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Past and Present, Private and Public in the History of Education

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This paper is concerned with two central themes. The first is that of the relationship between past and present in history; the second that of the relationship between private and public in education.

PAST AND PRESENT

The purpose of this section is to outline some opposed views concerning the relationship between past and present, and then to report briefly upon recent work undertaken in bringing historical perspectives to bear on current educational issues. The starting point for this exercise is a consideration of 'What is history?'

History, including history of education, may be variously defined. For a great many people, including many historians, history means the past and/or the study of the past.

Connections with the present are resisted. The past should be studied on its own terms, and the crucial role of the historian is to divest himself or herself of contemporary concerns and enter fully into the lives, thoughts and actions of those who lived in the past. According to this approach the past should be studied principally, perhaps exclusively, for its own sake. Applied history, that is to say attempts to use the past to explain or justify courses of action in the present or future, is to be resisted at all costs. That is not the historian's purpose.

The opposite view begins from the definition that history is the disciplined study of human events with particular reference to the dimension of time - past, present and future. According to this definition the historian cannot deny or neglect the relationship between past and

present; the important thing is to hold and operate a sophisticated understanding of that relationship.

The relationship between past and present has many dimensions. At its most basic it is clear that any particular point in time has a future, a present and a past. For example, the year and events of 1986 were ten years in the future in 1976, but are now ten years in the past.

A second connection is that between the present of the historian and the past which forms the subject of study. The questions which the historian asks of the past are frequently directed by the interests of the present. For example, a research student currently interested in technical education today, might choose to study technical education in the early years of the twentieth century; an officer in the merchant navy may study the education and training of merchant navy officers in the nineteenth century.

Another perception of the relationship between past and present is that although it may be argued that times change, and the understandings and answers of one age may not simply be transferred to another, to situate ourselves, whether as individuals or as a nation, accurately in time is as potentially rewarding as it is difficult. Our lives are influenced by the events of the past as well as by those of the present and future. Our travels in the present and future will be infinitely more successful if we have as accurate as possible a map of the past. Though each human situation is unique, the record of human experience, usually referred to as history, is a rich treasure house that we neglect at our peril. Whilst a knowledge of history cannot enable us to predict the future with certainty, it provides invaluable data for choosing between different courses of action. Historical study provides an interaction with a much wider range of human experience than is possible simply by reference to the contemporary world. Those who deliberately ignore the mistakes of the past are most likely to repeat them.

The relationship between past and present has been examined by leading historians of education in the United Kingdom.

In 1977 Harold Silver delivered an inaugural lecture at Chelsea College, University of London, entitled 'Nothing but the present or nothing but the past?' That title was taken

from a comment by Maynard Keynes: 'A study of the history of opinion is a necessary preliminary to the emancipation of the mind. I do not know which makes a man more conservative - to know nothing but the present, or nothing but the past'. Since that date Silver has skilfully combined past and present in a series of studies of importance to policy makers, ranging from general collections, such as *Education as History* (1983) to detailed analyses of current issues in comparative contexts.

Even more explicit connections between past and present have been made by the Marxist historian, Brian Simon, whose writings have included overtly politically positioned studies of such contentious issues as intelligence testing, streaming and secondary comprehensive schools, and whose most recent works have been characterized by strong opposition to Conservative educational policies.

My own investigation of the relationship between past and present has been undertaken under the title of 'historical perspectives'. Some years ago I was the founder of the Historical Perspectives group of the UK History of Education Society, a group currently chaired by my colleague, David Crook. Publications in collected volumes and journals have included the application of historical perspectives to such themes as educational reform, the national curriculum, vocational education and history in schools.

In 1993-4 the Institute of Education's masters programme included a course entitled 'Historical Perspectives on Current Educational Issues'. In 1994-5 and 1995-6 the name of the course was changed to 'Understanding English Education', but the basic approach remained that of historical perspective and analysis. This masters course has formed part of a much wider research project, entitled 'Historical perspectives upon current educational issues in England', funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The project originated from a query in 1993 of the-then Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, who was reported as asking: 'Why don't people in this country feel they own state education?' It was my perception that this question, and many other key questions in respect of education in England, could only be answered by reference to the history of education. The Leverhulme Trust provided funding for a research project, and a full time

researcher was appointed.

Seven topics were selected for investigation: access to education; curriculum; standards and assessment; teaching quality; the control of education; education and economic performance; consumers of education. Topics were chosen after a substantial consultation process, which included canvassing educational professionals and educational organizations, and surveying books, journals and the press. Criteria for selection included both the prominence of a particular issue in contemporary educational debate, and the extent to which such an issue has a history - that is to say a significant place in human experience that encompasses past, present and future.

The basic methodology was threefold: to identify the key dimensions of the contemporary issues; to analyse the history of such issues; to place the contemporary issues in their historical context and draw conclusions.

It is impossible here to consider all of the contemporary issues and historical perspectives generated by the research project. Typically, both the contemporary issues and the perspectives were grouped under some four or five headings. Though the basic approach was historical, comparative dimensions were also considered, as for example, when treating the issue of post-compulsory school participation rates in the chapter on access.

Access

Conclusions in this area drawn from historical perspectives centred upon: improvements in access, the potential reversible nature of such improvements, changing historical perspectives (why do girls currently appear to gain more access to formal education than boys?) the relationship between access to formal education and access to positions of power in society, the existence of competing models for promoting access.

Curriculum

Examination of curriculum issues began with the identification of different types of curricula, for example subject-centred, child-centred and vocational, and the recognition that the school curriculum has been a major site of contests, both in terms of content and ethos,

and of control. Historical perspectives indicated crucial periods and turning points in curriculum contests, as well as exposing misrepresentations in respect of continuity and change. One classic example here was the demonstration that the ten subjects of the national curriculum of 1988 were almost the same as those of the secondary school regulations of 1904. Yet the national curriculum of 1988 was presented as a radical new development.

Teaching quality

This chapter identified several contemporary issues, including effective teaching, teacher education and training, recruitment and retention of teachers, and teacher professionalism. One interesting conclusion drawn in this area was the extent of continuity across the centuries of many of the qualities deemed to be necessary in a good teacher.

Standards and Assessment

This chapter was concerned with the measurement of effective teaching and learning. One major current concern in this area is that of the low standards of the majority, as opposed to the minority, of British pupils, as shown in some international comparisons of levels of attainment. Historical perspectives indicated changes in the nature of assessment, in particular the introduction of written examinations. Such examinations were instrumental in raising standards and also provided a means whereby people of different social classes, and even of different sexes might be measured against each other. Examinations were used as a means of selection to promote group and national efficiency, but they have also served other purposes, for example, as administrative devices for distribution of grants, or as a means of exclusion. Thus the eleven plus examination was used to choose a small group of children who would receive prestigious grammar school education. The great majority of children, however, were consigned to the secondary modern schools and were prevented from entering the next stage of public examinations at age 16.

Education and economic performance

The relationship between the economy of the United Kingdom and its educational provision has been considered crucial in recent years. In 1995 this led to the creation of a new

government department - a Department for Education and Employment. Conclusions drawn from the historical perspective focused upon the complexity of the relationship, cultural explanations, resistance to change and the roles of central government, employers and trade unions. While economic explanations of economic performance are possible in certain instances, in other cases connections between education and the economy need to be located within complex cultural dimensions.

Control

Control was an issue which underlined all the areas of investigation. For example, the purposes to which examinations were put depended largely upon those who controlled them - governments, universities, teachers. The chapter on control took as its starting point contemporary shifts in the control of formal education, but it also necessitated consideration of the various dimensions and inter-connections of control - both formal and informal. For control has depended not only upon statute and regulation, but also upon individuals and ideologies, and upon partnerships, between such potential controllers as central and local government, churches, teachers, parents and employers, partnerships that have changed significantly over time.

One means of control favoured by the Conservative governments that have held power in the United Kingdom since 1979 has been that of the market. It has been argued that education has become too controlled by the producers (notably Local Education Authorities and the teacher unions) while the interests of the consumers - students, parents, employers, the state - have been neglected. Nevertheless, the historical perspective shows that the most significant development in respect of control since 1979 has been a large increase in the power of central government over education.

Consumers

Research for the chapter on consumers showed that this has been a neglected area in history of education. Such neglect has led to simplistic contemporary discussions in which the roles and interests of producers and consumers have been presented as being diametrically opposed to each other. The historical perspective shows, however, that the interests, and indeed the roles, of consumers and producers have been closely intertwined. For example,

schools and other educational institutions are not just producers, but have also been consumers of parental products - children and students - and have regularly themselves exercised choice by accepting some of these products and rejecting others.

Conclusions

Although the basic methodology employed in this project was to apply historical perspectives to seven distinct topics, it soon became apparent that the topics themselves were closely interrelated and that general factors also applied which enabled broader conclusions to be drawn. These overall conclusions were based on such themes as complexities, continuities, changes and ownership.

Complexities

It was shown that many issues, for example the relationship between education and economic performance, were extremely complex, but that discussion by politicians and the media frequently indicated little awareness of such complexities. Those who would not consider themselves qualified to comment upon intricate issues in such fields as medicine or law, had no compunction about making pronouncements about issues of comparable intricacy in education.

Continuities

It was also apparent that there were many continuities - in terms of the power and influence of certain educational institutions, and of practices, for example in respect of curricula.

Changes

While some educational changes appeared to be unidirectional over a considerable period of time - for example the decline of Church influence in education, increased access for girls - others were of a more cyclical nature.

Ownership

Finally, the fundamental question as to why people in England did not feel that they owned state education was addressed again.

The conclusion drawn from the historical perspective was that from the middle of the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth, in spite of the privileged educational position of the state church, it was widely perceived that the English did have as much (and more) popular control over their institutions, including education, as people in the majority of other European countries. That control was indicated by the large numbers of working-class parents who paid the full cost of their children's schooling, and by the reluctance of central government to introduce compulsory school attendance.

During the second half of the nineteenth century popular ownership and control was lost, as a result of the professionalization of society and increased intervention by government at both central and local levels.

While the process of increased state intervention in education was common in most countries, its distinguishing feature in England, and to a lesser extent in Wales and Scotland, was that state education was provided at a level which would not seriously challenge the advantages enjoyed by fee-paying parents and pupils. The clearest manifestation of this policy was in the secondary field where the supposedly 'tripartite system' established after 1944 actually failed to provide resources for all but a few technical schools, and consigned more than three-quarters of children to secondary modern schools that were still essentially elementary in nature and purpose.

Current government policies in education in the United Kingdom are aimed at developing a greater sense of ownership, by diminishing the power of Local Education Authorities and teachers' organizations, and by giving parents increased roles in the governance of schools. The historical perspective, however, suggests that such policies alone will be insufficient to promote that end. Other areas needing to be addressed include curriculum and the relationship between education and employment, increasing the chances of success within the educational system, and a greater parity of resourcing and esteem between maintained and fee-paying schools. More fundamentally, the historical research has shown

the importance of producing a new framework for relationships between consumers of education, the educational professionals and the state.

The major outcome of this research has been a volume entitled *Education for the Nation*, published by Cassell in October 1996.

The theme of historical perspectives is being developed in two ways. The first is by providing more detailed investigation of particular issues - for example of the newly created Department for Education and Employment; the second by combining historical with comparative perspectives.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

Study of the relationship between past and present in the history of education leads to the identification of key themes which connect the past and present. One of the most important of these is the theme of private and public in education, although any consideration of this theme in respect of English education is complicated by the fact that the leading private schools in the country are referred to as 'public schools'.

In 1988, in the Winter issue of the *History of Education Quarterly*, Sheldon Rothblatt, a leading American historian of education, made a strong attack upon much of the historical work in British and, more broadly, European education.

The historiography is pointed toward the development of centralized state systems of education, with governments as the principal suppliers of schools, colleges and universities.

It is often concerned with the builders of such systems, the proto-bureaucrats of the great period of change in the mid-nineteenth century; and it just as often assumes that state provision for mass education, with particular regard to the improvement of life chances for working-class groups, is far and away the most important of all themes in the history of education.

Private or independent sectors of education are generally viewed with suspicion or

dislike as obstacles to political democracy and wider social opportunity, and the historiography implicitly favors their removal or curtailment by a vigilant state bureaucracy empowered with the necessary parliamentary authority. (Rothblatt, 1988, 627-8)

This perception is undoubtedly correct. Traditional accounts of the 'rise of the schooled society' have recently been underpinned theoretically by studies such as that of Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA* (1990). According to this type of analysis, modern education systems were not essentially the product of industrialization, or indeed of capitalism. The most important factor was not, as has been widely argued, a desire to impose upon children from an early age the time-work discipline necessary for the effective operation of factory based production. This can be shown by the simple fact that compulsory school systems were introduced in rural countries and areas, as well as in urban and industrial ones.

According to Green, the key factor was the extent to which states, particularly newly formed or reconstituted states - France and Prussia in the nineteenth century, Singapore and Taiwan in the twentieth - employed systems of education:

to provide the state with trained administrators, engineers and military personnel; to spread dominant culture and inculcate popular ideologies of nationhood; and so to forge the political and cultural unity of burgeoning nation states and cement the ideological hegemony of their dominant classes. (Green, 1990, 309)

Conversely, the British state had been formed in the sixteenth century under Tudor monarchs who established a state church which played a central role in education. In consequence, the British educational system was to bear many hallmarks of that period until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central governments did not establish schools, nor did they employ teachers. These responsibilities were left in the hands of religious societies and local educational authorities, although aided by grants from central government, which were given after central inspection.

Further evidence in support of Rothblatt's concerns is provided by the *Dictionary of British Educationists* (1989) written by Richard Aldrich and Peter Gordon. Analysis by the Canadian Scholar, Phillip McCann of the 465 subjects covered in this work, published in

1990 in the journal, *Historical Studies in Education*, confirmed the predominance of public over private.

McCann placed some 15 per cent of the subjects in the aristocratic class, slightly more than 10 per cent in the plebeian or working class, with the remaining 75 per cent in the middle classes. More than half of the subjects, some 56 per cent, had attended the universities of Oxford or Cambridge, with a further 15 per cent attending other universities, mainly London and those of Scotland. Similarly, a majority attended public schools (37 per cent) or grammar schools (21 per cent).

Clearly this selection of 465 subjects from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries does not adequately represent all types of educators, for example there are only 12 per cent of women, and few classroom teachers. Nevertheless it does represent the most famous names, as currently shown by published work in British history of education, during these two centuries which might be characterized as witnessing the rise of the schooled society. The most interesting statistic is that some 55 per cent of the entries made their careers within the sphere of educational administration. These included such well known figures as James Kay-Shuttleworth and Robert Morant from the nineteenth century, and Henry Morris and Alec Clegg from the twentieth. Politicians constituted another important group of some 13 per cent. Prominent among these were W.E. Forster, A.J. Mundella, Arthur Balfour, H.A.L. Fisher and R.A. Butler, whose names are inextricably associated with the educational legislation of 1870, 1880, 1902, 1918 and 1944 respectively.

The *Dictionary of British Educationists* mirrors, perhaps in distorted fashion, the dominance of British society and of the public educational system constructed for the poor, by male, Protestant, Oxford or Cambridge educated figures who themselves had attended, and sent their sons to, that small group of prestigious private establishments known as public schools. These men had little concern for educational theory; their own studies were classical and humanistic rather than scientific and technical.

Family

My own interest in the relationship between private and public in education began many years ago when writing the short textbook, *An Introduction to the History of Education*,

published in 1982. The first section in that book was entitled 'Family', and it is clear that the earliest education received by children takes place within a private space - that of the family.

The family is the most permanent and immediate educational unit, and it is in the family that for centuries children have learned their basic social, cultural and economic skills. These have included speech, rudimentary literacy, moral precepts, domestic duties, contributing to the family budget. During the later medieval period (1000-1500) some families, for example those of a great noble or wealthy guild master, could supply a fuller educational experience than that which was available in humbler homes. In such establishments, pages and squires on the one hand and apprentices on the other, acquired social and cultural as well as vocational skills.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries many eminent men, including John Locke and Joseph Priestley, took the role of tutor. They were employed in private households to educate the sons, and on occasion the daughters, of the influential and wealthy. Although in the nineteenth century, the advent of improved communications, especially railways, saw a great increase in boarding schools which catered for the sons of the governing classes, many daughters were still educated privately and at home, frequently by a governess. Nevertheless, the assumption that children of all groups in society should normally receive a substantial part of their education in school, served to diminish and to confuse, rather than to replace the educational influence of the family. In spite of the rise of public schooling, and the provision of formal institutions for the education of all children, the family, which is an essentially private institution, remains the first and the most important educational unit. In recent years the potential for family and personal education has been enhanced by such developments as television and computers.

Private schools

During the nineteenth century private schools, that is to say schools run by individuals or groups of individuals, were of great importance in England, especially in the period before 1870. The Education Census of 1851 identified nearly 30,000 private schools, of which nearly 5,000 were classified as superior, and some 7,000 as middling. The report of the Newcastle Commission in 1861 showed that nearly 600,000 children attended the private

working-class schools.

For several reasons these were popular with working-class parents who had to pay the full cost of such schooling: the teachers were more in sympathy with the priorities and rhythms of working class life; there was less insistence on regular attendance and less corporal punishment; the curriculum was more attuned to parental wishes, and concentrated upon basic literacy and useful matters, rather than upon excessive religious instruction.

In 1984 Phil Gardner provided a classic exposition of such schools in a book entitled *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England*. Similarly, the private schools of the middling and superior classes of the nineteenth century have been investigated by such scholars as Margaret Bryant, Donald Leinster-Mackay and John Roach.

Joseph Payne

My own modest contribution to this discovery or rediscovery of the world of nineteenth-century private schooling in Britain was a book of 1995 entitled *School and Society in Victorian Britain: Joseph Payne and the New World of Education*.

This study, which traces the life and work of Joseph Payne, born in obscurity in 1808 who achieved some eminence as a founder of two leading private schools, as a textbook writer and as the first Professor of Education in Britain, was first published in the USA. This was appropriate inasmuch as even in the nineteenth century Payne's writings achieved more prominence in the USA than in the land of his birth. For example, the first volume of his collected works, posthumously published in Britain by his eldest son, Joseph Frank Payne in 1880, with only one other edition in 1883, was re-published in at least 12 American editions.

The importance and independence of Payne's position as a private schoolmaster rested upon the fact that he was equally critical of the public schools for the sons of the wealthy, as of the public elementary schools which received state financial support and whose curricula and teaching methods came under state control.

Payne's criticisms of what is generally considered to be Britain's premier school, Eton, were published in 1868. Those criticisms fell under four broad headings: management and

finances; curriculum and methods of teaching; moral education; and quality of products. His criticisms of the state-directed elementary schooling of his day, which was governed by the Revised Code based on the principle of payment by results, were published in 1872. These centred upon the low standards of achievement, limited curricula, mechanical methods of teaching, and deficiencies in the education and training of teachers. Such criticisms help to provide quite new perspectives upon traditional interpretations of nineteenth-century British education.

The relative neglect of private schools and of the perspectives of private school teachers may be attributed to three main causes. The first is that private schools were invariably dependent upon the longevity, teaching ability and financial acumen of a single individual or family. In consequence they were often relatively short lived. Second, since they were not accountable to boards of governors or managers, as were the wealthy public schools or the state assisted elementary schools of the societies or of the local authorities, they have left few records. Third, as Rothblatt indicated, although in the historiography of English education a few public schools receive considerable notice as nurseries for the nation's elite, the majority of attention has been given to the inexorable rise of state schooling, so that private schools, their teachers and pupils, and the broader dimensions of private education, have assumed the role of villains. They have been seen as hindrances to the development of a proper system.

The career of Joseph Payne, however, indicates that private schoolmasters, such as he, were more open to innovation, to market forces, to the need to provide proof of real standards and attainments, than any other group. He was a stern critic of narrow curricular provision in schools, both the classical curriculum (relieved only by games) of Eton and other boys' public schools, and the limited three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) of elementary schools under the Revised Code of 1862. He wanted a broad curriculum and one in which attention was paid to the particular nature of subjects, both in respect of their intrinsic worth and of their methodologies. For example, wherever possible he wanted science to be taught and learned by the experimental method, and not simply from books. He also believed that formal education should be consistent with the principles of natural education: it should take account of the interests, capacities and achievements of the learner.

In an historical sense, public supervision and support of schools was valuable in that it made such schooling more open and accountable, both to contemporaries and to the historian. But the private schoolteachers might argue that since no children were forced to attend their schools, they were more truly accountable through the market discipline of needing to attract customers and to provide, and be seen to be providing, value for money.

In 1970 and 1975, in two books entitled *Education and the State* and *Education and the Industrial Revolution*, E.G. West argued that the Elementary Education Act of 1870 which introduced the first local school boards into England and Wales, should be seen as an extension of bureaucracy and producer control, rather than as a true extension of education and of schooling. Its chief function was not, as was stated, to 'fill up the gaps' in school provision, but rather to displace the private working-class school for which many working-class parents had readily paid school fees, and to bring schools under unnecessary and ultimately retrogressive bureaucratic control.

The study of Joseph Payne and of the world of Victorian education as revealed from a private perspective would indicate that there is a need for caution in accepting either Andy Green's analysis that Britain suffered from the lack of fully state-provided education, or E.G. West's preference for a voluntary system responsive only to market forces and free from government regulation. At first sight Payne, whose life was spent in private schools and who was strongly critical of the state supported system, its curriculum and hierarchies of inspectors and administrators, would appear to incline towards West's position. But Payne's position was not simply that the state should (or indeed should not) provide or control education. It all depended on the nature of the state, which in turn depended on the nature of society.

The government of Victorian Britain reflected to a considerable degree the values and priorities of Victorian society, with its several hierarchies and restrictions based on birth, denominational Christianity and sex. Payne, however, was an outsider, born in relative poverty, an opponent of the Anglican church, and a firm supporter of educational rights for women.

Payne's essential contribution to education and to educational history is to be found not only in the context of public and private, but also in the sphere of pedagogy. His capacity

to inspire educators across the dimensions of both time and of space was based upon an unremitting emphasis upon the need for a profound understanding, both among teachers in all educational establishments and in society more broadly, of the processes and of the potential of learning and of teaching.

Conclusion

Two points may be made in conclusion.

The first is of the need to combine a respect for the past as it was, and for the truth of that past, with an understanding of the relationships between past and present. Since education is such an important area of human activity, and politicians, professionals, parents and others make judgements about the future of education based in part upon their understanding of the past, the historian has a role to ensure that in the area of education the past is understood as accurately as possible.

The second is that the relationship between private and public in education is currently a key issue in the United Kingdom, as is many other parts of the world. Since 1979, Conservative governments have attempted to reduce the role of producers in education and to increase that of consumers. Whereas during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries private schools were transformed into, or displaced by, public ones, since 1979 there have been several attempts to make public schools more like private ones.

In consequence it is important for historians of education to amend and enlarge their agenda to include the significance of this development. As Rothblatt indicated - there is less need for concentration upon politicians, legislation and administration, and more need for studies of how individuals gain ownership of and use education for themselves. This has led to a greater interest in such areas as: private schooling for the working classes, as in the study of Gardner; private schooling for the middling classes, as in the work of Bryant and Roach; private schools, private schoolteachers, private bodies of schoolteachers such as the College of Preceptors, even the first private Professor of Education in Britain, Joseph Payne; individuals in education - as represented in various biographical studies and in biographical dictionaries of educationists.

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