

My reflection on (mainly) quality assurance

Stage three of critiquing my curriculum vitae

There are thirteen items here. In terms of presenting a CV I think the appropriate phrase might be 'over egging the cake'. It includes a lot of Quality Assurance stuff, exemplifying the kind of things I did in Liverpool Local Education Authority (LEA) and then at the University attempting to embed systems for humans rather than robots. I felt that once the University officially discovered QA its systems became more robotic and, to me, the quality was lessened. Filling in the form correctly seemed to be the most important requirement; although, many years earlier, someone did insert the word 'normally' into university regulations. That word would often come in handy.

I mention GCSE or the General Certificate of Secondary Education. I have never seen anything in education that exceeded the level of care taken by public examination boards to get things right. To be involved in GCSE from the stage when we were drafting syllabuses (now called specifications) and papers and mark schemes for the training of teachers in what we might loosely refer to as the social sciences or humanities was so exciting. Instead of the Ordinary-Level emphasis upon the arrival at a rank order based upon the ability to recall knowledge it was more like the far superior Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE). Questions were more varied and open, enabling candidates to respond with unexpected evidence with which examiners had to engage. Like CSE, coursework encouraged research and sustained learning.

GCSE provided me with what I regard as my best ever and most pleasing professional evaluation. I asked a teacher how his kids had felt about a paper I had set in Government and Politics. Normally candidates come out of an exam telling each other about the mistakes they think they have made. They are worried about their grades. His kids?

"Hey sir, that was a really interesting exam."

The thrill of professional fulfilment ran through me. Maybe I am easy to please. But that feedback illustrates my hopeless wish that instead of giving instant grades we could visit candidates twenty years later to see what use they made of their learning. I know that is impractical. Instead of giving a grade I would also prefer examiners to write responses. Given the numbers taking exams and the shortage of examiners none of this is likely to happen soon. In the days of Mode-Three CSE and GCSE teachers could do something approaching this, subject to the visit of an external moderator. No government would allow this today. We also have a cultural expectation that young people must be graded. Why? Because our educational system is really a series of selections providing differently valued labels to wear for life.

I tried to make examinations part of the learning process. A speech by John Major in 1991 began to turn GCSE into a measuring process. A few years later I moved from being a chief examiner writing papers and mark schemes to

chairing the meetings of three related subjects. They were Law, Welfare and Society and Politics. Another reason for stopping writing papers was that, no longer being a schoolteacher, I had lost the confidence that I instinctively knew what phrases would and would not work with sixteen year olds.

The last school in which I taught was in a community that competed, often successfully, for the title of highest unemployment in the land. Connecting that school with the community was very important, especially when local people began their fight back and began to create what became the largest housing co-operative in Western Europe. For a while government allowed us to design Mode-Three GCSEs. So, with help from a friend in an examination board, I designed one that, among other things, allowed young people go out of school to sit on committees with architects and others to make decisions about the kinds of houses that needed to be built. Writing about, for example, their study of demographic trends in their community and how decisions were taken was made credit worthy.

Later someone in that community asked for my help in writing a Mode-Three GCSE in Women's Studies. All Liverpool secondary state schools had women doing gender related work. They became involved and the result was impressive. I did very little of the work but, one night, I had to meet all of these women to tell them that government did not regard Women's Studies as a subject worthy to be studied and accredited.

I mention writing the paper that became the basis for the annual evaluation of masters and doctoral programmes provided for schoolteachers in England. Those programmes lasted ten years. For an educational initiative under New Labour that was a lifetime. The paper emerged from the work I had done on professional learning journals and accompanying portfolio evidence. And the theoretical roots of that work were in political science. For me education and politics are entwined because they are about the inclusive discussion of and arrival at public values.

I also mention links with what was then the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and various subject associations running programmes for members. The idea was to multiply their effectiveness and impact by means of bridging assignments that could link them with Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). These were the masters and doctoral programmes offered to schoolteachers in England.

The inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) over two years was not without stress and meant hard work but it was also stimulating. In those days inspectors behaved as fellow members of the profession. They were not traffic wardens. Overall that inspection led to a report (Soulsby and Swain) that in turn led to Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). It did, however, put an end to my PhD on impact. My boss, very understandably, suggested that doing well in the inspection was crucial to the survival of the department. More letters after my name were not.

EXTRACT FROM MY CURRICULUM VITAE

Further experience of quality assurance includes:

- **designing the QA system for the validation and accreditation of records of achievement for Liverpool Education Authority;**
- **designing and operating the QA system for the Education Department of the University of Liverpool's masters provision working within the UK and overseas;**
- **designing and operating the QA policy for working at masters level in languages other than English throughout the University of Liverpool;**
- **designing the validation proformas, guidance documents and worked examples for masters provision in the Department of Education at the University of Liverpool;**
- **commissioning, overseeing and designing the specification for QA in CPD throughout the Liverpool Department of Education;**
- **leading and managing the team at Liverpool during a two year long national inspection by HMI of accredited CPD programmes;**
- **member of the team that designed and operated the QA system of the University of Liverpool for validating and accrediting training programmes provided by members of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce;**
- **member of the team that designed and operated the QA system for accrediting prior learning throughout the University of Liverpool;**
- **chairing the validating and accrediting boards for three GCSE subjects;**
- **chairing moderation and consortia meetings for National Curriculum assessment;**
- **chairing and attending a large number of university examination boards;**
- **writing the paper that was the basis for the annual evaluation of all universities providing masters and doctoral level work for schoolteachers in England;**
- **designing and gaining agreement for the arrangements for accrediting prior learning between universities in England and the programmes of the National College for School Leadership, the GTCE and the subject associations.**

Cliff Jones 16th. July 2018