

## STANDING UP FOR EDUCATION

Edited by Louise Regan and Tom Unterrainer

### *Education, Education, Education*

Tony Blair pinched his famous triple-charged priority from his Chief of Staff, Jonathon Powell<sup>i</sup>. He hired Michael Barber to tell him what it meant: teachers shooting arrows at rapidly moving targets in a changeable crosswind and being blamed when they missed. Michael Gove loved Blair and admired Barber who now influences so much educational policy and practice across the world.

In the 50s and early 60s Secretary of State David Eccles<sup>ii</sup>, though suspicious of professionals, was excellent at getting money for education from the Treasury. His *Secret Garden* was hardly Gove's *Blob*<sup>iii</sup>. Gove wanted neither evidence nor experts (nor resources from the Treasury) and like Blair referred to his *deforming* changes as 'reforms', a once noble word from our school history books that we associated with the end of slavery, the extension of the franchise, greater fairness, equality and Gladstone's Act of 1870<sup>iv</sup>.

Instead of reform we have had the deformity of what I think of as *social fracking*<sup>v</sup>. To witness education and educators being directed to disconnect from local democracy, betray professional values, promote social division and hurt young people is deeply depressing. As this book reminds us the problem is international.

Regan and Unterrainer have brought together seventeen people who stand up for education. Combining knowledge and commitment their writings provide perspective, insight, evidence and hope. The first seven letters of *professional* give us *profess*. Books like this remind us that we have the power and the duty to articulate and offer for discussion the public values of professional educators. What do we profess? And are we not also learners integral to society?

All the contributors inform, stimulate and are good to read. The themes and specific subjects include: education as a right; the tensions of inspection; the suppression of creativity; mental health and well-being; the misuse of statistics; social control; and the refusal of government to perceive education as a social good rather than a commodity. They are not confined to one country and we are provided with perspectives beyond the classroom.

The contribution to the book of Jeremy Corbyn<sup>vi</sup> is significant because of the disconnection of policy makers from participants in education. For example, educators write many millions of words for masters and doctoral degrees in which they make critical sense of the purposes, concerns, anxieties, interests, joys, fears and values of education. Those professional voices are also a conduit for the voices of learners. I am willing to bet that no politician has read

one of those words or the reports evaluating their impact<sup>vii</sup>. That has not stopped them making and imposing policy. Gurus and consultants may gain the ears of ministers but participants in education struggle to do so.

The book is part of a fight back that is not confined to schools. Reading, for example, ***Further Education and the Twelve Dancing Princesses (2015)***<sup>viii</sup> reminds us of the inspiring transformational part that further education can play in education despite governmental indifference. There was a time when it was possible to bring together people from all phases of education within an education authority to exchange experience, expertise, views and arguments. Now the emphasis is upon competition rather than co-operation. The word 'community' remains in use but hardly in the sense meant by John Dewey<sup>ix</sup>. Together with 'reform' it needs to be recaptured. And, clearly, so does 'education'. Dewey was born almost one hundred years before Michael Barber. His vision of education and society was humane, fulfilling and shared by many. Our politicians have, too often, gone instead for Barber's *deliverology*<sup>x</sup>, which comes with what we might call *measurology*.

Among those standing up for education are the ***Symposium for Sustainable Schools*** <http://www.soss.org.uk/> and ***Reclaiming Schools*** whose masthead you may recognise if you go to their website <https://reclaimingschools.org/>. They are not the only ones. My concern is that while anti educational groups take action pro educational groups are insufficiently cohesive. Buying and reading this book will help.

The types and classifications of schools (and colleges and universities) multiply. There remains a mainstream but the number of 'Oxbow Schools'<sup>xi</sup> is growing. As we lose social and professional coherence we are held together by inspection in a game of blame.

This is not inspection as contemplated by Lawrence Stenhouse who encouraged educators to see themselves as researchers supported by Her Majesty's Inspectors. He was writing in 1975 at the same time as Denis Lawton<sup>xii</sup> was proposing a national curriculum that would emerge from professional discussion of social values.

Seven years later a group of teachers in Australia led by Stephen Kemmis and others put forward the notion of the Socially Critical School<sup>xiii</sup> that was not confined to preparing young people for society or for an individualistic life. Why prepare to join something of which you are already a part? With a socially critical approach the emphasis moves from teaching as instruction to learning as a collaborative and socially related activity.

We are told to close the gap. What gap? The gap between us and Finland? Why not the gap between rich and poor? It comes with a privilege gap. Today many politicians have convinced themselves that such gaps are irrelevant when it comes to obtaining high scores, which have become the official signifier of a good education. We also have a creativity gap, an enjoyment gap, a health and well-being gap and a gap between policy makers and participants.

The campaign for genuine education needs to extend across all phases. Buy this book. Argue about it. Allow these voices to speak to you. Answer them back. Stand up for education. Don't sit down. And when you encounter a policy maker, never kneel. Shout **education, education, education**.

## Cliff Jones

**Standing up for EDUCATION** can be found at  
<http://www.spokesmanbooks.com/>

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[www.post16educator.org.uk](http://www.post16educator.org.uk)

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i

The activities engaged in by Jonathan Powell on leaving government include writing books. Here is my view of the one in which he tells us about thinking up Blair's famous triple priority.

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

ii

The link below is to a serious obituary of David Eccles. Not only does it provide useful background and information about education policy but it also presents a picture of a Conservative politician very different to Michael Gove.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-viscount-eccles-1077645.html>

iii

The following is intended to be humorous but, in my view, treats Michael Gove with all the seriousness to which he is entitled.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2013/oct/02/michael-gove-referring-to-the-blob>

iv

The Act is also known as the *Forster Act*. It gave us free compulsory schooling to the age of fourteen. It came, however, with a lot of direction. I think that we can classify it as a 'reform' in accordance with the values of good old Whig History.

v

Be warned, I have placed a lot on **Social Fracking** on my website. This is a summary.

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

vi

Jeremy Corbyn's contribution to the book is a transcript of his speech of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to the Annual Conference of the National Union of Teachers. The contrast between Corbyn and Blair on the theme of education seems to be the difference between participation and instruction.

vii

The Resources page of the website of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) contains details relating to the Postgraduate Professional Development programme that operated in England. There were others. I also posted these details on the Critical Professional Learning website (second link).

<http://ipda.org.uk/resources/ppd-reports/>

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/activities.html#masters>

viii

Nets can work. I noticed the Princesses book on a desk in the University of Teesside. The first editor's name mentioned was Maire Daley who I remembered from my time as a Liverpool LEA advisor. Back then it was possible to mix with people from all phases of education and both further and higher (polytechnics) institutions were run by democratically accountable local government. Then I noticed a chapter in the book by Rania Hafez from the University of Greenwich. Later at a validation event in Greenwich I had my copy signed. If only accidental encounters could be organised a little then it might become easier to stand up for education.

<https://www.ucl-ioe-press.com/books/higher-education-and-lifelong-learning/further-education-and-the-twelve-dancing-princesses/>

ix

The following link is to an article that sees a relationship between the work of John Dewey, Stephen Kemmis and Nurit Peled-Elhanen.

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

x

Partly self-deprecatingly and partly proudly Michael Barber has adopted the word 'deliverology' to describe his central belief of how to do government by setting clear targets and hitting them as a sign of success. In 2005 he left his UK government job to become a partner and head of McKinsey's Global Education Practice. While there he co-authored, in 2007, *How the world's best-performing school systems come out top*. The word 'instructor' replaces 'teacher' in this short work. Now he is Chief Education Advisor at Pearson, a profit making company with a huge global educational reach. He has been described as 'the control freak's control freak'.

First published in 2007 Michael Barber's *Instruction to Deliver* was revised in 2008. It is endorsed by academics who are fascinated by how government works and keen to know how it can be made to work efficiently. It is almost a textbook for politicians and administrators around the world who want to learn how to implement policy. If you like that sort of thing.

xi

This link is to something I wrote after being asked to write a blog for the British Educational Research Association (BERA). It includes the blog on Oxbow Schools but also has a lot of further links that are relevant to this review. I have also isolated and distributed some of them as appropriate for these endnotes.

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

xii

First Lawrence Stenhouse and then lots and lots on Denis Lawton who was, by the way, part of the Political Education/Literacy movement in the 70s. In the text I am referring to *Class, Culture and the Curriculum*.

<http://www.meshguides.org/action-research-stenhouses-concept/>

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/874632.Denis\\_Lawton](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/874632.Denis_Lawton)

xiii

The best way to obtain a copy of this book is via the following link. It is not long and worth printing out. I have used the book a lot and I am pleased to see it being used in a number of universities. The publication date does not detract from its current relevance.

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED295339.pdf>