

Educational chaos theory comes to England

We heard recently from Nick Boles MP, an influential supporter of the government and former flatmate of Michael Gove, that planning is a waste of time and that what we need is chaos. Now I am beginning to perceive a political theory underpinning what has been happening in our World. It goes something like this. I think.

Planning is bad so we must plan to get rid of plans, including our plans, even our plans to get rid of plans. Oh dear, that can't be right, where was I? Start again. Let's see if the dialectic of Hegel, Marx and Engels can help.

Thesis: beginning in the eighties, teachers were told that they must read, learn, inwardly digest, instruct and test children only in the National Curriculum. If not Ofsted would paint a sign on their school to tell the World that they had educators' plague. The result was lots and lots of planning at every level.

Antithesis: teachers must now work in the World of Secretary of State (SOS) Gove; galloping all over the field; rescuing an initiative here; responding to a new one somewhere else; trying to work out what is happening; and staggering home, hoping for elusive enlightenment. I wonder if anyone is keeping count of Gove's U-turns. He told The Times recently that taking office was like landing on the beach at Normandy and fearlessly facing the fire from the enemy; by which he seems to mean those who raise objections to his precipitate policy making. I think he must have read too much of Valiant Comic's Captain Hurricane in his youth.

Synthesis: teachers arrive at a sunny upland meadow where everything makes perfect sense and government's respect for the professionalism of teachers includes asking them what they think. Will this happen? Plan your bets.

Meanwhile, professional educators in HE are falling to the swords of vandals. Are teachers in schools aware of redundancies in universities for people working in education? HE tutors working in the post compulsory sector are particularly singled out because ITT in FE is really CPD and undertaken by people with mortgages, children and cars to pay for. They cannot afford the fees.

This matters because people working in HE who work with schools and colleges blend the perspectives of theory and practice; they employ knowledge of practice to challenge theory; and they use theory to challenge practice. Government assumes that headteachers and college principals will pop down to their local university, knock on the door and ask for a customised programme to provide all of their staff with masters degrees and doctorates. They can certainly do that; but soon there may be no-one to answer the knock on the door.

It hurts to think of the loss of experience, expertise and professional memory. All the King's Horses and all the King's men won't put education back together again. Professional learning is now all about coping with chaos: its official. Plan to like it.

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