

Studies in Teaching and Learning

The Development and Structure of the English School System

Keith Evans

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The Development and Structure of the English School System

Studies in Teaching and Learning

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Studies in Teaching and Learning

The purpose of this series of short books on education is to make available readable, up-to-date views on educational issues and controversies. Its aim will be to provide teachers and students (and perhaps parents and governors) with a series of books which will introduce those educational topics which any intelligent and professional educationist ought to be familiar with. One of the criticisms levelled against 'teacher-education' is that there is so little agreement about what ground should be covered in courses at various levels; one assumption behind this series of texts is that there is a common core of knowledge and skills that all teachers need to be aware of, and the series is designed to map out this territory.

Although the major intention of the series is to provide general coverage, each volume will consist of more than a review of the relevant literature; the individual authors will be encouraged to give their own personal interpretation of the field and the way it is developing.

Preface

This book has grown out of its more wide-ranging Unibook forbear on *The Development and Structure of the English Educational System* (1975). But to economise on space and to provide a more functional focus for teacher training students, the present work concentrates on the development and structure of the statutory system of schooling in England and Wales. The chronological canvas embraces the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the post-war years are given extra weighting, and a special effort is made to deal with the last decade. Throughout, educational development is considered within the wider societal context, and the opening chapter provides a thematic analysis of those factors which bear most closely upon it. The rest of the book then spans the development of statutory school provision from its mid-nineteenth-century beginnings to present-day practice and policies. Elementary and primary, secondary and special education, associated welfare services, schools' curricula and examinations, teacher training and the administrative structure all receive appropriate attention. Additionally, there is a final postscript on the current scene and some future prospects, a useful appendix giving a list of Education Ministers and their governments since 1856 and a select bibliography to provide further reading.

Whilst the book lays no claim to quality of literary style or original scholarship, it does presume to provide students with a more summary and systematic presentation of the relevant material than is commonly found available in other texts. The substance of each chapter is clearly divided into a number of major parts, with each part designated by a main heading. A quick look at these main headings affords a ready appreciation of the basic aspects which compose the whole of the topic concerned. In like fashion each major part is sub-divided into subsidiary sections and other constituent elements; this allows the chronological sequence of events and developments, the legislative provisions of various Acts, the recommendations and results of official reports, the analyses of underlying influences and determinant factors, the structural or institutional components of a given framework and other such

matters to be presented in a summary and systematic manner which can be easily understood. Yet considerable trouble has been taken to ensure that this form of presentation (with its peculiar advantages) does not exact too high a price in terms of sheer readability. I hope I have succeeded in this respect.

Finally, may I express my gratitude to those who have helped me to produce this work. Professor Lawton contributed to its conception and welcomed it to his series. Mr G.F. Crump, the Director of Education for the County of Avon, kindly gave me the benefit of his expert comments on the first draft of Chapter 11 on 'The Present Structure of the English Educational System'. My thanks are also due to my wife for help with the typing and other clerical chores. And throughout the long haul leading to final publication Mrs Diana Simons of Hodder and Stoughton has been a continuing source of efficient editorial support. Whilst acknowledging the generous help obtained from these various quarters, I must, however, emphasise that any shortcomings the book may have are my sole responsibility.

Bolton, Lancashire
1984

KEITH EVANS

Note on Acronyms

To save space a number of acronyms have been used on a routine basis. Some are instantly recognisable and all are well-established in current educational usage. The complete list is as follows:

ATO	Area Training Organisation
APU	Assessment of Performance Unit
AMMA	Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association
AEC	Association of Education Committees
CEE	Certificate of Extended Education
CPVE	Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CLEA	Council of Local Education Authorities
DES	Department of Education and Science
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
LEA	Local Education Authority
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NAS/UWT	National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UDE	University Department of Education
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

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1 The Context of English Educational Development

The foundations for and the core of any modern educational system consist in the provision of formal schooling for the child and adolescent. The growth of such provision and educational development in the widest sense do not take place in a vacuum; they occur within, and are part of, the whole context of the parent society. Thus the nature of an educational system varies according to time and place. The aims, the extent, the organisation, the curricula and the methodology of education will reflect the existing institutions and the dominant attitudes, values and forces which characterise a particular society. In this sense the history of English education since 1800 is not simply the superficial story of expanding and changing provision in various fields and at different levels; it also involves an understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century English society, especially in terms of the forces working within it that help to explain the developments and problems which emerged in the field of education. In other words, the development of the English educational system and its schools cannot properly be understood unless it is seen in societal perspective and related to the overall context of the time. To facilitate clearer examination, this complex context may be somewhat arbitrarily divided into various dimensions.

1 Demographic

Variations in the growth and distribution of population have exerted a considerable influence upon the educational scene since the late eighteenth century.

(a) Nineteenth Century

This was a period of unprecedented growth during which the population of England and Wales rose from nine to thirty-three millions. The associated

process of urbanisation ensured that this growth was concentrated in the towns; for example, the combined populations of Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield expanded nine-fold during the nineteenth century. At times, especially the 1840s, substantial Irish immigration increased the pressures. The sheer size of the younger generation ultimately broke the monopoly of voluntary provision in elementary schooling and necessitated the direct intervention of the State. Once the Factory Acts began to take real effect, the growing number of children on the streets produced an urban social problem which helps to explain the 1870 Elementary Education Act and the subsequent drive for compulsory attendance.

(b) Inter-War Years

This was a period during which the birth-rate fell to its lowest level in British history, with the possibility of a stagnant or declining population emerging. This was associated with a critical sex imbalance amongst those of marriageable age, resultant of the heavy loss of male lives on the Western front during the First World War. The new demographic context relieved the previous pressure on school places and made available the life-long services of a very large group of dedicated spinster teachers. Although the educational system encountered other serious difficulties during the inter-war period, it was never faced with a shortage of teachers. Indeed, in these years, for a female teacher to announce her forthcoming marriage was tantamount to handing in her resignation; at a time when there was often the threat of unemployment within the profession, this was a policy which it was felt could be afforded and justified.

(c) Post-War Period 1945–70

This period provided a difficult demographic context for educational advance. Already required to raise the school leaving age (to fifteen years) and to provide secondary education for all, the authorities were suddenly faced with a significantly higher birth-rate, featured by an immediate post-war 'bulge' and a sustained rise 1955–64. This situation was exacerbated by the growing influx of Commonwealth immigrants and by an acceleration in the geographical redistribution of population. Meanwhile the correction of the former sex imbalance, the move towards earlier marriage and the consequent high wastage rate among young female teachers, produced an acute shortage of teachers which was only slowly overcome. The 1944 Education Act's provision for the further raising of the school leaving age to sixteen years was progressively put off, and its county college scheme to establish

compulsory part-time continuative education for the 15–18 age group was shelved indefinitely.

(d) Recent Years

The mid-1960s heralded a radical change in the demographic context. During the period 1964–77 there was a continuous and cumulative fall of 35 per cent in annual live births in England and Wales. After 1977 the total school population became subject to serious contraction and by the 1980s the problem of falling rolls was resulting in the closure and reorganisation of schools, staff redeployment, the limitation of teacher employment and promotion opportunities, early retirement and redundancy. Inevitably, it was the system of teacher training which suffered most; from 1975 savage cut-backs were combined with major reorganisation to meet the new situation. Although the birth-rate took an upward turn 1977–80, this has not been sustained and underlines the difficulties involved in predicting future educational needs.

2 Economic

Educational development and economic matters have come to have an increasingly close relationship because any modern system of education both provides for the needs of the economy and inflicts a heavy charge upon it.

(a) Needs of the Economy

One of the major functions of the educational system is to subserve the basic manpower needs of society. This function emerged with the Industrial Revolution and became increasingly important as the economy became more advanced and sophisticated. The present need is for a highly skilled and differentiated labour force, able to promote and capitalise upon scientific and technological advance for the economic benefit of the nation. Thus the demands made by the economy and its developing occupational structure upon the educational system have changed with time.

(i) *Mid-Nineteenth Century*

The need for a disciplined labour force for the factory system and a growing pool of skilled artisans and clerks partly explains the developing interest of employers in elementary education as a means of instilling obedience and minimal learning into the younger generation of the working class.

(ii) *1880–1939*

The increasing concern over the provision of technical and secondary education was partly attributable to economic influences. The challenge to Britain's industrial supremacy and the beginnings of her comparative decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century provoked a new sense of urgency in the field of technical education. The rise of new scientifically-based industries, the growth of the welfare state and its attendant bureaucracy, and the increasing importance of tertiary (especially professional) occupations in the early twentieth century combined to encourage the expansion of secondary grammar and higher education.

(iii) *Post-War Era*

The need for a much more highly skilled and finely differentiated labour force (rather than an 'elite' plus the 'mass') has supported the drive for comprehensive secondary education and the remarkable expansion of further and higher education since 1945. In the 1960s it became widely accepted that economic strength depended upon avoiding the previous wastage of talent associated with the inadequacy and inequality of educational opportunity. The vastly increased post-war expenditure on education was justified by its being a long-term investment in human resources which the country could not afford to neglect. But from the early 1970s this simple confidence evaporated as the educational system's accountability and supposed contribution to the country's economic well-being was seriously questioned. Against the background of a depressed economy and a growing pool of unemployed school-leavers, it is significant that, since 1977, the role of providing ordinary teenagers with the experience and training relevant to economic needs has been increasingly assumed by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), a non-educational agency operating under the Department of Employment.

(b) *Cost to the Economy*

For educational development the price of growing dependence upon public funds has been increased vulnerability to economic vicissitudes and to the constraint of what the nation is able and prepared to afford. Thus the state of the economy and the priority enjoyed by education at any particular time have had a direct bearing on the nature and extent of educational development.

(i) *Late-Nineteenth Century*

The official commitment to economic retrenchment following the Crimean War helps to explain the introduction of the stringent 'payment by results' for grant-aided elementary schools, whilst the dual system of voluntary and State provision introduced by the 1870 Elementary Education Act was partially justified by W.E. Forster in terms of 'sparing public money'. Not until 1891 was the principle of free elementary schooling finally accepted. Meanwhile the reluctance and failure to embark upon the development of a national system of secondary education is also partly explained by the widespread opposition to the cost of doing so; indeed, when the venture was at last undertaken after the turn of the century a substantial part of the cost was to be defrayed by parental fees, an arrangement which continued to operate until 1944.

(ii) *Inter-War Years*

This period provides a classic instance of educational development being at the mercy of changes in national economic fortunes. The unprecedented enthusiasm and high hopes for education which found expression in Fisher's 1918 Education Act foundered on the rocks of Britain's serious economic difficulties. The post-war slump and later the world economic depression constrained successive governments to curtail national expenditure, and educational development was singled out on two occasions for particularly rough treatment. The Geddes Committee (1922) recommended that educational spending be cut by one-third and the May Committee (1931) was no less severe. The projected day-continuation schools, the free-place system for secondary grammar education, the new percentage grant arrangements devised by Fisher to encourage more generous provision, and teachers' salaries and superannuation were all, in one way or another, victims of the economic backlash. The Hadow reorganisation process, which pointed forward to secondary education for all and was launched upon in 1928, inevitably made very slow headway in the face of a serious lack of funds.

(iii) *Post-War Era*

The remarkable rise in public expenditure on education after the Second World War was a reflection of the much higher priority accorded to it by governments and the community at large. For the first time educational development became a major burden on the economy. At the end of the 1960s education surpassed defence as the largest single item of public expenditure. The point had been reached where further significant educational advance, if not based on an improved economic growth rate, could only be

made at the expense of other social services or the already overburdened taxpayer. By this time the various sectors of education were in sharp competition for funds (e.g. 'priority for primaries' policy) and there was the danger of administrative cost-effectiveness rather than educational considerations determining development (e.g. in respect of decisions for or against open-plan schools and between various patterns of comprehensive reorganisation).

But it was not until after 1975 that education really began to suffer, largely as a consequence of its loss of political priority and the onset of economic depression. From that date educational expenditure began to fall in real terms and as a proportion of total public spending. Although falling rolls have helped to offset such spending cuts, the educational system has not faced comparable financial stringencies since the 1930s. A sign of the times is the interest of educational publishers in the sale of school books direct to parents and their acute concern over the illicit duplication of copyright material for teaching purposes.

3 Scientific and Technological

The industrialisation and urbanisation of Britain involved an ever-increasing dependence upon scientific and technological developments, to the extent that they came to underpin and impinge upon our very way of life. Yet traditionally English education had neglected these fields of study and consequently pressures were brought to bear upon it.

(a) Late-Nineteenth Century

The 'scientific movement', pioneered and led by Prince Albert, Lyon Playfair, Bernard Samuelson, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley, challenged the prevailing neglect of scientific and technical studies and helped to produce the higher-grade elementary schools, the organised science schools, the early technical colleges and the new civic universities. The foundation and development of the Department of Science and Art for the official encouragement of scientific and technical instruction of utility to industry and commerce was a foremost expression of the movement's influence. The gradual widening of the elementary curriculum and the limited concessions made to the study of the natural sciences in the grammar schools and the ancient universities may also be ascribed to its existence.

(b) Post-War Era

Following the Second World War the 'technological movement', punctuated by the Percy (1945) and Robbins (1963) Reports, emphasised the need for the educational system to produce more scientists, technologists and technicians if the country's industrial future was to be safeguarded. Whilst giving some encouragement to the development of secondary technical schools, the main result was that technical and technological education at the further and higher levels became the most impressive single growth area in English education during the period 1955-72. Additionally the Industrial Training Act (1964) provided a framework within which individual industries, in co-operation with local education authorities (LEAs), developed schemes for the training of apprentices and other young people.

But the momentum was not sustained. The secondary technical schools, never large in number, began to disappear in the 1960s. Spending cuts ultimately hit technical education and even the technological universities. In 1982 most of the Industrial Training Boards (accused of waste and ineffectiveness) were wound up.

Certain new initiatives have been forthcoming from the MSC. The Youth Training Scheme (1983) is to provide a year's work experience, training and related education for a large proportion of sixteen to seventeen-year-old school leavers; it is part of a long-term plan to modernise the training system as well as a means of responding to youth unemployment. And, impressed by Continental example, the government has directed the MSC to mastermind a pilot (potentially national) scheme to develop technical and vocational courses for students aged fourteen to eighteen in full-time education.

Although the needs of science, technology and industry have been pressed upon the English educational system from various quarters for well over a century, the unfortunate fact is that such pressure has generally met with a reluctant and tardy response. The root cause has been, and still is, the entrenched position of the 'liberal' (previously 'classical') tradition in English education. This tradition elevates academic learning and devalues technical, vocational and practical studies. At the senior elementary level it helped to postpone the introduction of practical subjects until the 1890s and subsequently to stifle the growth of vocational courses. At the secondary level it dominated the independent schools and did much to shape the curriculum of the State grammar schools after 1902. It placed the stamp of inferiority on the junior technical schools of the inter-war period and upon the secondary technical schools of the post-war era. Its commitment to the prior claims of a 'general' education condemned the secondary modern schools to a diluted version of the grammar curriculum and to an unsuccessful