed in. Campbell writes about her constantly saying to her close associates that she knew *what* she wanted but needed them to tell her *how* to bring it about. In my view, if you really do know what you want to happen then you should be at least half way to knowing how to make it so.

I have often wondered if she had come under the influence of people with different views her policies might also have been quite different. My guess is, however, that even so-called conviction politicians only internalise values that appear to improve their chances of winning elections.

So farewell then Sir Humphrey

We enjoy as a stereotype the fictional Sir Humphrey Appleby in the television series 'Yes Minister' and 'Yes Prime Minister' effortlessly exercising the superior tradecraft of senior civil servants putting to flight both ministers and outside experts, advisors and consultants. Maybe it is comforting to convince ourselves that, irrespective of party, government will continue without too much disturbance. Comforting, maybe, but now wrong because not only have we seen normal democratic procedures by-passed by New Labour but we have also seen career civil servants made subservient to party political appointees. The urge to deliver policy has meant that our once non-party-political civil service, capable of serving any colour of government and ensuring a degree of continuity and stability is now yesterday's model. Quiet public service has been replaced by loud partisanship. Osborne provides much detail on this.

I used to teach and examine government and politics from the 1960s to the 1990s and I have a wide collection of school textbooks on the subject going back to the early 1900s. If your knowledge of how British government works comes from a text book on that subject from even, say, twenty years ago then it will be hopelessly out of date in respect of normal democratic procedures, local government, cabinet government, accountability and the civil service. Older text books on the subject (usually called British Constitution until the late 1960s) might be about a different country entirely. Try reading Walter Bagehot's *English Constitution* which he wrote in 1867 and see how things have changed under Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown.

On August 25th 2009, in their evidence to a House of Lords enquiry into the working of the Cabinet Office, a number of very senior former civil servants spoke about their belief that not only was cabinet government threatened by the decision making style of recent prime ministers but that the party political neutrality of the civil service was also under threat.

Herbert Morrison, one of the giants of the wartime coalition government and of Attlee's post war Labour administrations, wrote a book called *Parliamentary Government: a survey from inside* (1954, O.U.P.). This was a detailed, readable and authoritative book which, among other things, explained how cabinet government worked and ministries operated. Meanwhile, his own grandson, Peter Mandelson, is a prominent member of a government that has achieved far less than the administrations of which Morrison was a member but has dismantled the old structures and conventions. Maybe there is a connection and the comparative lack of achievement is because New Labour decided to do things differently. What Margaret Thatcher began Tony Blair and Gordon Brown continued at a much faster pace and to a far greater extent. Blair's Chief of Staff, Jonathon Powell was not only allowed to direct the work of civil servants but also, in his evidence to the House of Lords, made it quite clear that cabinet government was no longer perceived to be the way to do things and make difficult decisions. Going to war on false pretexts, constructing a less fair society and deconstructing democracy do not, I believe, count as achievements.

Avoiding accountability and passing it on to others

There has been criticism from a number of observers and especially in the Butler Report, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2004), that the Blair administrations failed to follow normal protocols when making policy: by-passing democratically accountable committees and leaving an insufficiently discernable trail of documented decision-making. This has come to be known as 'Making policy on the sofa'. I am not sure who first uttered those words but they gained currency after Butler reported and this approach to the job of governing a country has made problematic a normal and unremarkable enforcement of accountability; and by doing so it means that when the reckoning eventually takes place it will be, by contrast, both prominent and public.

To read the Butler Report go to

www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/deps/hc/hc898/898.pdf.

Despite efforts by government to keep the inquiry into the invasion of Iraq behind closed doors it will not now be held in secret and journalists and historians are unlikely to turn a blind eye to it: just the opposite. It is ironic that in order to manage the Iraq enquiry New Labour tried, at first, to revive the culture of Sir Humphrey. He would have set limited terms of reference, kept things behind closed doors, chosen a tame chair that was hoping for a peerage and so timed publication of the report that its negative impact upon the government would be diminished. They did their best to follow his example but had to give in to pressure to make it mostly public.

When I read *Blair's Wars* by John Kampfner (2004, The Free Press) I was struck by the extent to which matters of huge moment, leading to considerable loss of civilian and military lives, were discussed and decided upon so carelessly.

By the way, I think that the actual sofa of policy-making fame can be seen in a photograph included in *30 Days, A Month at the Heart of Blair's War* by Peter Stothard (2003, HarperCollins). I shall say more on that a little later.

I chaired the team that wrote the last ever GCSE examination syllabus in Politics: the subject that had once been popular in schools but lost out to the officially approved but rather strange subject of citizenship. No-one in the UK is a citizen as the word would be understood in France for example because we are all subjects of the Crown whose powers are exercised by whoever leads the largest party in the House of Commons. One quarter of the politics syllabus was about accountability; by which was meant holding government to democratic account. It has, however, come, instead, to mean holding professionals such as school teachers to account for failing to reach the targets set for them by government. Accountability is a key component of performance management and because of this can, I suggest, easily lead to narrow target setting and the careful selection of evidence to show that targets have been met. In my view that is the opposite of what we should be

doing. If you look at the guidance on performance management reviews provided by the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) you will find that the conversation between teacher and line manager is in danger of transforming what could be an open and wide approach to professional learning into a narrow anti-intellectual, anti-educational and anti-professional exchange which concentrates upon targets: have they been reached and if not why not.

To see the relevant documents go to

www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/s/school_self_evaluation_tool.pdf

and also to

www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/i/impact_evaluation.pdf.

Licence to teach, a further shift in accountability and the manipulation of evidence

What follows has been adapted from my column in the autumn 2009 issue of *Breaktime Magazine*.

It has been no secret for a year or so that government were intending to introduce a renewable licence to teach. Its announcement in the White Paper Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century School System has allowed journalists to make much play with the initials MOT and not, in my view, without good reason because there are lessons to be learned from making the comparison. In presenting this idea Government has been very careful to point out that by their own measurements teachers are better qualified than ever and that there is no shortage of high quality applicants. Their apparent justification for introducing this renewable licence is that it will place the school teaching profession on the same professional footing as solicitors and medical doctors. But I wonder about the notion that school teachers will have to undergo an MOT every five years in order to establish fitness to teach. On the surface it might seem to be a good idea. I can imagine schools using it as part of a publicity campaign and it does give the impression that the profession will be taking more control of its own destiny. But there are issues.

Professional learning has to be entwined in all of this because it provides opportunity to professionally refresh: to acquire and make sense of new knowledge and skills in order to prove that teachers are worthy of another five years. The problem is that this may become the sole purpose of professional learning: to get another licence so that teachers can be sure of paying five more years' instalments on their mortgage or see their children through university. Were I in such a position I would make absolutely certain that I assembled all of the evidence that I needed to get that licence: it would be my major priority. I would put into the dustbin any professional penicillin that I might have accidentally discovered if it did not help me to keep my licence. Who is interested in unexpected evidence for professionally unintended outcomes, no matter how valuable or significant, if it does not hit the target? Just tick the boxes and another five years are in the bag! Well, that is the cynical response.

That, however, is what many medics and lawyers do and it does not lead to good quality professional learning. In order to satisfy requirements solicitors can simply ensure that they have filled in the full number of hours of CPD without either relating the professional learning to the strategic interests of their firm or engaging in any critical reflection. Doctors may record that they have, for example, spent forty five minutes reading an article but do not have to demonstrate what they learned from it. It is all rather sterile and way below the standard of professional learning in which most school teachers engage.

Burying mistakes

We are in the education business which means that professional learning has to be intellectual; that different perspectives must be employed; that new knowledge should not simply be acquired and applied but that it should also be interpreted, contextualised and critically reflected upon. This means learning collaboratively, involving children and colleagues; it means referring to a body of literature; and it also means not slavishly following so-called 'best practice' or latest authoritative knowledge but bringing to the surface apparent professional mistakes, examining them and learning from them. Doctors, as the joke goes, bury their mistakes. Teachers, eager to pass their MOT, may now be forced to do the same, which would be anti-intellectual and unprofessional.

National Standards, performance management and the need to renew the licence will frame professional learning; but it will not enhance the status of the teaching profession if we narrow the focus of professional learning so that it concentrates upon renewing the licence. This was how the old standards worked. They were hurdles to be got over after which they could be forgotten until the next one loomed into sight. It was as though doing the job and being examined about doing the job were scarcely related to each other. Why do people book their cars in for a service just before they are tested? Are you worried that your brakes may not be up to scratch and so do something about them when you notice a problem or do you only begin to think about your brakes as the test looms near?

Another issue is that pressure to obtain the licence will result in looking for specific evidence rather than looking amongst all the evidence arising from professional learning and examining it for its value and significance. Doing this is to commit a crime against learning itself. We should never look for evidence to fit what we want. That is a form of cheating.

The working environment

And, let us not forget, a teacher may be deemed fit to teach in one school but not in another. We have to take into account the working environment as a factor acting upon the teacher's performance. It should provide opportunity for professionals to flourish. It is now essential that it does; but, given the need to concentrate upon out-performing competitors, will it? Renewing the licence to teach must not become an isolated activity. The entire experience of being a teacher must lead to professional learning: to teach is to learn. Has the notion of schools as professional learning environments been costed?

Another way of looking at the professional context issue is that government seems to believe that schools with good examination and SAT scores should automatically be exemplars for those with low scores. I have in mind a selective private school of my acquaintance which has applied to become an Academy. It is close to a state school which accepts all applicants and copes with enormous social deprivation and problems. In the mind of government the head of maths, say, from the 'successful' school will be able to demonstrate to the head of maths at the lower performing school how to get

good results. If you are into blood sports you might wish to purchase a ticket to watch the demonstration. This approach to professional learning is seriously insulting.

We shall de-professionalise teachers if the licensing process reduces professional learning to the passing of the test. We shall re-professionalise teachers if they are liberated to learn more than the minimum requirement to pass the test. For years we have complained that the National Curriculum and its assessment regime led to teaching to the test. It is no different for teachers. So, let us hope for an open-minded approach. And we certainly do not want a teacher scrappage scheme. Just imagine a future government offering schools £2,000 to scrap old bangers that have failed their tests so that they can be replaced by shiny new NQTs complete with full warranties.

One last point: we will shortly receive a definition of the entitlement to professional learning of the children's workforce in schools. If it comes in the form of hours that will be a bad mistake because professional learning does not adhere to timetables. What would be really nice is for the professionals themselves to discuss and define the concept of their entitlement to professional learning. Any chance of that?

To see the White Paper go to www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolssystem and do not forget to keep looking at the website of the Training and Development Agency for schools www.tda.gov.uk for current developments in CPD.

To look at Breaktime Magazine go to www.breaktimemagazine.co.uk.

Nationally shaming consequences of New Labour

The most spectacular, appalling, lethal and nationally shaming consequences of New Labour's approach to the business of government and politics have been the invasions, regime changes and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq; the latter in particular being carried out in the face of strong, well-informed, articulate and wide opposition and regarded by many as not only illegal but also subsequently involving war crimes. I believe that this demonstrates what can happen when policy targets are set without due democratic process and yet enormous effort is applied to achieving them; even to the extent of suppressing dissent and discarding, disregarding and distorting evidence that does not fit the chosen story.

In an incredibly hubristic moment Tony Blair agreed that Peter Stothard should spend thirty days shadowing him in order to write a book about the experience. The time covered the build up to the invasion of Iraq and the subtitle of the book is *A Month at the Heart of Blair's War*. Having read it I found it difficult to stomach the picture I formed of Jack Straw, Alistair Campbell and Tony Blair discussing and making jokes about Blackburn United football club in the midst of plotting what surely has to be the most despicable act of international government sponsored terrorism contemplated and carried out by a British Government since its secret collusion in 1956 with France and Israel to invade Egypt in order to continue its control of the Suez Canal; plotting, furthermore, with a US President who had cheated his way into office, thereby demonstrating the value of his commitment to democracy.

The story is told by Stothard in of Robin Cook having to avoid the press by entering No10 via the basement where I imagine him navigating his way past spare kitchen utensils and maintenance equipment in order to discuss his letter of resignation. Later, according to Stothard, in the House of Commons former colleagues, aware of his new out-ness and of their own continuing in-ness, affected what seems to me to have been the behaviour of children in the playground who distance themselves from someone no longer in the gang. Their treatment as a pariah of the one senior member of the government who resigned over the invasion of Iraq is hardly edifying.

I expect that some cabinet members continue to claim that they genuinely believed the evidence for WMD. Millions of others could see through what was presented to us as though it was reliable and validated evidence. Robin Cook laid bare the confused thinking that on one day said a second United Nations resolution was essential in order for us to go to war but, when on the next day one was not forthcoming, said that it did not matter anyway. And then there was the nonsense of not allowing Hans Blix to complete his job on behalf of the United Nations looking to see if there was any evidence for weapons of mass destruction. Scott Ritter, the predecessor of Hans Blix, had made it quite clear that in his view any capacity of Saddam Hussein to use or manufacture weapons of mass destruction was insufficient pretext for a war. He simply did not believe that what Bush and Blair were claiming about these weapons could be supported. My question is that if you were envisaging going

to war, to a war in which lots of innocent people would be killed, would you not have closely examined the evidence that supported your reason for fighting; and would you not have at least listened to what the experts had to say? To the Bush and Blair administrations Scott Ritter was not saying what they wished to hear. I must conclude that most members of the cabinet willingly and collectively colluded in an exercise of self-deception; an exercise facilitated by the tendency of Blair to avoid open, properly recorded and fully-informed discussion. They may not feel shame but I cannot escape it and I do not think that I am alone.

Rational argument, a proper presentation of the facts and reminders of old socialist values were simply brushed aside in the rush to war. In order to pursue the policy they had to be; other voices offering different views could not be allowed a hearing in case they diverted the energy being expended on the implementation of the basic decision. This has been characteristic of New Labour. Its values lead nowhere else. They are devoted to the implementation of policies whatever their validity and to nothing else. Policies are little more than targets to New Labour.

Declaring war on abstract nouns

Declaring war on an abstract noun such as 'terror' is futile; not only can you not know when you have won the war but the lack of clear focus means that targets begin to proliferate as you thrash around looking for enemies. You generate more of what you are trying to eradicate by doing this. In the same way, education policy aims at achieving 'improvement'; spawning more and more targets, drawing professional educators into an eternally unwinnable war and negatively labelling large numbers of children. Whether it is bullets or books the political response to the need to win wars has been the same: just one more surge will do it: another thousand soldiers and another educational initiative tied to a target.

New Labour's 'war on terror' has given us more terror. This is denied by Blair who now has an understandable need to claim that the 7/7 attacks in London or the killing of Jean Carlos Menezes, to choose just two examples, could not possibly be connected to his policy. These futile wars have also embroiled us in such appalling breaches of human rights that they have stripped from us (I do mean 'us' because this is 'our' government) any right to pontificate about the failings and shortcomings of others.

Whatever our government ministers knew about the Nuremberg trials they have clearly forgotten.

New Labour's obsession with 'improvement' in schools has given us:

- both the introduction *and* the abolition of National Strategies;
- Gifted and Talented programmes for a tiny few *and*, in contradiction, the Every Child Matters Agenda;
- pressure for every school to be above average *or* to be closed (the phrase *Last School Standing* comes to mind if that ridiculous policy is ever implemented);
- a re-definition of 'satisfactory' as 'not satisfactory' when being inspected;
- national professional standards *followed* by yet more of them to ensure that school teachers work to their specification;
- the Best Practice Research Scholarships *followed*, just as they were becoming effective, by their abolition;
- the announcement of funding for the Early Professional Development Programme *followed* almost immediately by removal of its ring-fencing within school budgets;

- the 14-19 initiative, with schools dealt with by one government department *but* their Further Education 14-19 partners by a different one;
- and any number of green papers, white papers, bills and acts all of which demand attention from teachers who may, *at the same time*, be experiencing considerable changes to their conditions of service when their school is turned into a specialist and or faith school or an Academy.

You will, I guess, be able to compile a longer list yourself but the question to ask is what all of this has done for the professionalism of school teachers. In my view it has made the profession reactive rather than proactive.

'Improvement' is an unwinnable war that teachers have been recruited to fight. To improve a league table position you need your opponents (and that is the most appropriate word) to co-operate by performing so badly that they create a space for you to move up into. If enough football teams lose or withdraw from enough matches Accrington Stanley can go to the top of the premier league. Do you think they will do this? League tables can only demonstrate improvement in relation to others. In order to achieve real improvement it is necessary to know your baselines and to understand the criteria that you use to make measurements.

Improvement was a prominent part of the British Standards Institute (BSI) 5750 quality standard which required businesses to demonstrate when audited that they were constantly seeking to improve how they fulfilled their purpose. No BSI auditor ever asked if the purpose was a good or appropriate one; as long as you got better at doing what you said you were doing you received the award. This impoverished approach to quality assurance can place the professional head between the railings, being pulled from the front by the carrot of pay progression and promotion and pushed from behind by the stick of inspection and the threat of losing a licence to practise. Coming out of the railings and trying another way or thinking for themselves is not an option offered to school teachers. I return to this point later under **Faultlines, flaws and a poverty of purpose**.

The word 'improvement' is being used a lot as I write. Boys are said to have improved their GCSE performance relative to girls because of the demise of coursework. How can it be that narrowing the mode of assessment so that the examination leaves out important skills such as investigation, research and the ability to engage in sustained learning is regarded as enabling boys to improve? Their scores have gone up but actually their education has been diminished; but who cares as long as the newspaper headline looks good? Girls, meanwhile, have lost out.

No professional ghetto

Education and all that it signifies can be free of neither context nor values. There is no professional ghetto that can be totally fenced off from aspects of government and politics that we might wish to put out of our minds: in which, for example, a thing called 'teaching' can take place regardless of the values of the people in charge. When politicians devise educational policy they are contributing to the future shape, interests and values of society (even the entire World for some policies) as they wish it to be. They gain and exercise the right to do that because they are elected, albeit by means of a voting system that can entrust enormous power to political parties with low electoral support. Professional educators should be aware of that because their role is far more socially critical than may be generally realised; and it is also wise to remember that a government that can suppress, discard, disregard and distort evidence in order to embark upon dodgy foreign adventures will have no qualms whatever about diverting blame from itself to others. Indicative of this is the treatment of Ken Boston the former boss of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) who was forced to take the blame when policy went wrong. The trick of using agencies as shields is not new; Michael Howard did it as Home Secretary.

Agents of government

One purpose of government agencies such as the QCA and the TDA is to be standby whipping boys for ministers. I guess that if you govern by means of target setting and performance management then accountability will always be limited to those working for the target setters. Agencies can be seen as a dispensable and, when things appear to go wrong, deniable sub-contracted layer of government created in order to shield those at the top and also to bypass the civil service who, over many years, built up relationships with, for example, teacher unions and universities. Those relationships were often perceived by politicians as hindering what they wanted to achieve. Agencies, on the other hand, know that to survive they must provide good news for ministers to announce: good news that fits the chosen story.

Maybe the notion of agencies needs a little clarification. We tend to refer to them as Quangos: 'quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations' or a similar set of words. 'Quango' has a nice vocally satisfying ring to it but I think that 'agency' is a more accurate word for organisations set up to work to a clear government remit. They increased in number during the Thatcher administrations although you will hear a lot from opposition politicians about the money spent ('wasted' is usually the preferred word) on them. In power, however, politicians cannot resist using organisations that are semi or even completely detached from the civil service to carry out their wishes and take the blame when things go wrong.

At one time it was the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) that brought together stakeholders to discuss policy on the continuing professional development (CPD) of school teachers in England. It used to be possible to meet a civil servant for a chat prior, for example, to chairing a meeting of the UCET CPD Committee. This provided opportunity to be updated and to exchange views. The remit for CPD was then given to what was changing from being the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) into the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA). Previously the TTA sent representatives to attend meetings at the DfES; now the relationship is reversed and the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) sends representatives to meetings convened, chaired and managed by the TDA. Organisations invited to those meetings are now at a further remove from the source of policy. For those of us brought up with a different vision of government this seems very strange. Recently, the TDA has taken from its website the phone numbers of staff. In my view, the greater the pressure from the top to deliver policy the less accessibility there is for people who might disagree and journalists are now forced to obtain their information via press offices.

Under New Labour the notion of 'Social Partners' has gained ground which has meant, for example, that only those teacher unions that were prepared to make a prior commitment to government policies and limit their role to discussion of implementation are given the opportunity to be consulted. This has left out in the cold the National Union of Teachers. A question: would you

deliberately exclude the largest union representing teachers from the discussion of crucial elements of education policy?

I am aware that other teacher unions would probably tell this story differently and emphasise their commitment to dialogue not only with government but also with each other. They might say that the NUT excluded itself from such dialogue. I take the view that New Labour's use of the concept of social partnership was probably derived from its intention to control dissent. Social partnership is about being 'in' and I rather admire my own union for its willingness to be 'out'.

A last point on accountability: if it is avoided and evaded on a day-to-day basis the accountability debt builds up and eventually has to be paid in full by those who no longer have sufficient credit to meet the bill. Or might you think that is making too much of the current public loss of confidence in politicians? The point should not be lost that, having scheduled M.O.T.s for school teachers in September 2010, Ed Balls will precede them to the testing station when he stands for re-election.

A story of out-sourcing policy-making

I used to be a member of the steering committee managing the training of learning mentors throughout England in, at first, primary and then also secondary schools; and sometimes I chaired it. The contract had been granted by the DfES to a group of us comprising four universities and one large LEA and there were links to LEAs throughout the country. At one of our regular meetings with the DfES we pointed out that there was a considerable demand from trainee learning mentors for some form of accreditation and that we had some ideas how to address this.

'Yes', said the DfES, 'we are aware of this and are about to form a working party to address the issue'. Quick as a flash, drawing upon my background in studying, teaching and examining the subject of government and politics, I asked: 'What will be the terms of reference for the working party?' I thought that was a clever question; but after hearing the response I began to think that the points of my political science compass had unaccountably shifted. 'Well', said the DfES, 'we are putting out to tender the task of formulating the terms of reference.' Believing that governments formulated their own terms of reference without having to sub-contract the task this was a shock to me; but it got worse.

Months later we were asked to attend a meeting at the DfES. It turned out that Price Waterhouse Cooper was in the chair. They had been awarded the contract to define the terms of reference for the accreditation working party and had produced a report. A problem with the report was that they had not talked to anyone who actually worked on the learning mentor programme. Inside the DfES this seemed not to matter. Still, however, naively believing in the unassailable power of Sir Humphrey Appleby, I sought to spot the senior civil servant in the room in order to ensure that the one person who could gain the ear of the responsible minister heard things from the horse's mouth. There was one person there who spoke with clear authority so I approached her. After a while she interrupted me: 'But I am not a civil servant', she said. 'I am an advisor on a short term contract'. In fact, there were no civil servants in the room at all; in a policy making meeting in a government department!

I believe that this story indicates on a small scale that New Labour, like the Thatcherite Conservative governments before it, believes that going to the private sector will produce a better result than staying with the properly appointed and democratically accountable public sector. In my experience, thinking like this is expensively delusional. There was no need to issue a contract. Public servants could have done a better job at a lower cost; had they done so there would have been some democratic accountability; and there would have been some continuity and corporate memory. Instead we had expensive hot air and nothing happened. I expect that there is now no one in the successor government department who has the slightest knowledge of any of this so next time something similar crops up their learning will have to start from zero.

No real consultation but lots and lots of consultants

The Gershon Report *Releasing Resources to the Front Line* (2004), commissioned by Gordon Brown, promised huge savings by reducing the number of civil servants. Of course the loss of establishment staff has been counter balanced by an increase in the number of agency, part time and short term consultants.

In 2005 I attended a seminar at which Alex Alexandrou presented his evaluation of the effect of the 31% reduction in the staff of the DfES. He had carried this out for the Public and Commercial Services Union. One significant complaint by the union that became clear during the presentation was the lack of consultation by government. But the way that things are done under New Labour means that consultation simply cannot be allowed to unsettle the people aiming at the target and there must be no questioning of the basic decision which is often referred to as a 'governmental given'. The loudly declared target, upon which in this case Gordon Brown's political reputation depended, simply had to be hit even although losing that many staff was bound to have an adverse effect upon graduated promotion and succession planning; upon the corporate memory of the government department; and upon the ability of government to simply see things through. Hiring short-term consultants, no matter how clever they may be, is not cheap and it is not the way to do government. How effective are schools when they have to hire a large percentage of temporary staff? No matter how well qualified a supply teacher may be they are not the same as permanent staff.

More on Government and Politics

Radical and dynamic governments do not have to disconnect themselves from normal means of administration and democratic systems of accountability.

Lloyd George before, during and after WWI was charismatic, radical, dynamic and unconventional but not only did he give us national insurance and old age pensions; huge and long-lasting constitutional reform (the 1911 Parliament Act curtailing the power of the House of Lords) as a consequence of the Liberal Party's backing for his determination as Chancellor of the Exchequer to re-distribute wealth and welfare; and the re-organisation of industry necessary to support the 'War Effort'; but, as Prime Minister working with Maurice Hankey, he also gave us administrative reform that created the system of cabinet government that has served us well and withstood the pressure of two World Wars and severe economic recessions until it was recently dismantled. In other words, rather than impatiently by-passing our system of government he made it work better. It might also be argued that, unlike many of the previous and succeeding post holders, Lloyd George's approach to the distribution of honours was open and honest: with him everyone knew the exact price of a knighthood!

It was in his later years as prime minister, operating without the full support of his own party and having to sustain a coalition government by sheer force of personality and quick wittedness, that he can be said to have lost the values that had propelled him into power and to have devoted his considerable skills instead to manoeuvring to remain at the top.

Churchill, during WWII, was charismatic, dynamic and an achiever on a very much narrower front and scale than Lloyd George but, despite a huge majority and a coalition of three political parties supporting him as Prime Minister, the House of Commons retained enough democratic self-belief to subject him to a serious debate on a motion of no confidence in the middle of the war. He won the vote but his overall leadership was called into question.

It is true that some of Blair's House of Commons votes were very narrowly won, despite his huge majority. But those anti votes did not indicate a similar democratic self-confidence on behalf of the House of Commons. They were internal party back-bench revolts on specific issues signifying discontent at the direction being taken by New Labour. It might not be going too far to see them as the death throws of Old Labour: the last kicks from those with long-lasting and well-tested values.

I must also mention the quiet, charisma-free dynamism of Attlee who as deputy to Churchill during WWII not only kept the boring business of government ticking over efficiently but, after winning the election of 1945 and in the face of great difficulties and enormously powerful negative forces, introduced far-reaching and radical social and international changes while continuing to behave just like any other commuter by travelling on the London Tube and walking down Whitehall from where he lived in No10 Downing

Street to the Houses of Parliament where he worked and where he expected to be held publicly accountable.

And while I am on this theme I think that political observers and commentators are beginning to recall Harold Wilson with far more respect now that they have experienced New Labour. His legacy includes not only the Open University but also, unlike both Attlee and Blair, the avoidance of joining disastrous foreign adventures embarked upon by Presidents of the U.S.A.

Attlee's decision, made under great pressure from the USA, to support a relatively small-scale intervention in Korea in 1950 meant that the UK then became embroiled in a much larger war when the USA decided to increase the scale of the fighting. According to Giles Radici in *The Tortoise And The Hares* (2008, Politicos) our military spending doubled as a result with negative effects upon our ability to support industry and export goods. The consequences included the abandonment of free medical prescriptions and the resignation of ministers; especially Aneurin Bevan, the creator of the National Health Service. Harold Wilson also resigned on that issue. He will have had clear memories of this when he refused to give in to a similar level of pressure to join the USA fighting in Vietnam: a lesson lost to Blair.

I wonder if it might be significant that many of the books written on New Labour concentrate upon the personalities of its leaders rather than the ideas. New Labour, particularly under Blair, brings to mind Max Weber's notion of the charismatic type of government with its emphasis upon personality and leadership rather than management. Perhaps that was the only way for New Labour to be sustained: almost like a Maoist constant revolution. I certainly think that it is worth considering the extent to which the Brown administration suffered more from charisma failure than from the slings and arrows of political misfortune. Tony Blair seemed to find a way to rise above everything that beset him; as though just when you thought that he was bound and gagged by the accusing facts he managed to wriggle free with a smile or an earnest 'trust me' expression on his face.

Brown, by contrast, is far less effective in the role of salesman and also has to deal with the fall out of many of Blair's policy decisions. We might ask ourselves if as voters we are sometimes no better than suckers waiting to be seduced by the soundbiters.

It appears to me that from the outset in 1997 a combination of inexperience of how government worked, relative ignorance of political and military history, a weakly anchored set of socialist values and sheer impatience led Blair administrations to sometimes substitute activity and agitation for carefully modulated progress which would have been more appropriate and placed a curb on runaway policy-making and intervention.

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 can be seen at 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.

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 I note that the one least wedded to the official message was the first to lose his job.

Dynamism and sense of purpose of the Gadarene Swine

Governments can become very self-important and convince themselves that every little thing that they do is earth-shatteringly urgent and significant; hence the succession of educational initiatives that follow the appointment of new secretaries of state. They do not always stop to think. New Labour recalls for me a football report, probably in the late 1960s, describing Liverpool Football Club's forward line as demonstrating all the dynamism and sense of purpose of the Gadarene Swine. At times under New Labour it has seemed that professional educators in England, and even members of the government, have been caught up in the midst of a galloping herd unable to make anybody listen when they ask where they are going. Osborne describes a meeting with David Miliband who was at the time head of the Downing Street Policy Unit. His addiction to target setting as a way of doing government was starkly evident. The inability, however, to distinguish woods from trees indicates a closed down intellect.

I look at all of the impressive material on, for example, school re-modelling that you can find on the TDA website and then ask myself if anybody has really thought about the purpose of it all. Loudly exclaiming 'improvement' is not a good response to this question because we do not know what it means; or, even if we think we do, we cannot be confident that we know how to measure it. By the time the herd has formed a clear picture of where it is headed it just might be too late to turn round.

Initiative fatigue and initiative *withdrawal* fatigue

No matter how well-meant recent decisions such as the ending of the National Strategies the effect is as though half of the Gadarene Swine were being exhorted to gallop even faster forward while the other half had just received the signal to go into reverse. The term 'initiative fatigue' has been heard a lot but exhaustion and a drop in morale must surely be linked also to the effects of initiative withdrawal. Have you ever tried to select reverse gear while going forward at top speed surrounded by other cars continuing to go forward?

Maybe as a school teacher you can recall stirring up the enthusiasm of children for something you had planned only to have to tell them that it was cancelled. If you have ever done that what was their reaction the next time that you tried to whip up their enthusiasm?

A quotation about army life usually attributed to Petronius (27-66 AD), author of the *Satiricon* and favourite of the emperor Nero, might shine some light here.

We trained hard.....but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.

I am indebted for this quotation to the former porter to the Education Department at the University of Liverpool. Brian had it posted behind his chair in the entrance to the building to be seen by a succession of academics, school and further education teachers, local authority officers and Ofsted inspectors as they walked past. We all nodded sagely, laughed with each other and consoled ourselves that it did not apply to us.

To continue the football metaphor, where the herd was going was over to the right wing and after a while few even bothered to question the direction: momentum was everything. And that momentum has gained pace now that the next general election is in sight so that we have a sudden rush to devise and implement professional learning strategies before it is too late. They include defining the 21st Century School nine years after the start of the century and twelve years after coming into power. I am at a loss to understand why a school has to be fit for an arbitrary date anyway except that the language has been deliberately chosen to match the modernity theme.

Simon Jenkins in *Thatcher & Sons* (2006, Allen Lane) argues that much of New Labour is a carry over from the Thatcher governments which broke the old post-war political consensus and shifted the middle ground to the right. Like New Labour those Thatcher administrations were also characterised by their dynamic impatience and disregard of disagreement. So the New Labour legacy for professional educators looks like the embedding of Thatcherite values into the body politic: values that not only emphasise individualism

rather than social fairness but also revel in the joy of action whatever it signifies. In my view we have witnessed not so much a reconciliation of contrasting philosophies but the displacement of the unselfish one by the selfish one. This is rather like Gresham's Law which states that bad money drives out good. In other words, no matter how low the real value of something if it has official endorsement it must become the officially approved and accepted standard. If government wish to set a morally low standard then we must all aim to reach it: endeavouring to hit the target set for us.

I think that that the first Blair administration underestimated the electorate's desire for a leftward shift or maybe, despite the enthusiasm with which the electorate voted against the Tories, they simply did not want one. There certainly was impatience on the part of the newly-elected government with the slow and careful construction of consensus needed for the mundane business of governing; hence the use of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit which fitted the commitment to a dynamic implementation of policy; whatever that policy happened to be. There was also a reluctance to scare former Tory voters by, for example, removing Chris Woodhead from his post, not only as substantive head of OfSTED but also from his putative position as national educational guru with the given power to pronounce judgement upon all matters educational. Just ask yourself how school teachers would have responded to the early sacking of Woodhead: street parties I should imagine.

And I feel sure that the re-nationalisation of the rail companies would also have been very popular. But somehow New Labour allowed itself to believe that it could not act against the interests of shareholders. This is rather like believing that betting shop punters must be compensated if a horse falls down.

What we have now in terms of educational policy and what I regard as the de-professionalising of teachers comes, I believe, from a combination of the re-positioning of New Labour on the right of the political spectrum; its Gadarene-like approach to making things happen; its love of rhetoric; and its ability to self-deceive.

Just think of the encouragement of the bonus culture in business and the dismantling of student grants while expanding student numbers; of the ill-considered rush into wars; of the easy but empty phraseology; and of the ability to ignore the dodginess of evidence.

A borrowed educational vision

The plan of Kenneth Baker, Thatcher's most long-lastingly influential Secretary of State for Education, was that we should have different kinds of schools for different kinds of children alongside a uniform system of measurement that would positively label some children while negatively labelling others. Simon Jenkins argues that Baker began the effective nationalisation of the curriculum and its mode of assessment. I believe that he also began the continuing process of privatising and de-democratising its delivery.

A story about a gerbil and a dextrous and verbally agile secretary of state

It is the year before the introduction of the National Curriculum and the assessment regime that will accompany it. Kenneth Baker, of whom John Cole, the former chief political correspondent of the BBC, said: *'I have seen the future and it smirks'*, is in a lecture hall in the University of Manchester outlining his great work which became known as the Gerbil or the Great Educational Reform Bill (it was later the 1988 Act). He does a lot of talking. I am in the front row with Ray Derricott, a predecessor of mine as Director of CPD in Education at the University of Liverpool and formerly my teacher. I get to ask the first question.

'How', I asked, 'can you hold in your head two contradictory concepts? On the one hand you are proposing to centralise and make uniform what is taught and how it is taught; and what is assessed and how it is assessed. But, on the other hand, you are also proposing to differentiate the schools so that we will have different kinds of schools for different kinds of children. How do those two ideas of uniformity on the one hand and differentiation on the other go together?'

In responding he called upon his large personal lexicon of oral political memorabilia and quoted the classic stonewalling response of R.A. Butler (sponsor of the 1944 Education Act) whenever he was challenged like this.

'That', he said, 'is a very interesting question.'

There followed a lot of words which I doubt anyone in the hall understood except that they enabled him to call for another question from someone else.

The true answer, to which not even a Conservative politician could have publicly admitted at the time after years of comprehensivisation, was that if you make uniform the curriculum and its system of measurement while providing different kinds of schools for different kinds of children you can make possible, reinforce and justify increased social stratification. It gives you a means of discriminating because some schools are empowered to exclude the children they do not wish to teach. At the same time you make it more possible to shift blame away from the policy-makers onto those that fail to climb and be awarded high value, be they children, teachers or schools. Maybe back then Conservative politicians were reluctant to set out such a vision for education and society and maybe today New Labour would also be reluctant to do so. They have, nevertheless, ruthlessly implemented it.

After his answer my respect for Baker's cleverness and memory of classic political responses soared: my respect for his values plummeted.

The model

The curriculum and particularly its system of assessment should now be seen as Rail Track or Network Rail and the schools and further education colleges as independent train companies. This has been the model for how much of government is run these days: a regulatory framework that enables central government to set performance targets; agencies and inspectors to make us chase after targets, create some coherence and to monitor performance against those targets; and lots and lots of independent providers seeking contracts linked to targets. If we carry on like this we shall see branded federations of schools bidding for contracts to provide schooling in given areas. Governors will be, in effect, the board of directors and parents the shareholders investing children in the enterprise; the chief executive will be fired if results are not perceived to be good; teachers will be kept up to scratch by performance management reviews and the five year M.O.T.; and children deemed likely to drag down results will simply not be admitted: their parents will not be allowed to invest in the FTSE 100 schools.

I am not sure if universities have yet realised that the masters degree in teaching and learning (MTL) is pushing them in the same direction of branded federations. Those universities that have bid for a lot of government contracts will find that they have little room for manoeuvre: they must play the tune required by the paymaster.

In this model local government becomes yet another agent working on behalf of central government and loses its democratic validity and vitality because it is limited to working towards targets received from central government. Also in this model universities find themselves doing the same. This is why some vice chancellors are ruthlessly closing down departments that do not reach the targets arbitrarily set for them. It is also why bid-writing is now an essential skill for academics; and, for that matter, school teachers.

An effect of the target setting and bidding culture is the shortening of horizons. I remember trying to prise out of a member of the senior management of the University of Liverpool some idea of its thinking for the future only to be told that 'senior management only have a two-year vision horizon'. I would expect the vision of a university to be of the order of a hundred years. As for the words 'vision horizon'!

One of the problems with short-termism is that decisions are made, un-made and re-made as income streams dry up then flood and then dry up again because they are dependent on contract chasing in response to the latest initiative and target. This is not the way to run a navy. Another problem with short-termism is that it creates long-term problems. The invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq were planned on a short-term basis but, because of the myopic 'vision horizons' of government, they have created problems that we see no way of resolving except by doing more of the same or by humiliating retreat.

Loud but shallow

In 1997 New Labour's educational beliefs were loud ('Education, education, education') but not deep: gurus and consultants provided the substance. Fear of not holding onto votes won from natural conservatives had a powerful influence upon, for example, shedding the commitment to what Alastair Campbell, Blair's Director of Communications and Strategy called 'bog-standard' comprehensives. We have had de-stabilising curricular and assessment change; great pressure for schools to out-perform other schools; and an obsession with re-structuring, which is also de-stabilising.

It bothers me that educational professionals fall easily into the trap of attempting to make sense of contradictory and un-wise policies. It is almost as if we have convinced ourselves that we have the ability to transform the ears of sows into purses of silk; and so, no matter what is thrown at us we shall cope. But, then again, maybe what the hidden job description for professional educators has always said was:

'Be prepared to swallow your professional pride, suspend your critical faculties and dedicate your life to responding positively to whatever educational fancy occupies the mind of whatever minister or secretary of state is in post at any given moment. Stop thinking of yourself as a sentient being and simply hit that target because hitting targets is the only game in town'.

As a war cry for professionals it falls short.

When I was an LEA person working on assessment I once found myself in one of my favourite schools talking to the staff about what was coming their way in terms of the National Curriculum and its assessment regime. Ken, a really committed, hard-working and intelligent professional, prefaced a question by saying that he believed that in introducing such wholesale curriculum and assessment changes over such a short timescale Kenneth Baker had bitten off more than he could chew. 'No Ken', I said, 'he won't be doing the chewing....you will'. And so it came to pass; for to chew whatever politicians have provided in the form of educational nourishment has, no matter how unpalatable or lacking in vitamins, become the only source of sustenance for the professional educator.

Professional Life

We know that changes have been taking place in what we loosely call professional life; but they always have. We know that governments adopt and pursue policies that impact upon professional life; but this is not new. We also know that there is a long established tendency for governments to adopt rhetorical slogans that spread into different aspects of general policy-making and its implementation; the slogan 'New Professionalism' is one of those.

As perceived by government professionalism in education is about teachers knowing more about what government has decided is important so that they can push harder to get better measurable results; and should there be an outcry that children are less happy or that creativity is being squeezed out of the curriculum then there will be a special initiative on happiness and creativity will be timetabled.

For me the problem is that in the education business the definition of professionalism is received: it is not generated by the people that do the job. I acknowledge that elected governments have the right to set agenda but the imposition of definitions and their associated targets is counter productive.

If it ever totally did, being a professional no longer indicates separate, autonomous self-containment for an individual either within an organisation or group or in respect of other professional groups and clients. It increasingly indicates, both within and without, connections, linkages, flexibility, team work and preparedness for change. It should, I believe, also involve listening to the critically examined professional voices of colleagues. Perhaps a degree of this connectivity was always provided by membership of organisations such as the Masons, Rotary, Oddfellows, Staff Rooms, Senior Common Rooms and the like; and certainly there have always existed inter-dependencies within and between professional groupings.

What we are seeing is, however, significantly different and amounts to a discernable New Labour legacy that has been built upon an earlier Thatcherite legacy, particularly for school teachers and para professionals. What makes it different is the way that performance management and an impoverished notion of 'improvement' have been deployed. In order to reach badly chosen and poorly understood targets more and more pressure is exerted at the expense of a socially fair, democratically accountable education.

If the Brown administration were serious about restoring some professional autonomy to school teachers it would be listening to their voices, particularly the informed and critically examined voices of the thirty five thousand teachers in England who every year join programmes at masters level and above and write, every year, approximately two hundred and twenty million examined words on the concerns, anxieties, interests and values of their professional lives. So much valuable professional learning takes place on these programmes but the only listeners to what school teachers are saying are academics and a few teacher colleagues. Policy-makers are not

interested in what this learning can show. It informs theory but it is not allowed to inform policy.

More evidence of the New Labour vision of what it means to be regarded as a professional school teacher can be seen in the recent proposal that in future they will have the opportunity to qualify without any training.

What follows has been adapted from my column in the October 2009 issue of CPD Update (Optimus Press www.teachingexpertise.com).

Easyteach: the no frills route into teaching

A couple of months ago I wrote about the introduction of what have become known as MOTs for teachers. Now, from the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF), via the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA), comes a proposal that teachers be allowed to qualify without any training by simply demonstrating, on the basis of having worked in schools, that they can match the standard required to achieve qualified teacher status (QTS).

You can read the details of the proposals and take part in the consultation by going to www.tda.gov.uk/about/newsletter/sep2009/Articles/consultation.aspx

Some questions

- 1. Is this the start of a trend to cut the cost of teacher training?*
- 2. Will it mean that in future teachers come into the profession without any introduction to educational theory?*
- 3. How can an assessment-only programme compensate for not learning alongside others in a classroom with a tutor to reveal and deal with misunderstanding, confusion and a lack of background knowledge?*
- 4. Is the plan to eventually move all teacher education into schools and to transform universities into testing stations that can also offer (at a price) some coaching to help people prepare for the test?*

We have to be concerned about this. In my view it arises from two major assumptions that underpin all policy. One is that qualifying and practising require standards. This would not be a problem if standards were used as starting points to discuss professional learning. It is when they are used rigidly to support decisions about qualifications, pay, progression and promotion that I worry. That can reduce thinking to the unprofessional and anti-intellectual act of merely assembling evidence that matches the standard. The second major assumption is that we measure professional performance by examining how close people get to their targets. This has a similar effect. The tendency is not to examine the wisdom of the chosen target but simply to strive to hit it;

once again disregarding and discarding any evidence that does not fit no matter how valuable it might be.

Why should people involved in CPD be bothered? Because the learning of professionals builds upon what people bring with them as they join. If there are deficiencies because NQTs have met the standards without any training then those deficiencies will have to be addressed after qualifying.

Whether you agree or not with any of my points I urge you to take part in the consultation. As usual there is little opportunity to question the wisdom of the policy but this is your profession and QTS is the start of CPD.

Final question: is there something strange about teaching children to obtain qualifications if teachers can qualify without being taught?

For a longer discussion of the same issue consult the ipda website at www.ipda.org.uk. Look for 'Tests without Teaching for Beginning Teachers'.

Gurus and consultants

In an interview in 2006 Michael Barber takes the credit for having formulated and implemented the educational policy of the government; and, as Director of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, he was in a position to push this approach across much of government. It boils down to setting a target and reviewing the performance of those charged with achieving the desired result. It is a discredited way of working from a number of points of view but it is also deeply anti-intellectual and, therefore, anti-educational.

You can read the interview

at www.educationsector.org/analysis/analysis_show.htm?doc_id=344385.

I imagine a one-sided dialogue in the early days of the Blair regime between someone from the Delivery Unit and a civil servant in a government department who had yet to adopt New Labour ways:

'You look like a square peg to me old chap and the target you have to reach is on the other side of that round hole. Not to worry.....I have a big hammer.'

The idea of course is that eventually the old chap will know no other way of working; he will come to love the hammer which is actually the means of managing his performance and holding him to account.

Barber has since worked for McKinseys the management consultants. This seems to have simply enabled him to exert even more force on the levers for policy, particularly in respect of education. A report that he co-authored for McKinsey's has been quoted in support of MTL and it even features in abbreviated form in the first issue of the TDA's new magazine for school teachers. The TDA really likes Michael Barber.

Called *'How the World's best-performing school systems come out on top'* (2007) I found the report to be a dispiriting piece of work.

What it says matters most are:

- 1 getting the right people to become teachers;
- 2 developing them into effective instructors; and
- 3 ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

It is all part of the target setting and performance measuring culture and do you find the words 'instructors' and 'instruction' disturbing? I do. But the work of McKinseys on education is becoming very influential because of how it links to the programme for international student assessment (PISA).

This assessment programme (known as the PISA tests) generates the educational league tables of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They are influencing policy throughout the World and

governments are becoming very anxious about the position that their country occupies.

During 2009 a selection of fifteen year old children in probably more than sixty countries responsible for approximately 90% of the World's economic activity will have taken the tests to help determine positions in the league table. I have the following concerns about this programme.

- PISA links educational performance to economic performance which distorts its purpose.
- It encourages politicians to become obsessed with targets which pervert professionalism.
- Countries copy the high scorers without understanding culture or context.
- It leads to a professional blame culture.
- Concentrating on obtaining high scores means the test tail wags the curriculum dog.

You may find it helpful to read 'Take the Test, Sample Questions from OECD's PISA Assessments'. To see this go to www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/23/41943106.pdf.

To read a critique of PISA, '*PISA and "Real Life Challenges": Mission Impossible?*' by Svein Sjoberg of the University of Oslo go to <http://folk.uio.no/sveinsi/Sjoberg-PISA-book-2007.pdf>.

And if you wish to find out which countries participate in PISA go to www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2966,en_32252351_32236225_1_1_1_1_1,00.html.

As for Andrew (Lord) Adonis: is he qualified as a teacher? No! Has he been elected as a tribune of the people? No! But was he empowered as Schools Minister to change both the structure of the school system and also the smallest detail of teaching techniques? Yes!

Bringing Adonis into the government as an un-elected minister was like allowing an obsessive amateur to control policy. I cannot see Attlee allowing somebody who, in political and democratic terms, had risen with no trace and already been a member of two other political parties to occupy such a position of influence. He has also received an offer from the Conservative Party which goes some way to prove Osborne's thesis about the rise of the ideologically unfettered political class.

One of the major obsessions of Adonis was Academies. You might find it useful to read *The Great City Academy Fraud* by Francis Beckett (Continuum 2007).

I have adapted what follows from a review of the book that I wrote for CPD Update.

The theme is values. As professionals we need to be ready to bring a critical eye to bear when government introduce policy. Often, what is presented as new is really old; and what we are told will do one thing will actually have an opposite effect. In this book Francis Beckett provides evidence and argument that challenges government orthodoxy. In fact, the book does more than that because it also reminds us that in order to adopt and promote much of present day educational policy politicians have had to discard and discount values to which they had adhered for years in favour of values which they had previously despised and ridiculed. When this happens you can usually bet on someone using the term 'modernisation' as a cloak. Challenge the policy and the counter charge will be that you are against modernisation.

Academies, Beckett reminds us, are not modern. They are really a continuation of the work of Kenneth Baker and others in the 1980s. I remember thinking at the time that the roots of much of that set of policies were in the need to identify someone to blame for the poor performance of British industry plus a longing for a settled and specific stratification of society.

Estelle Morris on leaving government challenged current policy on academies by reminding us that at one time her party was committed to raising standards rather than to tinkering with structures. But I suppose that changing structures can seem to politicians as though they are engaging in something significant while, in contrast, making slow quiet progress gets no headlines. The strange thing is that the structures being put into place today are those devised earlier by a political party with different values.

Francis Beckett pulls no punches in this book and anyone who wishes to engage in debate about the kinds of schools being established by centrally conceived and imposed policy should read it. After all, professionalism is part of the agenda today and what could be more indicative of professional behaviour than to articulate professional views on the structures within which you work?

The author was supported during the writing of the book by the NUT who make clear in the introduction that they do not have to agree with everything in it although they are clearly pleased that it was written.

When I wrote in that review about parties of different values I guess that I was continuing to cling to a belief that deep down New Labour might still have some socialist values that differentiated it from Conservative Party policies.

Faultlines, flaws and a poverty of purpose

There have been significant faultlines, serious flaws and a disappointing poverty of purpose in the approach taken by both major political parties to the education of children in England. Many of them relate to assumptions that have been taken over many years about how social value should be distributed; and I do not think it is going too far to attribute those assumptions to views of social class that have been bolstered by the malign, considerable but today forgotten influence of eugenics (literal meaning: *to produce the best*, actual meaning: *to improve the race*).

I say more about eugenics later but for now let me make clear that I am not talking about racism as simply attacks on other races but rather as the purification of what people considered to be their own race: of eradicating those considered to be inferior. The two notions overlap when one race is perceived as a potential contaminator of or threat to another race but there is also something sinister and repulsive about a group deciding which of its members are to be regarded as improving the stock and which are to be regarded as degrading it. In schools we suffer selection, setting and streaming. It is the same in society at large.

The more recent idea of expecting every child to be above average is silly enough but retaining old and unreliable benchmark values as the bases of blame for their teachers when they do not all perform above average makes it worse. Failure to think critically and deeply about education and the means by which participants are assessed has ensured that New Labour have simply promoted more strongly the free-market values that it inherited, together with a spurious belief in the importance of making things happen. Repeated ritualistic use of the word 'improvement' cannot cover up what has really been happening to a society that has become less fair.

I think of a **faultline** as a line of policy weakness that may only become apparent when subjected to critical examination or unforeseen pressure. Sometimes it may not be subjected to critical examination willingly because too much policy has been built on the faultline. The maintenance of policy can depend upon pretending that there are no problems that cannot be solved by ignoring them. This is like believing that if we all 'sing from the same hymn sheet' all will be well; and if all is not well then the answer is to sing louder.

For example, we are fighting in Afghanistan because the USA twice refused the offer of that country's government to arrest Osama Bin Laden; the second time it was if evidence was presented to them of his involvement in the attacks on Washington and New York. An invasion was preferred and we are still there taking casualties and killing innocent civilians while Bin Laden remains uncaptured. But instead of telling the story like this our government makes a lot of noise about fighting 'terror'. They have to because the decision to invade was a foolish one that has dragged us into a quagmire and we can see no way out. The policy faultline must not be subjected to any kind of critical examination so the volume of the rhetoric has to be turned up. The longer we stay there the more that will be the case.

The major faultline has to be the poverty of New Labour's purpose which was, I believe, merely to get elected.

I have chosen to look at **six educational faultlines**.

1. Schools have been required to both collaborate and compete.

In order to pass inspection schools must try to climb above their competitors in the league tables but in order to work collegially they must transfer knowledge to other schools that may climb higher as a result. Not every headteacher allows their Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) out to work for the benefit of other schools. And the possible positive effect of the recent so-called 'decentralisation' of professional decision-making, which is encouraging, after many years of discouraging, teachers to work together on curriculum and pedagogical matters, is nullified by their urgent need to compete with each other. This is not the way to ensure that professional educators work together in the interests of children and society.

There is a totally understandable desperation to avoid being labelled 'a failing school'. This awful term is in widespread use. Newspapers, the media in general and politicians make free with it. They assume without question that the measuring yardsticks upon which such labels are based are sound; until, that is, the children of today out-perform those who write letters to editors complaining about a lowering of standards since their day. Under the section on **flaws** below I discuss the inadequacy of our system of measuring performance and the unfairness of labels such as 'successful' and 'failing'.

2. Schools are required to follow the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and yet also to label 90-95% of children as 'not gifted and not talented'.

I remember being interviewed in the DfES as part of a group trying to win a Gifted and Talented contract. We were not successful. In order to clarify things I asked if it was the policy that *all* children had gifts and *all* children had talents. I was given an emphatic 'yes'; but, as we now know, that definition did not hold sway for long. And yet, if you examine the teaching materials produced for the 'gifted and talented' it is difficult to see them as anything other than simply good materials that can have a widespread application. I do not understand the need for a restricted application of the label if all children really do matter; and I find it disturbing that, in pursuit of income and profile and in response to research imperatives, universities find it necessary to collude in this labelling process by bidding for G&T contracts.

3. The professional learning strategy for the entire children's workforce in schools depends upon a web of local, regional and national networks, especially local government, but the policy of

increasing the number of Academies and faith schools means that more schools will be operating outside those networks and be free of the obligations to local communities that come with them.

While the strategy creates opportunity for coherence the re-structuring of the school system militates against it. I have been really impressed with the effort made by the TDA to construct a coherent professional learning strategy encompassing related but disparate professions. It is, however, a pity that, because it is not a 'social partner', the NUT is not a party to any of this. I am aware that within the TDA there is recognition that this is undesirable but they are under pressure from government. It is also a pity that the forthcoming general election may result in most of this work being brushed aside by some 'bonfire of quangos' as a new government seeks to appear decisive.

Look on the TDA website (www.tda.gov.uk) for the Strategy and Implementation Plan. Search for The National Advisory Group for the Professional Development of the Children's Workforce in Schools.

- 4. The decision to task the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) with not only a) Initial Teacher Training but also b) continuing professional development (CPD) and c) the establishment of a coherent inter-agency strategy for the professional development of the children's workforce in schools while d) moving it (the TDA) from London to Manchester, e) suffering an almost 90% turn-over in staff and f) doing all of this in the year before a general election.**

Just try to imagine any general at any point in history thinking that it was a good idea to 1) fight on three fronts instead of one, 2) move out of an impregnable defensive position close to headquarters, 3) get rid of seasoned troops and replace them with un-trained ones and 4) go out to fight. You might wish to ask yourselves how well you would do in a forthcoming Ofsted inspection if you returned from the summer holidays to find that not only was your school now in a different building in a different town but also that almost everyone of your experienced colleagues had been replaced by a Newly Qualified Teacher.

- 5. Much noise has been made about parental choice but the creation of a plethora of so-called Specialist and Faith schools and Academies will increase the power of schools to choose the parents.**

The notion of specialist schools is difficult to fathom when the clear legal obligation exists for a broad and balanced curriculum for all children. Lots of secondary schools have applied for specialist status; but as that is a means of obtaining extra income why would they not? It does not mean that the school actually believes in being specialist but it does mean that it believes in having more money. Faith schools are very difficult to reconcile with a belief in social inclusion, especially at a

time of increasing secularity. Academies, however, must be the most un-socialist educational idea to have been adopted by a Labour government in recent years. They were presented to us as a way of injecting more money into the system so that the children of poor parents might have the benefits of a well-resourced schooling. We now find that private schools see this as a means of obtaining state funds to sustain themselves; we have increased social exclusion and decreased local democratic influence; and, in a time of recession, business support is evaporating and the proportion of state aid for private control is increasing.

It is not choice that should matter but that the children of those without power, money or desirable social position should not be disadvantaged by attending any single school in the land. If citizenship and the Every Child Matters agenda are important then no child should have an unfair advantage; not one.

Let me repeat this. It is not choice that should matter but that the children of those without power, money or desirable social position should not be disadvantaged by attending any single school in the land. If citizenship and the Every Child Matters agenda are important then no child should have an unfair advantage; not one.

6. The assumption that all can, and therefore must, become above average.

This is a recurring error of politicians of all parties. It is easy to make fun of their poor levels of numeracy. Maybe they think that they are saying that they want everyone to do their best. Unfortunately, they are reinforcing the league table approach when they talk about averages and the result can only be a frustrating chase after an impossible target compounded by blame and negative labelling for the unfortunate.

I choose the word **flaw** to indicate what I see to be the results of sloppy thinking over many years: a level of thinking below that needed to match the seriousness of the issues: thinking that has led to badly constructed policy. Some of the flaws to which I draw attention here are deep and long-lasting and have had social effects that I believe to be devastating; and some will de-intellectualise teachers.

One theme of this section is assessment which has, I am sorry to say, often been associated with selection and discrimination. The point I am trying to make is that we derived many of the classifications associated with the values awarded by our system of assessment from perceptions of social class; from beliefs about improving our race (whatever that is); from an eagerness to discriminate between children; and from an inability or an unwillingness to stop, think and find out (research) what might be the most reasonable expectations of performance by children.

This theme is continued into the field of performance management for school teachers where I believe that a similar inability or unwillingness to research the standards means that norms of professional behaviour become established prior to any testing of the criteria by which professionals are judged.

School teachers are discouraged from developing the kind of critical professional voice that could contribute to properly arrived at reasonable expectations of performance by both children and their colleagues.

I draw attention to **nine educational flaws**.

1. The establishment of educational values based upon social and racial exclusion

We live with our history. When the Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education (O-Level GCE) was introduced in 1951 it followed on from the old School Certificate. Both examinations were designed for fewer than 20% of the population at the age of sixteen. The exact percentage varied from place to place. Leaving to one side the small number of children attending our so-called 'public' schools these were mostly the ones in grammar schools. The examinations were also filters for young people passing through to sixth forms, some of whom went on to go through another filter to be accepted for university.

But this was from a time when we did not have universal secondary education and most children had no choice but to attend elementary schools which they left at fourteen. It was possible to leave even earlier with special dispensation if, for example, parents could show pressing economic reasons; my mother and father left school as soon as they turned twelve and the great post-war Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin left at eleven.

Because so many were excluded, for of lack of opportunity rather than ability, from the School Certificate and its O-Level successor there could be no way of knowing how effective the examinations were as measures of educational performance for the complete sixteen year old cohort. Any distribution curve showing a complete range of results for these examinations would have had to leave out approximately 80% of the non-participating sixteen year old population. If this had been an experiment I think that you would have to conclude that any claim that the results were nationally representative was invalid.

After the 1944 Education Act, which provided secondary education for all, and the introduction of the 11-plus examination which purported to select children for different kinds of schools on the basis of 'general intelligence', we came to make assumptions that those selected for grammar schools had 'passed' and that those not selected had 'failed'. O-level, being the examination undertaken by sixteen year old children at the socially desirable grammar schools, came to be regarded as the

examination benchmark of choice. This was despite its narrowness as an examination which concentrated upon examining the ability to recall knowledge and was often referred to as a 'memory test'; and despite serious objections to the manner by which the children who were permitted to take it had been chosen at the age of eleven.

By comparison, the Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE), when introduced for secondary modern school children in the 1960s, tested a much wider range of skills and knowledge in addition to recall. It examined analysis, interpretation, evaluation, investigation and critical reflection; it used more than one mode of assessment, including course work or 'projects' carried out over a long period and a variety of types of questions; and it encouraged a more varied set of teaching techniques. It was even possible, in Mode 3 form, for teachers to write and submit for approval and external moderation their own syllabus, written examination and mark scheme. In my view the children who were negatively labelled because they went to secondary moderns and stayed on to sit CSE examinations rather than O-level were the beneficiaries of a much more searching examination system; and the teachers were stimulated to be far more professionally creative. It is not, unfortunately, easy to convince the media of this because the decision had been taken that O-level was designed for the children at the top of the pile; and so the better examination was given a less desirable label.

We have an established set of educational values based upon social segregation rather than upon a fair opportunity for all to become fulfilled.

It is also important to remind ourselves just how powerful was the influence of eugenics during the time leading up to the 1944 Education Act when major decisions were taken about different kinds of schools for different kinds of children and also about the percentages of the population supposed to be able to reach certain levels of intelligence as it was understood at the time.

Eugenics was all about preventing the degeneration of the race. It reinforced notions of social class and added shame to the feelings experienced by those deemed not to be good enough as human beings. The lower your social class the more likely you were to be labelled, and treated as, degenerate. In the U.S.A. the word 'retarded' is still in use to describe what we would usually refer to as pupils with 'special needs'. Maybe, for that matter, 'special needs' can be just as negative a label. It may have begun life as a serious attempt to make sense of and address the learning needs of a wide variety of children but, as with many such initiatives, it is susceptible to being reduced to an easily and widely applied label. Somehow I cannot picture the smiling face of a parent when, for example, their child runs home with the news that they have been chosen to be part of an inclusion programme.

The notions about racial purity and improvement fostered by the widespread acceptance and promotion of eugenics up to at least the

1940s still bedevil human relationships; and they lurk in the values that we continue to apply when we use words such as 'failure'. It is, after all, not so long since people used words such as 'defective', 'derelict', 'subnormal', 'mentally deficient', 'idiot', 'imbecile', 'backward', 'moron', 'cretin' and 'feeble-minded' without even stopping to think. All of those words have racist connotations if we remember that we are talking about the people who have been identified as unfit to breed. Such terms came into being as part of the technical language of eugenicists but they soon became part of everyday conversation. They were and are very sticky labels.

In his book *The Morbid Age, Britain between the wars* (2009, Allen Lane), Richard Overy provides what is, to me, a chilling account of the desire to purify the race. In the chapter entitled *a sickness in the racial body* he describes the extent to which the birth control movement was motivated by a desire to prevent 'degenerates' breeding. Overy tells us that Marie Stopes, the greatly admired figure who made birth control acceptable before WWII, was motivated by the desire to purify the race. She cut her son out of her will and refused to attend the wedding when he married an 'inferior' woman: inferior because she wore glasses. The son's wife was, you may find it interesting to know, the daughter of Barnes Wallis.

He also reminds us of how this kind of thinking underpinned so much of the work of Sir Cyril Burt, the psychologist who promoted the ideas of intelligence testing and intelligence quotients (IQ) in this country. Not only have there been accusations that Burt falsified some of his research which led up to the adoption of the 11-plus examination but, more disturbing, it is clear that he held to a fundamental belief that educating the 'ignorant' did little good. The task of identifying the 'ignorant' was to be achieved by intelligence testing which allocated them to secondary modern schools.

Most frightening of all, in my view, is that compulsory sterilisation, euthanasia and castration of the 'unfit' were so openly discussed and proposed in the UK.

Eugenics was mainstream orthodoxy at the time when we made major decisions on how we should differentiate children and allocate them to the kinds of schools deemed most fit for them. I do not believe that we have ever shaken off this kind of thinking and its underpinning values; today those schools with less power to exclude the pupils they do not wish to teach look to behaviour management to help solve the 'problem'.

Not only did such views have a deep and long-lasting effect upon educational values in the UK but they are dangerously difficult to distinguish from policies implemented in Nazi Germany. How far is it from proposing compulsory sterilisation for those considered unfit to breed to introducing euthanasia for the socially and racially unwanted offspring of those considered unfit to breed?

Stephen Murdoch's book *IQ THE BRILLIANT IDEA THAT FAILED* (2007, Duckworth Overlook) is a history of intelligence testing. He has a chapter on the 11-plus and describes the use of IQ testing in screening out immigrants to the USA who were perceived to be undesirable and in sorting and classifying the 1.7 million men recruited to the US army in 1917; an army that continued to segregate regiments by race throughout WWII. He also provides an account of Nazi use of intelligence testing to classify those selected for euthanasia. On education he writes:

The history of the use of IQ tests is appalling..... Their application in education, whether the eleven-plus in England and Wales or the Wechsler exams and the SAT in the United States, has been at best misguided. Considering that they do not test intelligence and have negligible ability to predict academic achievement, they have at the least been used to exclude many worthy individuals from access to an excellent education. At their worst, since they correlate so strongly with socioeconomic background, they have excluded those already most disadvantaged in society.

Our desire to educate is, I believe, often overpowered by our greater desire to socially classify and label which means that our educational system can be very anti educational.

2. Further false bench-marking

The official assumption that Grade Four in CSE represented the average performance of a sixteen year old was made in the 1960s at a time when 80% of children left school at fifteen without having even participated in a programme of learning that might have led to any public examination. It was another false or imaginary benchmark: another insertion of a norm without any testing.

If this really had been a true average back in the 1960s then we might now congratulate ourselves upon having made a huge improvement in performance since then. Only we cannot do this. It was a fantasy average with absolutely no basis in fact. Not only did the 'average' not emerge from any testing it simply could not do so because the children were not there to be tested. The 'average' was arbitrarily imposed. Making such a careless assumption about where to place the average would result in a fail grade at any level of examination; just try submitting a thesis for a PhD and telling your examiners that your statistics are imaginary.

3. Falsely differentiating and yet more imaginary classifications of children

The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was designed for the also imaginary 40% below O-level, leaving nothing in the way of public

examinations for the equally imaginary 'bottom' 40%. We simply made assumptions about these percentiles: we had no reliable way of finding out who they were or even if they existed at all. The later General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) merged the two grading systems and so was designed to cater only for the so-called 'top' 60% with grade 'C' and above equating to the O-level grades. We often forget, however, that although the grades were said to equate they came from two very different assessment regimes and approaches to teaching. I have already made clear that in my view CSE was a far more searching examination than O-Level supported by a much wider range of teaching techniques but that is not a view that appeals to what I think of as 'The Grammar School Tendency'.

GCSE has, however, been used to judge the performance of schools and teachers in teaching across the *entire* ability range. I believe that such a major public examination *ought* to apply across the complete sixteen-year-old population (strictly speaking this is the 14-16 population); but the ghosts of past value assumptions continue to influence judgments being made about how value should be distributed today. They may also have led to grade inflation as everyone strives to achieve grades that signal high value.

Based upon unsupported and untested assumptions, different grades have been given different value at different times so that at one time it was important to achieve a CSE grade four and above in order to be in the so-called 'top' 50% (grade four CSE 'equating' to an 'F' at GCSE) and later it became important to have a grade 'C' and above at GCSE to be where the top 20% used to be assumed to be. Neither of these boundary grades are sound baselines from which to show improvement. They were plucked out of the air. And if the so-called 'bottom' 40% were not supposed to be even entered for GCSE then teachers have the right to feel aggrieved when held accountable for low grades.

4. Unfounded and unfair labelling

In the chase after so-called 'improvement' recent policy has been to regard any grade below GCSE 'C' (back to the old school certificate and O-level) as failure. Headteachers have lost their jobs because of this; schools have been labelled 'failing'; and many children and teachers have acquired a stigma that will remain with them till the end of their lives. We should never underestimate the effect of labelling upon human beings. And some of those very sticky labels derive from our historical obsession with social exclusion. Why, for example, do we use the word 'good' to apply to grades 'C' and above? Obtaining those grades is now more important than enabling all children to be fulfilled. Does the grammar school ghost continue to haunt us?

You may have seen schools in which children assessed for GCSE at 'D' by teachers at an early stage, but thought to be capable of an eventual 'C' with lots of input and a following wind, have been given far more

attention than those judged never to be likely of achieving the valued grade. This kind of unprofessional behaviour is a direct result of the blame culture in which schools and teachers must now operate: obtaining the required percentage of the approved grades has become far more important than providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all. Or, indeed, more important than ensuring that schools can become fair societies within themselves. What about the 'D's that will not climb to a 'C'; or the 'E's; or the 'F's (once thought to represent the average); or the 'G's; or, for that matter, the 'U's (unclassified)? What do they get out of school other than an undesirable label?

We should remember that the words 'pass' and 'fail' were never intended to be used in GCSE because the idea was that entrants would obtain the grade that best represented their performance. Rigid norms from the outset made this problematic but, nevertheless, there is no pass mark. As a society, however, we simply cannot stop ourselves wishing for a damaging demarcation between what we like to perceive as success and failure.

5. Haunted by statistical histories

At the very first meetings of the groups that decided where to draw grade boundaries for all of the GCSE subjects decisions were made that haunted all subsequent such decisions.

No matter if the boundaries chosen for different subjects were generous or stingy or based upon a wet finger in the wind they remained as reference points for many years in order to demonstrate that standards stayed the same. At the meeting that I attended on the first occasion at which we had to establish grade boundaries the only guide available to us was the untested notion of Grade 4 CSE being the national average for sixteen year olds so we used that. During those years the rigid adherence to maintaining the same shape of distribution curve perpetuated the values decided upon at the first meetings. Statistics have histories too.

Of course we could bring back the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) which tried to establish well researched reasonable expectations of performance by children. But this approach did not fit easily with a National Curriculum that presented us with ready-made but unresearched norms. Since the abolition of the APU in 1991 no politician has wished to be confused by having to listen to serious researchers on this matter (see 6 below).

6. Establishing norms for the National Curriculum system of assessment before testing the criteria.

The National Curriculum originally came complete with lots of Attainment Targets. The first published draft for Science had 19 ATs and, by the way, the first to be removed was the nineteenth: the social impact of

science. We also had Profile Components (clusters of Attainment Targets) and, crucially, ten levels of performance complete with descriptions to help us recognise the performance to match each one. Of course it was rather silly to assume that knowledge, skills and understanding could be neatly described, acquired and demonstrated in ten equal steps across a range of ten subjects but at least we now had a set of criteria to help teachers make sense of learning; and making sense of learning is really what should be happening when we assess the work of children rather than judging and labelling. We are, after all, in the education business rather than the social labelling business.

The criteria came largely from the collective minds of the groups of people brought together to write them but, having published them, the next sensible thing to do was to test them; as you would with all theories, for that is what untested criteria really are. Kenneth Clark was Margaret Thatcher's Secretary of State at the time. I doubt if the idea ever occurred to him that we should test the criteria in order to arrive at norms that might reflect a relatively natural and reliable set of expectations for the performance of children. He simply told us that Key Stage One would have available only the bottom three levels and that we would find the average in the middle. Lo and behold, that is where it was and this gave him the opportunity to complain that so many children were below average. And, if this were not enough innumerate nonsense for the profession and the children to endure, the year after John Patten, Clarke's successor, allowed Key Stage One to go up to level four. Of course, some children that might have been banging their heads on the top of level three were now released to go up to the next highest level. For Patten this was evidence that Conservative Party policies were working. He called it 'improvement'.

Meanwhile, the University of Leeds had a contract to evaluate, ahead of their introduction, the modes of assessment at KS1. I was one of the research associates. During the course of administering research SATs to children of approximately seven years of age I had to ask a child to read out aloud an unseen story that included quotation marks, exclamation marks, slang, nicknames and names from across a wide cultural spectrum. I doubt if even the most experienced BBC announcer could, if bounced into reading without any preparation a complicated story with multi-cultural nicknames, have done any better than this child did with no effort. Even scouring carefully the descriptor for level ten I was at a loss. It seemed to me that she was way above the level ten descriptor but could, courtesy of Kenneth Clarke, only achieve a three.

This is one reason why I deplore differentiation by task. By all means we should acquire and use a language to help us understand what is happening when learning takes place but to predict and restrict the achievement and demonstration of that learning by pre-setting the levels of tasks is, in my view, unprofessional. Differentiation by outcome, on the other hand, allows for consideration of the unexpected both in terms of

its nature and also of its level of performance. Of course it encourages mixed ability teaching and that is now officially frowned upon.

7. Constructing National Standards as a basis for performance management a) without testing them and b) by linking them to false benchmarks

National professional standards are no different from level descriptors or any kind of criteria: they are merely theories that require testing before we know what weight can be placed on, or significance given, to them. Until they are submitted to critical reflection in a variety of professional contexts over a reasonable period we ought not to use them as a basis for making decisions about pay, pay progression and promotion. They are also restrictive and constraining. And, by the way, how many teachers in your school have reached Excellent Teacher (ET) standard? If you are not an ET does this mean that excellence eludes you? And what a silly title to give this standard!

8. Looking for evidence to demonstrate that targets have been met

Between them performance management, inspection, league tables and exhortations to be above average create a blame culture. In such conditions the examination of professional learning to see if there is any unexpected evidence for unintended outcomes that might turn out to be professional penicillin is less likely than the search for evidence that targets, no matter how badly chosen, have been met. This de-intellectualises the profession. We should NEVER look for evidence to demonstrate that we have met a target: we should ALWAYS look *amongst* evidence, including the unexpected, to see what it signifies. We are educators; we are not selling double glazing or time shares or insurance policies: we are not on the planet to hit our sales target. We must never accept a target without questioning it or ever throw away evidence without examining it for its value and significance. Working to targets narrows the mind. How inspiring will it be to have on the professional gravestone: 'They reached their targets by carefully selecting the evidence'?

9. Ignoring professional voices

I have calculated that every year in England approximately 220,000,000 words are written at masters-level and above by school teachers. How many of them are read by policy-makers?

A story from Key Stage One

While in Leeds administering those research SATs to seven year old children I had a professionally challenging moment; the kind that sometimes makes you wonder if you and your colleagues have anything in common at all. The idea was to pair a boy and a girl to carry out a directed experiment. My colleague researcher and I had prepared several sets of rolled up tubes of paper for this. Some tubes were thick and some were thin; and some were tightly rolled and some loosely. The children were required to choose some books in order to build two parallel columns across which they could place, in turn, the various sets of rolled up tubes of paper. They were then to suspend from each paper bridge a small plastic bucket into which they shovelled (while counting each scoop) some sand. Upon the eventual collapse of the bridge we were supposed to begin discussion of such notions as weight and tensile strength. When, as it would, the first bridge collapsed I said and did nothing. This made my colleague restless. I, however, simply observed the children who by now were into collaborative learning and had become almost unaware of these two researchers watching them. The children did not stop to discuss a plan of action; they immediately began to repair the bridge. 'Stop them', urgently whispered my colleague and, referring to the booklet with which we had been provided, went on to say: 'they are not supposed to do anything like that for at least another four pages of the manual'.

At that moment any idea of what grade those children might have been awarded could not have been further from my mind; they were getting interested rather than carrying out my instructions and were beginning to take charge of what was happening. It made me wonder if the only attainment target we should ever have been working towards was AT1: investigation. Had this SAT been for real I am sure that my colleague would on that occasion have done better than me to enable the children to achieve a higher score.

My conclusion after taking part in this research for Leeds was that we did not need to have separate SATs in Key Stage One. Instead of SATs for English, Mathematics and Science it would have been very easy to design an activity that enabled us to assess the work of children in all of those subjects. This would have fulfilled the original intention that children would not notice that they were being assessed and it would, therefore, have lessened any tension. My experience of examining at CSE, Sixteen Plus and GCSE and assessment in all Key Stages also led me to believe in the value of activities that engage the interests of students rather than sudden death stressful tests.

Judgment

For a judgment on the educational policies of New Labour as they affect the professional lives of school teachers in England it is instructive to look at the various reports on social mobility. I believe that they demonstrate a twelve year political journey to a past of privilege, widening social and economic gaps and greed. In other words, all of the hard work and dedication of school teachers has been harnessed to such a poorly chosen set of educational policies that things have become worse. The individualist side of New Labour has triumphed over the social fairness side. The party that once changed the political weather to create a more fair society forgot what it used to believe and now looks likely to hand over power to a party determined to stamp out the last vestiges of the public service ethos. Any weather it has made will fill the sails of Conservatives.

How can it be that the Milburn Report was only produced twelve years after New Labour formed a government for the first time? The panel was chaired by a prominent New Labour politician and the report is actually called *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. It is little use blaming some professions for their lack of accessibility if it has taken you so long to recognise the problem. To see the report go to www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/accessprofessions/asp. I must, however, warn that government websites often change because items are archived and you sometimes need patience to find what you wish to see.

Other reports on social mobility worth looking at include the report by the London School of Economics *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America* (2005) which is available by going to <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/about/news/IntergenerationalMobility.pdf>.

What does this mean for the teaching profession? Educational voices are not heard. I believe that we lack the confidence to express thoughts about the kind of society in which we wish to live and about the role of teachers in contributing to its construction; instead professional lives have been perverted and wasted.

How can we rise above current party political values?

Although I believe that the professional lives of school-teachers in England should be given a higher sense of purpose the chances are slight of this coming from any of the major political parties. They have become addicted to interfering and target setting and, in the case of the Conservative and New Labour parties, averse to slow cooking. I mean that they want results quickly so that while the educational casserole should be gently simmering for a long time before it is properly cooked these politicians cannot stop themselves from constantly watching it, taking out some ingredients and putting in others that will cook faster, turning up the heat and serving it before it is ready. The result is indigestion.

Another reason why the chances are slight is that they have rejected public service and social fairness in favour of individualism. They have not entirely abandoned the language of social fairness because at election time it helps to say nice things about society and welfare and so-on but they have totally bought into a vision which reduces teachers to standardised child processors. The world for which these children are processed is a world of the market place: a greedy world in which we may know the price of everything but the value of very little.

Yet another reason is that they have diminished democracy. Rather than encouraging us to vote in local elections for councils that provide services they prefer that we become the customers of businesses that have won contracts to deliver those services. Local government receives its targets from central government and then awards a contract after competitive tendering to a company that claims to be able to hit the target. If they miss the target they lose the contract and another bidder steps in. Who used to empty your dustbins? Who empties them now? We should not pretend to ourselves that schools are so precious that they will be immune to this way of doing things; and if they fail to hit their targets the contract will go to another branded educational consortium.

I believe that if we are to work to a higher purpose it must involve critical professional conversations. To this end I want to set out for discussion **three questions** amplified with a few possible consequences. If I can encourage critical conversations in this way then it may be possible to move towards the construction of a professional educators' manifesto against which can be judged the educational and social values and policies of future governments.

1. What would have to change if the professional lives of educators were dedicated to help build a fair and inclusive society? It might, for example, mean:

- a) secular mixed primary schools and secular mixed secondary comprehensive schools;

- b) a commitment that no child should be educationally disadvantaged because of the financial resources, influence or social position of their parents;
- c) an end to selection;
- d) less streaming and more mixed ability teaching.

2. Would education benefit from more democracy? It might, for example, mean:

- a) central government listening to elected local government rather than issuing targets;
- b) central *and* local government listening to teachers rather than narrowly measuring their performance;
- c) central government, local government *and* teachers listening to children and their parents;
- d) the re-establishment of a long-term public service ethos rather than a short-term open market for consultants and businesses;
- e) less 'leadership and management' in schools and a greater degree of collegial decision making.

3. Should education lead to fulfilment? It might, for example, mean:

- a) establishing a set of performance criteria across a wide range of skills and knowledge leading to properly researched and reliable norms;
- b) allowing anyone of any age who matches any grade criterion to have that recognised with no restrictions on the level available;
- c) that homework should be long-term projects, encouraging children to undertake more investigative research, collaboratively when appropriate;
- d) that public examinations should have a high proportion of coursework carried out individually and collaboratively encouraging a sustained interest in learning;
- e) creating a fair society;
- f) acknowledging that *all* children have gifts and talents.

In my view these are the sorts of questions we should be asking and issues we should be raising when politicians come knocking on our doors asking for our votes. We need a voice that articulates educational and social values concentrated around fairness, democracy and fulfilment; and we need to express ourselves confidently.

A critical professional conversation

If you wish to engage in further critical professional conversation based upon this discursion you might find what follows to be useful. It is merely an aid to help structure and stimulate conversation and I suggest that you use it or adapt it or think of something that serves you better. It could possibly contribute to the establishment of some professional values. If you think that my tone in what follows is overly teachery I can only apologise.

1. Assertion

Try to pick out **three** instances where the text depends upon assertion alone and where no or inadequate evidence is provided in support. Be prepared to explain your selections to others. You might, for example, feel that a point being made can only be justified as opinion which you can take or leave; you might feel that the opinion is accompanied by a qualification which makes it more worthy of consideration; you might feel that the point being made can stand as a fact if it can be verified; you might feel that the point is not worth making and should have been left out; and you might feel that the point claims more than can be justified on the basis of the evidence presented to you.

You do not have to agree or disagree with the assertions. You might even strongly agree with them but still feel that evidence is lacking.

2. Agree/Disagree

Pick out **three** points in the text with which you most **strongly agree** and **three** with which you most **strongly disagree**. When doing this try to put aside consideration of the nature, strength and significance of any evidence provided in the text because this is not a direct question about that evidence: it is about relating what you have chosen to your own experience and values: what is it that makes you agree or disagree? Be prepared to explain your choices. That is where evidence will come in; evidence from your own professional life.

3. Balance and Fairness

Would you say that the text is balanced and fair? You may wish to narrow this down to where you think it is and where you think it is not and simply point out some examples. I am not suggesting that you write an essay and, in any case, who says that everything has to be balanced and fair? Again, be prepared to explain what you have decided but remember that revealing to others decisions about what you consider to be balanced and fair may bring your own values not only to the surface but also into question.

4. Style

Style does matter because it is part of how we say what we want to say. It can both please and irritate. It can both highlight and hide meaning. It can both provide insight and deceive. Possibly the worst thing that a style of writing can do is to confuse the reader. So can you find places where the style of this text did not help you? I guess that metaphors, analogies, examples, illustrations, punctuation and juxtapositions may provide the greatest sources of confusion and irritation. Can you identify a few places where a different form of expression might have helped? Can you provide better ones? Would the meaning change if the style of language changed?

You might also like to identify places where you feel that the style helped.

5. Histories, classifications, formulations and testing of theories

It can be very interesting to trace the history of theories and to place them in appropriate groupings. Doing this can help the sense-making process.

A way of thinking about theory and groups of theories is that they are relatively settled sets or expressions of understanding that can be tested. They can be based upon really thorough enquiry. They can also be based upon very poor enquiry. Remember that Sherlock Holmes was always reluctant to formulate a theory too early in his enquiries but when he was ready to do so the next thing he did was to test it. Hercule Poirot was no different. Despite the efforts of Captain Hastings and Inspector Japp to prise a theory or an early conclusion out of him he first accumulated all the evidence before constructing a theory that could be tested.

Sometimes we forget that besides the field of education there are other areas of study that have used similar theories, often much earlier. Systems theory is just one example. Theories do not necessarily only grow in one field.

Sometimes we refer to theory and theorists so frequently that we get involved in a spot-the-theory game, lose perspective and become unable to take a step forward. The phrase 'cannot see the wood for the trees' comes to mind.

Sometimes we use theory without realising it. The dodgy research basis for the 11-Plus examination is seldom referred to these days but the assumptions that accompanied it remain to haunt us.

Can you identify and classify theories used in the text? Can you identify areas where you think that *theorising* is taking place before sufficient enquiry has been carried out? And can you identify areas where you think it would be appropriate to construct and carry out a test of something said in the text?

Theories are not always made explicit and a body of literature is not always identified so these might not be easy tasks. I advise managing your time carefully here. Try to remember that digging into a text to discover a hidden theory is not the desired end: the initial and main purpose of this exercise is to take part in critical conversations. Discovering, articulating, contextualising and challenging theories is part of that.

But this is not a solitary activity: your conversation will allow others to express their knowledge and you may have the chance to engage in some systematic, collaborative enquiry about theory.

6. Political stance

Can you identify and classify political positions in the text? It may help to distinguish between *political* and *party political*. I take the word 'politics' to stand for the process by which groups come together in order to make decisions about values. Political parties are supposed to have already established general sets of values from which policies emerge; although sometimes the line from value to policy may be tortuous and even broken. The general value positions of parties may also be seen as perspectives from which they examine the World.

So, can you see general value positions in the text and can you see value positions that you regard as those of particular political parties?

Explaining what you believe that you have discovered is, yet again, essential.

7. Orthodoxies and assumptions

Professional life does not always encourage us to challenge orthodoxies and assumptions whether they come from politicians or theorists or have emerged from years of practice. An example of what I mean is that it has become so normal to differentiate by task that some teachers do not even know about differentiation by outcome any more. On a larger scale you might think that society has come to accept the privatisation of education and so it is seldom challenged. Can you identify any such orthodoxies and assumptions called into question in the text?

On the other hand, the text may also make assumptions and follow or propound orthodoxies; maybe without realising it.

8. Inconsistencies and contradictions

There are likely to be inconsistencies so can you identify inconsistencies within the text? In particular you may find that a point being strongly asserted in one part of a text is contradicted in another part. Sometimes authors do this deliberately in order to arrive at a synthesised or reconciled final position. But sometimes they do it because their minds are wandering. There may be advantages in following a wandering author exploring un-charted territory: it can stimulate thinking; and there may be disadvantages to reading a text that is exceedingly well designed and assembled: it can resemble a set text that has to be learned unquestioningly.

You are not being asked to judge and grade this text. I merely suggest that you use any inconsistencies and contradictions that you identify in order to further your critical conversations.

9. Developed Further

Is there anything in the text that you would like to have been developed further? You might also feel that you would like to research or enquire further into issues raised or points of interest in the texts. Again, be ready to explain.