

The fourth professional dimension

Once upon a time my colleagues and I enjoyed the pleasure of the company of a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors for a very extended visit. They began their task half way through one university academic year and did not finish until most of the way through the next one. It sometimes felt that if you opened a cupboard there would be an HMI with notebook and pencil waiting to ask seemingly innocuous questions that, if miss fielded, could have led straight to the professional dole queue. One thing that HMI have over ordinary Ofsted inspectors is that they are thoroughly trained to be charming assassins: if you are contemplating sudden professional death you don't want a botched job by an amateur part-timer. Working in a university education department we were flattered that government assigned to us only those inspectors with a double 0 number.

Back in the dying days of the last century HMI were still crossing, somewhat diffidently, over the chasm between their former role as mutual professional sense-makers, in which they saw themselves as critical friends of teachers with a deep desire to work towards a common good, to, on the other side, the role of fault finders sent out to catch, label and despatch anyone falling short of a government target. It was during the later stages of the crossover period, when some had completed their journey while others lingered before taking the final step, that they came to inspect our accredited CPD.

Heart stoppers

I had a couple of heart-stopping moments. In the first I was told that it was all very well working with teachers to identify and, crucially, analyse their needs but those needs had to match what government wanted; if they didn't we would fail our inspection: teachers had to be helped by us to discover their need to deliver policy, nothing more. So I devised an activity that related needs to impact but retained a strong element of analysis. That satisfied the inspectors. The second incident was when an HMI judged the work of two teachers very differently from me. The HMI liked the piece of work that concentrated upon examination results but not the one in which a teacher had written about the journey from low professional confidence to belief in their ability to do a good job. Evidence for the latter being somewhat intangible and problematic the HMI did not think much of it. I managed to successfully argue that because this was a masters level programme we challenged teachers to go into the areas of professional life where the evidence might not be easy to collect and examine but could have significance. Nevertheless, encouraging schoolteachers to problematise their professional lives was clearly a dangerous thing to do.

It was still possible at that time to nervously embark upon such a conversation with an HMI in a university; but the pressure was undeniably strengthening to reduce what we did to a narrowing of the professional perspectives of schoolteachers so that they concentrated upon government priorities. Maybe

it was just as well that we did not draw the attention of inspectors to the module on the socio/political context of education.

I continue to feel that governments of all persuasions are so concerned to achieve short-term success, or what can be made to look like success, that they fail to see how their own priorities could be better achieved if approached from more than one perspective.

Perspectives

In order to make sense of the professional lives of schoolteachers I have found that it helps to make use of four major perspectives: the **regulatory/inspection perspective**; the **academic/theoretical perspective**; the **personal/professional perspective**; and the **politico/ideological perspective**. You can guess that during the inspection there was no mention of a fourth perspective.

Let me take them in turn to explain what I mean about each perspective. There is, by the way, a considerable literature associated with each perspective.

1. We must look at professional life from the perspective of regulations and inspection regimes because, especially since the late 1980s in England, failure to do so can mean professional death. Although we can be looking at policy here there are limits to the extent that it can be problematised and critiqued. We are examining what the paymaster requires and intends to make sure is implemented. The only wriggle room we have is that we are allowed to think about different ways of doing what is required. I am NOT suggesting that this perspective is somehow beneath us. Elected governments have a right to make and implement policy, even if they promised to do something different when standing for election.

The literature most associated with this perspective is likely to include the National Curriculum, its Assessment Orders, inspection frameworks, examination specifications and documents relating to government initiatives and requirements; in fact anything official that tells you what you must do.

2. The academic and theoretical perspective is important because it brings to the examination of professional life the values of proper enquiry. Using this perspective it is necessary to formulate questions carefully and to find out what has been said by others. Despite a propensity of politicians to sometimes regard theory as airy-fairy hot air, theory is actually about the well-founded formulation of questions and the rigorous examination of evidence in terms of its strength and significance.

In addition to a wide variety of literature relating to educational philosophy, sociology, ideas and subject specific academic writing the

literature of this perspective also includes material on how to conduct research and develop the values of and acquire the techniques for criticality.

3. By personal and professional I mean the perspectives of schools and schoolteachers doing their job from day to day. At times the rush to respond to the demands of work can mean that this does not feel like a perspective at all. There is so little time to stand back and reflect. I have included it because it is so constantly present that it can easily be relegated to something called 'simply doing my job': getting through till Friday. It needs to be thought about. There are many values involved; priorities are decided upon; and courses of action are taken, changed and cancelled in favour of new ones. Without treating seriously these sometimes confusing and clashing rhythms of professional life we can be guilty of regarding the anxieties, imperatives and concerns of teachers and schools as no more than the normal moans of teachers. They are, in fact, a rich source of material for those that wish to make sense of professional life.

The literature includes anything from a scheme of work to a school's self evaluation and a range of its policy documents. Increasingly, I hope, that literature will also include partnership agreements with HEIs and others. It ought, in my opinion, also to include critical professional learning journals and portfolios of evidence for impact. Values lurk in such documents. They ought not to be concealed. If they are critically reflected upon and the results shared this kind of literature can be very powerful.

4. The politico ideological perspective is important because professional educators, individually and collectively, help to shape society. We may not always realise it but we are recruited, managed and directed to do just that. And we sometimes do it most when we are only dimly aware of the full import of government intentions. It is easy to get to the stage of complaining about all that is happening but, partly because politicians do not always clearly articulate, or even understand, their own ideologies, it is not so easy to devise and deploy conceptual frameworks that can help us to classify, categorise, challenge and make sense of what is happening; and, in particular, what is seen to be happening when we look at the other three perspectives from the fourth.

I am sure that neither Michael Gove nor his boss David Cameron nor, especially, Nick Clegg would for one moment admit, even to themselves, that they are intending to accelerate the differentiation and stratification of society by creating different kinds of schools for different kinds of children and parents: to widen social gaps.

I am also sure that when, for the first four years of the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher, as secretary of state for education, created more comprehensive schools than all other secretaries of state, irrespective

of party, put together she had no idea that by narrowing social gaps she was acting in opposition to her own deep beliefs. We should never overestimate the ability of politicians to understand what they are doing.

Nevertheless, articulated or not, openly avowed or not and clearly understood or not, politicians with the power to construct and enforce policy do draw upon their instinctive beliefs in how society ought to be shaped. In the case of the Conservative Party this will, for example, mean that so-called public schools will never be made to revert to what they once were: schools founded for the public, usually the very poor public. To do that would damage privilege; and that would mean perceived disaster to so many Conservative supporters. We hear so much about encouraging those at the bottom of the pile to aspire to join those at the top. Ultimate privilege will, however, always be *just* out of reach for most of the strongest social strivers. It has to be that way in order to fulfil a Conservative vision of society, which will always be stratified and differential, even deferential.

The literature for this perspective was relatively thin on the ground in the UK, especially England, for many years after the 1988 Education Act and the implementation of the National Curriculum and all that went with it. Publishers seemed to think that what teachers demanded were tool kits that enabled them to be prepared for inspection or to drag children up a grade. I may have missed it but I do not recall anything published in the UK for the schoolteacher market during that time that addressed the issues to be found in Kemmis et al (1983), for which I provide a link below. But things are changing. I am not going to provide a reading list but, if you are prepared to move slightly off the educational piste and venture into political commentary, there is a growing literature that critically reflects upon the action and values of parties and politicians, including their use of education to shape society. You might like to begin with **The Values of New Labour** on this website (<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/criticalViewpoint.html>).

None so blind as those that will not see

Talk of perspectives was part of the language that, during inspection, I used in order to engage with HMI hoping, thereby, to gain recognition for what the academic/theoretical perspective had to offer. At times it felt that it was being ignored: as though the official view was that, rather than contributing to improved professionalism it was, at best, a distraction and, at worst, inimical to it. As an external examiner of work produced by teachers at many universities I believe that I see the interplay of perspectives all the time in the way that people engage with their assignments and approach literature. Deploying different perspectives enriches the experience of being a teacher researcher; it broadens the mind; and, I believe, it enhances the work done by professionals. I wish governments could or would see this.

Government intentions

What is now proposed as educational policy for England emphasises the need to employ the fourth: **the politico/ideological perspective**. I say this because, admitted and declared or not, it is very clear that government has an intention to reshape society in England. Despite all the rhetoric about a Big Society and localism it is the intention of government that schools and school teaching shall play a part in the further differentiation and stratification of society; universities too for that matter. The accelerated demise of the good local, secular school for all, responsive to democratically accountable local councillors, does not bode well for believers in social inclusion; nor does it help to generate a more fair and equal society: just the opposite.

Michael Gove sees school teaching as a craft, which certainly it is, but it is also a profession; and the first seven letters of that word tell us that as professionals we ought to believe and advocate something: something that educators have generated rather than something they have been told to profess by short-term unqualified politicians.

Why have I titled this piece The Fourth Dimension? I am certainly no mathematician but a fourth dimension enables us to generalise from and make critical sense of the other three dimensions. It is the same with the perspectives I have listed. By making use of the politico/ideological perspective, or dimension, all of the others begin to look different. We can then see that regulations, inspection regimes, school planning, personal planning and academic theory are harnessed to serve particular beliefs about how society should be shaped.

We cannot ignore the role being imposed upon schools and schoolteachers as contributors to a re-shaping of society that will make it less fair and more unequal. Should not professional educators profess something better than this? Should not professional educators think about, even do something about, the social values that they are now required to endorse and reinforce?

You might wish to look at www.ipda.org.uk for further discussion of these themes, especially the forthcoming ipda conference. I also recommend searching for a wonderful, short, book by Stephen Kemmis et al called *Orientations to Curriculum and Transition: Towards the Socially Critical School*. If you simply type in ERIC ED295339 you will, after a little more searching, find a slightly untidy photocopy of the book, written in Australia in 1983 back in the days before the National Curriculum and its associated Assessment Orders and long before there was an 'f' in Ofsted.

Reading this book will not get you a job as a government advisor but it might help add perspective to what you profess.

You might also find it useful to look at **Critical Professional Voices in Education**, a series of essays on this website (<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/criticalViewpoint.html>) .

And now for further evidence of government values

Michael Gove has decided to take a sharp knife to the National Standards that have to be met on entry to and for progression through the teaching profession. The problem is that although an argument can always be made for the simplification of things like national professional standards two things are likely to follow. One is that the simpler you make a standard the more bland it tends to be. The other is that there will be a concentration upon results.

I foresee the opening up of further policy faultlines. We are hearing that a lot, history for example, has been lost from the curriculum as schools and teachers focus upon achieving high scores in high tariff subjects. We also hear that the children most unlikely to achieve the high scores have been neglected. But what on earth did anybody expect to happen after Kenneths Baker and Clarke set up the National Curriculum, its associated Assessment Orders and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)? These were the secretaries of state who, dismissing any chance of researching what levels of performance it might be reasonable to expect from children at certain ages, simply told teachers what to teach, how to teach it and below what levels they, their schools, children, the parents of children and whole regions of England would be labelled as failures. They set the rules of the game, appointed the referees and allocated the resources. Why should politicians be surprised that schools and teachers, in dread of the consequences of not doing so, played to the rules?

Redundant subjects: redundant teachers

Gove may try to bring back more history and give more attention to low attainers but if the rules of the game continue to emphasise the hitting of specific targets in order to acquire the label 'outstanding school' the faultline will remain. Thrown into the opening faultline will be those teachers who one day were teaching approved subjects but were made redundant the next day when their subject no longer fitted into the new scheme of things.

The 1988 Act required schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Constant changes to national standards; to favoured subjects; to expected levels of attainment; and to the structure of the school system sound to me anything but balanced and certainly not stable. Meanwhile, there continue to be threats to Special Needs and the Department for Education has been exploring the possibility of downgrading the required qualifications of Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs).

Gove's cosy South East coterie

But lets go back to these standards. If you click on the link below you can find the list of people selected by Gove to advise him on new standards. There is not one from the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers

(UCET), the body with, by a very long way, the most experience of providing initial teacher education and also accredited continuing professional development. Their exclusion becomes all the more strange when you remember that shortly after Gove took office Ofsted reported that higher education based initial teacher training was the best way to become a teacher. I am told that Michael Gove refused to believe the evidence because he had already taken a stance against HE. Experience, expertise and capacity to deliver mean nothing to blinkered politicians.

Just as startling is that the list of people reviewing the standards contains hardly anybody outside London and the South East of England. Not one from the North East; not one from the North West; not one from the East Midlands; one from Birmingham; not one from the South West; and not one from a rural area such as Cumbria where the experience of being a teacher can be markedly different from the South East.

You can view the terms of reference, the remit and the review team at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/reviewofstandards>

It appears to me that a lot more fuss should be made about the way that Gove goes about his job. I guess, however, that if, like David Cameron, your experience of life outside London goes little further than Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds you might think that the list produced by your Secretary of State for Education represents a good cross-section of the Big Society.

We need that Fourth Dimension more than ever.

Cliff Jones

March 14th 2011