

# Evidence *versus* ideology in education policy; the recent history of initial teacher education in England and Wales and the implications for educational researchers as agents of change

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## Resum

En els últims trenta anys, hem assistit a una reconsideració radical de la manera com els llicenciats universitaris han estat iniciats en l'ensenyament a Anglaterra i Gal·les. Malgrat que es tracti d'un breu espai de temps, és possible discernir un canvi significatiu en la manera com s'ha tractat de portar a terme un canvi en aquest aspecte de l'educació.

Els anys vuitanta es van caracteritzar per una prudent i gradual evolució cap a un sistema «d'associació» entre les escoles i les universitats. Els estudiants ocupaven més temps d'instrucció a l'escola que no pas a la universitat. Més recentment, l'acostament a l'escola com a base de la formació va ser redefinit des d'un model precipitat i poc consensuat d'acreditació segons «competències». El contrast amb les anteriors modalitats de formació de mestres a Anglaterra i Gal·les és encara més notable. L'article subratlla els canvis d'enfocament en la reforma de l'etapa inicial de l'educació de mestres a Anglaterra i Gal·les, així mateix, considera les implicacions derivades dels dits canvis per a aquells que es dediquen a la investigació educativa.

El mateix període ha contemplat també fins on va dirigir el govern la política educativa de manera centralitzada. La revisió d'aquests canvis ens acosta a la reforma de l'etapa inicial de l'educació de mestres i a la gènesi i maneres de crear política educativa. Això revela que, en diferents moments, la influència entre les evidències i la ideologia ha anat oscil·lant, igual que la relació entre els dissenyadors de les polítiques i els docents. Es consideraran les implicacions d'aquestes oscil·lacions per als departaments universitaris i per als investigadors educatius.

**Paraules clau:** professió docent, formació a l'escola, model de competències, reforma, formació inicial, investigació educativa, evidència i ideologia, polítics i acadèmics.

## Abstract

The last thirty years have seen a radical revision of the ways in which university graduates have been inducted into the teaching profession in England and Wales. Even within this relatively short time span, it is possible to discern a significant change in the manner in which change in this facet of education has been attempted. The 1980s were characterised by a cautious, piecemeal and gradual evolution towards a system of 'partnership' between schools and universities, with graduates spending an increasing percentage of their training in school rather than in the University. More recently the move towards school based teacher education, and to an imposed 'competence' model of accreditation, has been more precipitate, and less consensual. The contrast with the manner in which earlier changes to

the system of initial teacher education in England and Wales were effected is even more striking. The paper outlines the changes in approach to reforming initial teacher education in England and Wales and considers the implications of these changes for those engaged in educational research.

The same period has also seen a change in the extent to which the government has directed education policy from the centre. Examination of these changing approaches to the reform of initial teacher education, and to the genesis and means of policymaking, reveals that at different points in time, the comparative influence of evidence and ideology has fluctuated, as has the relationship between policymakers and academics. The implications of these fluctuations for university departments of education and for educational researchers will be considered.

**Key words:** teaching profession, training in school, 'competence' model, reform, initial teacher education, educational research, evidence and ideology, policymakers and academics.

## Resumen

En los últimos treinta años, hemos asistido a una reconsideración radical de los modos como los licenciados universitarios han sido iniciados en la enseñanza en Inglaterra y Gales. A pesar de tratarse de un breve lapso de tiempo, es posible discernir un cambio significativo en el modo como se ha tratado de llevar a cabo un cambio en este aspecto de la educación. Los años ochenta se caracterizaron por una prudente y gradual evolución hacia un sistema de «asociación» entre las escuelas y las universidades, con los estudiantes ocupando la mayor parte de su tiempo de instrucción en la escuela en vez de hacerlo en la universidad. Más recientemente, el acercamiento a la escuela como base de la formación fue redefinido desde un modelo precipitado y poco consensuado de acreditación según «competencias». El contraste con las anteriores modalidades de formación de maestros en Inglaterra y Gales es todavía más notable. El artículo subraya los cambios de enfoque en la reforma de la etapa inicial de la educación de maestros en Inglaterra y Gales y, asimismo, considera las implicaciones derivadas de dichos cambios para aquéllos que se dedican a la investigación educativa.

El mismo periodo ha contemplado también hasta donde dirigió el gobierno la política educativa de modo centralizado. La revisión de estos cambios nos acerca a la reforma de la etapa inicial de la educación de maestros y al génesis y modos de crear política educativa. Ello revela que, en diferentes momentos, la influencia entre los indicios y la ideología ha ido oscilando, al igual que la relación entre los diseñadores de política y los docentes. Se considerarán las implicaciones de dichas oscilaciones para los departamentos universitarios y para los investigadores educativos.

**Palabras clave:** profesión docente, formación en la escuela, modelo de competencias, reforma, formación inicial, investigación educativa, evidencia e ideología, políticos y académicos.

## Summary

Changing approaches to the reform of initial teacher education in England and Wales	How should universities and educational researchers respond to these changes?
Reasons for changing approaches to educational change	Reconciling the political and academic tensions of ideology and evidence
The importance of intelligent forms of policy formation	References

It was recently reported in the British press that the official Chinese newspaper, *Disaster Reduction Press*, has warned Chinese citizens that «beards violate the requirements of hygiene and are not desirable». The report claims that facial hair traps chemical pollutants, such as benzene and ammonia, and thereby increases the units of pollution taken into the body by bearded persons. Endocrinologists from St. George's Hospital in London were sceptical about the scientific basis for this claim. Dr Stephen Hussey stated, «It sounds pretty dubious to me» (Guardian, 1994).

The fact that this report was accorded front page status in the British newspaper possibly derives from what it regards as a droll and anachronistic disregard for clear empirical and scientific evidence to substantiate the assertions and policies advocated in *Disaster Reduction Press*.

In their book, *Research Methods in Education*, Cohen and Mannion (1980) trace the general development through time of more rational and effective means for devising policy and planning appropriate action; from the superstition of ancient societies, through Aristotelian deductive reasoning and the citing of «authorities», to Bacon's stress on the observational basis of science, and then to the idea of systematic empirical research, controlled trials, evaluated pilot schemes and the range of research strategies designed to contribute to «intelligent» or rational decision making in education and other areas of social policy.

In Cohen and Mannion's account of the move away from superstition and the citing of authorities to more «evidence based» and rational forms of policymaking, there is an assumption of continuous (if at times slow and uneven) progress in the making of social policy, as modernist and positivist beliefs replaced metaphysical and superstitious ones. This paper will question the assumption of continuous progress in the quality of policymaking and will argue that ideology has remained an important influence on the making of social policy. In order to make this point, the paper will focus on the manner in which changes have been effected in the training of teachers in England and Wales in recent years, drawing some broader comparisons with earlier reforms in this area, before examining the implications which changing methods of reform hold, both in terms of educational change, and in social policy generally.

### **Changing approaches to the reform of initial teacher education in England and Wales**

After the Cross Commission of 1888, with its criticisms of «on the job» training of teachers, England and Wales moved away from the apprenticeship model of teacher education and towards a professional system which involved institutions of higher education. In the late 1960s and 1970s this model was criticised as being ineffective and overly theoretical (Haydn and Hake, 1995). These widely perceived weaknesses led to attempts to reform and improve initial teacher education courses by a transition towards a partnership model which involved schools more substantially in the process. It is important to note that these changes proceeded in a gradual and piecemeal manner, char-

acterised by negotiation, cautious experiment and consensus. Although higher education lost its dominant position in the process of training, the changes were generally welcomed by those in higher education as pragmatic and necessary. They were also seen as «proven» —or at least recognised as having evinced some improvements by all those involved in the process, when evaluated and assessed (Gilroy, 1992, Dickinson, 1993, Edwards, 1993). Improvements were also noted by the reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, and the Office for Standards in Education (HMI, 1988, Ofsted, 1993) The important point to note is the evolutionary, trialled and consensual manner in which reform proceeded (Crook, 1995; Haydn and Hake, 1995).

This period of gradualist and participative reform ended abruptly with the accession of Kenneth Clarke as Secretary of State for Education. In a speech to the North of England Conference in January 1992 (Clarke, 1992), he announced that the move towards school based initial training was to be accelerated, with students spending a minimum of 4/5ths of their postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) in schools. This announcement was in stark contrast to the way in which changes to PGCE had been managed over the course of the previous decade. Neither teacher associations or institutions of higher education had been consulted over the change, and the Secretary of State cited no evidence or enquiry report to provide a rationale for such a change, other than the government's belief that this would lead to improvements, and a single paragraph from an HMI report on school based initial training initiatives (Clarke, 1992).

The speech was characteristic of the tendency to evidential elision in educational reform, in that it made no mention of countervailing evidence, including the advice of Department for Education (DfE) officials who were subsequently removed from their posts.

Nor was it possible to discern any clarion call for reform from parents, governors, disaffected trainees, headteachers or teacher associations. Two professors of education were to support the call for a further shift towards school based training, (Hargreaves, 1993; Smithers, 1993) and the Centre for Policy Studies, a right-wing think-tank, campaigned stridently against what it regarded as the baleful influence of «the educational establishment» (Lawlor, 1990, 1991) but in terms of the literal «weighing» of evidence, this did not match the accumulation of reports and surveys indicating that the partnership model commanded widespread support and was seen as having delivered significant improvements in the quality of new teachers. This evidence came from HMI and Ofsted reports, reports commissioned by teacher associations, and surveys of the views of headteachers and newly qualified teachers. This statistical evidence to support the success of partnership is summarised by Blake, (1994) and reveals that the vast majority of headteachers felt that new teachers had been well trained, as did almost all trainee teachers themselves. HMI found that new teachers were teaching a higher proportion of good lessons than experienced teachers (Ofsted, 1993). Several surveys revealed that under 8 per cent of headteachers were dissatisfied with the quality of newly

qualified teachers, and under 7% of teacher trainees were unhappy with their professional training (HMI, 1988; Ofsted, 1993; Hunt, 1992a; Hunt, 1992b).

In view of the widespread disaffection with teacher education methods in the previous decade cited above, it is difficult to think of any area of professional training in England and Wales which had improved as drastically and which evinced such a high level of trainee and «purchaser» (head teacher) satisfaction. MORI opinion polls also revealed a high level of satisfaction amongst parents as to the competence and integrity of the teaching force (Guardian, 1994b). The education «market» was not baying for further reform of initial teacher education.

The government's initiatives were not simply taking place in an evidence-free zone, they were taken in the face of substantial evidence that the partnership model of teacher training which had evolved in the previous decade had significantly improved the quality of newly qualified teachers and had elicited the approbation of head teachers, teacher associations, HMI, parents and trainee teachers themselves. The only written record of dissent was the slim polemic of right-wing think-tanks, urging the overthrow of what they saw as a liberal-progressive and egalitarian educational establishment, and the restoration of the cultural and intellectual hegemony of traditional right-wing values in education.

Against this background, the government pursued further initiatives to reduce, or even eliminate the influence of higher education on initial teacher education. In September 1993, the government launched the pilot project for its entirely school-centred teacher training initiative (SCITT). At the start of October, Minister of State for Education, Lady Blatch, declared that the schemes «would produce teachers of the highest quality» (Daily Telegraph, 1993) and within a month of their inception, the schemes were deemed to have generated sufficient evidence of success to launch a second wave of school based training.

The Education Act of 1994 with its creation of the Teacher Training Agency also indicated a government «apparently more committed to expanding school-centred training than school-higher education partnerships» (Crook, 1995). This same period marks an accumulation of reports from HMI, Ofsted and teacher associations critical of the performance of school based schemes (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1995a, b, c; Ofsted, 2002). It was significant that the objectives of the Teacher Training Agency stipulated by the 1994 Education Act did not include any remit to inquire or research into the comparative effectiveness of the various forms of initial teacher education (Teacher Training Agency, 1994).

This degree of *dirigisme*, haste, and unilateralism is untypical of past initiatives in initial teacher education, and the *modus operandi* of governments in relation to educational reform in general in England and Wales. Comparison with the ways in which changes to teacher training have been made in the past reveal both differences, and some strands of continuity. The changes wrought by the Cross Commission, the McNair Report and the James Report were all the result of extensive and protracted debate and discussion with edu-

cationalists and were marked by tentativeness and caution (Dent, 1977; Parry, 1972; Taylor, 1978). The idea of systematic and colloquial enquiry to precede and inform the process of reform, epitomised by the royal commissions which were the hallmark of educational reform in England and Wales in the nineteenth century, has become unfashionable. Porter goes as far as to remark that the last government instigated inquiry into education in England and Wales can be dated at 1971, with the setting up of the James Committee to report on teacher education and training (Porter, 1995). Although this discounts the Higginson Committee which was commissioned in the late 1980s to report on post-16 examination provision, the fact that the government completely discounted the report's recommendations does not completely invalidate Porter's general argument. More recently, the University of Toronto evaluations of the government's literacy and numeracy strategies were widely publicised until the evaluations became more critical.

The reflective, colloquial approach to education reform, based on the results of empirical enquiry and the eliciting of the views and positions of those involved is a protracted and time consuming process. Whereas Cohen and Mannion extol the virtues of this research based approach, Barber points out its disadvantages:

The decision making process was painfully slow: far too slow for a world in which social, cultural and technological changes were gathering pace and continue to do so [...] The fact is that the partnership model of decision making after which many educators still hanker was demonstrably inadequate by the 1980s. (Barber, 1994: 355-6)

There is, however, a continuum between the precipitate *diktat* which ushered in the most recent changes to initial teacher education in England and Wales outlined above, and the «traditional» model criticised by Barber. He goes on to delineate more carefully some of the points within this continuum which have been adopted by recent Secretaries of State for Education, tracing this through the «pragmatism», of Secretaries of State Kenneth Baker and John MacGregor, where there was «a substantial degree of dialogue, if not understanding between government and profession», to the *dirigisme* of Kenneth Clarke, and the «free-market Stalinism» of John Patten's reign, where policy was made, «by proclamation rather than consultation», and leading to a complete breakdown of the policy process (Barber, 1994). Barber saw the accession of Secretary of State for Education Gillian Shephard as a retreat from the high-point of ideologically imposed reform, and a return to more consensual and empirical ways forward. «There is a new tone in ministerial speeches of respect for the profession, and for research [...] The cultural revolution is over» (Barber, 1994: 359). This view, and the change it represents, is reflected in the remark of a DfE civil servant that «She wants something that will work and that has widespread support —that's a revolutionary concept for the DfE» (*Observer*, 1994).

The move from evidence to ideology in education reform could be traced back yet further, but does not represent a seamless progression. Lawson and Silver state that the Norwood Report of 1943 «was concerned not with evidence but with assertion. It had less of a basis in discriminating analysis and concern for data than any other modern report on education» (Lawson and Silver, 1973: 432). Although the Royal Commission approach to reform in education had been generally discarded by post-war British governments, perhaps for the reasons given by Barber, the stewardship of Keith Joseph, Kenneth Baker's predecessor as Secretary of State for Education, was generally acknowledged as being characterised by a rigorous respect for evidence and enquiry. His rejection of several educational initiatives to which he was ideologically aligned drew widespread praise from the education press in his obituaries:

He could turn down a voucher scheme which had intellectually attracted him because he was not finally convinced that it could work. The force of argument and facts usually triumphed over ideology in the end. Thus he defended political education in schools at a time when it was regarded as subversive by many cabinet colleagues, on the grounds that it was essential for young people to be taught to make up their own minds on the basis of the evidence. On several occasions, right-wing witch hunts were dismissed by him after calling for the facts, considering what was offered, and then declaring the case «non-proven». (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1994)

As recently as 1978, Kogan described the process of education policy as «the product of conflicting claims, painfully and painstakingly resolved» (Kogan, 1978). Whether this is any longer the case since the political demise of Keith Joseph is questionable. The accusation that policy has been made «on the hoof», without careful preparation, research and consultation, has been levelled at recent education legislation (Hansard Society, 1993). McKie notes the increase in non-hostile amendments to legislation made necessary by hasty and ill-considered education legislation (McKie, 1993). Kogan also notes the reluctance of British government to expose its education system to external, OECD scrutiny, with no policy review of its education system since 1975 (Kogan, 1994: 118).

The hypothesis which will be advanced in this paper is that the extent to which the pendulum has swung away from considered, colloquial, evidence and enquiry based reform may have a deleterious effect on the quality of such reform, and be a step backwards on Cohen and Mannion's chronology of the evolution of more effective, rational and intelligent approaches to change.

### Reasons for changing approaches to educational change

The past fifty years have seen a radical change in the extent to which the government has had a «hands-on» approach to educational reform. From a position where education was considered «the secret garden» —to be left to educational professionals and not to be interfered with by politicians (McCulloch *et al.*, 2000), there has been a move towards increasing centralisation and con-

trol, with policy directed from the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office—a body which did not include education professionals (Fielding, 2001; Alexander, 2003; Wragg, 2003).

The role of professors of education and academic educationalists, of teaching associations and head teachers, and of specially commissioned committees of enquiry, has been of limited importance in the process of reform of initial teacher education in England and Wales. Simon explains this in terms of the «amateurism» of the English approach to the reform of education and the training of teachers, dictated by the sway of the most prestigious educational institutions in the country, the ancient universities and the leading public schools.

Those who wished to teach, having the appropriate social origins including a degree at Oxford or Cambridge, could learn through experience, on the job. Certainly no special training was necessary [...] This situation has, to some extent, been perpetuated. The dominant educational institutions of this country have had no concern with theory, its relation to practice, with pedagogy. (Simon, 1981: 13)

Simon contrasts this with the status accorded to educationalists, and to pedagogy on the continent. His hypothesis is borne out by an examination of the leadership of committees of enquiry into education reform —Norwood, Head of Harrow School, McNair, who possessed no experience of teacher education, James, who presided over the 1972 inquiry into teacher training, and had been High Master of Manchester Grammar School, as had Parker—recently appointed head of the Teacher Training Agency. The reluctance to call on the expertise of university departments of education continued when the National Curriculum which had been established by the Education Reform Act of 1988 ran into difficulties, and the DfE called upon Sir Ron Dearing, from the Post Office, to resolve the problems. With the exception of Dearing, this list would appear to bear out the view of Simon, that policy formation in England and Wales was directed to a large degree by the prestige and influence of the old universities and elite schools.

The conscious rejection of a role for «experts» (in the sense of academic educationalists, as opposed to the heads of traditionally prestigious schools), in the process of education reform, is partly explicable by the New Right's attribution of the educational establishment as the cause of educational ills in England and Wales (Lawlor, 1991; O'Hear, 1988). McCullough's account of John MacGregor's period as Secretary of State for Education from 1989 to 1991, sheds some light on this (McCullough, 1994). MacGregor cited two books as having exerted a powerful influence on his approach to education reform, Correlli Barnett's *The Audit of War*, and Martin Wiener's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*. Both books were critical of the role of the leaders of the educational establishment. This raises the question of how Mr. MacGregor chanced upon these particular titles; were they his particular choice, were they but two books amongst many or had they been «left on his desk» by others?



It is not known what books, if any, exerted an influence on his successor, Kenneth Clarke, and his justifications for the changes to teacher education are not referenced to literature on the subject, research findings or official enquiries, beyond the single paragraph alluded to in his 1992 speech to the North of England Conference. In his 1992 speech, Clarke claimed the support of the teaching profession for his reforms of teacher training, evidenced by the personal letters which «many teachers write to me saying how liberated they are beginning to feel from the anti-academic pressures put upon them by educational advisors of former years» (Clarke, 1992).

Both Kenneth Clarke and his successor John Patten were disdainful of academic and educational theory (Hugill, 1993; Hillage *et al.*, 1998) and the dominant thrust of Conservative reforms, in education and other areas of social policy, was to reduce the influence of professional specialists and rely on a combination of «common sense», and a new and different form of expertise—that of managers and entrepreneurs.

Distrust of educational theory and research, and antipathy to teacher educators can also be noted in the statements of the Prime Minister, John Major, who according to Chitty, makes «a number of sweeping and damaging generalisations and allegations without providing any supporting evidence» on educational matters (Chitty, 1994: 63). Professional experience and expertise is also devalued; a recent advertisement for the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools noted that experience in education was «not essential» (TES, 30 November 2001), and new head teachers are no longer required to have a teaching qualification (TES, 20 September, 2002).

Lawton attributes the superfluousness of experts to the belief in the imperatives of market forces; «If you believe in the market, you don't need experts—clients and customers will sort it all out» (Lawton, 1995). Several other commentators were more inclined to see this less in terms of free-market ideology, and more in terms of an attempt to establish cultural and intellectual hegemony over public life (Ball, 1993; Blake, 1992; Gilroy, 1992; Raynor, 1989; Whitty, 1990).

Whatever the reasons behind the relegation of «expert» opinion, and the move away from colloquial, pragmatic and evidence-driven reform in education, the manner in which reform was conducted bore little relation to the way in which change had been effected in pre-war years. In terms of Cohen and Mannion's model of progress in policy making, this represented a return to less rational and sophisticated decision making processes. Dent's work, *The training of teachers in England and Wales, 1800-1975*, details the protracted laborious and considered manner in which change was effected during this period. Reforms of the past decade have not been characterised by a thorough and patient amassing of evidence, followed by cautious and measured change (or rejection of change) based on the evidence acquired, although Sir Keith Joseph's period as Secretary of State for Education is in marked contrast to this trend.

The central thrust of government reforms of initial teacher education in England and Wales since Sir Keith Joseph's tenure as Secretary of State for

Education has been based on the idea that the present system is overly theoretical and subject to pernicious progressive pedagogical and political influence. Although 20 years ago there was a body of evidence to support that idea (Haydn and Hake, 1995) the voluntary reform of initial teacher education effected by schools and university departments of education in the 1970s and 1980s meant that the rationale underpinning the government's call for reform was no longer valid. Conclusions and policies have not been based on rigorous enquiry, respect for evidence and determined attempts to elicit an accurate picture of the current state of affairs, which characterised the Joseph era, and earlier phases of education reform.

A striking example of this was Kenneth Clarke's assertion that «Too many students spend far too long working on the theory and history of education and not enough time learning how to handle a class or how to teach a subject in the classroom». Kenneth Baker subsequently announced that the government would effect, «A revolution in teacher training, switching the emphasis from college-based lectures in the history and sociology of education to classroom experience in selected schools» (Aldrich, 1990: 47-8). An inquiry into the status and prevalence of History of Education in PGCE courses by Aldrich elicited replies from 78 out of the 91 institutions responsible for PGCE work. Of these, 6 out of 78 institutions provided a separate course component on the history of education. In terms of total time allocated to the history of education during the course of the PGCE year, 32 institutions allotted no time to the subject, 35, between one and five hours, four, between six and ten hours, and one, between 11 to 20 hours.

Aldrich's survey is illuminating not simply because it reveals the flawed and inaccurate assumptions of Kenneth Clarke and Kenneth Baker in their rationale for reform of teacher education, but because it sheds further light on the mutual antipathy of politicians and teacher educators. One respondent commented that «The pronouncements of K. Baker and his advisors often verge on the foolish because they are, so it seems, pitifully unaware of what is happening in initial teacher training» another remarked, «One does expect just a *hint* of respect for the facts from a historian Secretary of State» (Aldrich, 1990: 52-3).

In a further reform of the specifications for the training of teachers (DfEE, 1998), which was again introduced without research studies, consultations with stakeholders or evidence base, policymakers identified several hundred teaching «competences» which trainees were obliged to acquire, and failure to develop competence in even one of these strands of ICT proficiency would mean that QTS could not be awarded. Chief Executive of the Teacher Training Agency Anthea Millett (1998) argued that by spelling out more comprehensively than ever before the competences which trainees would be obliged to possess before being licensed to teach, the new «improved» Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (DfEE, 1998) would ensure that the breadth of newly qualified teachers' competence would be higher than ever before.

This coverage mentality, and the «quantative» approach to teacher quality (the more competences stipulated, the better the teachers that will emerge)

flies in the face of much recent research about effective teaching and learning (see, for example, Bennett *et al.*, 1984; Lightman and Sadler, 1993). In the words of Dickinson *et al.*, 2001: viii):

In training, beginning teachers are monitored on their achievement of «standards». These are discrete «outcomes» statements that closely resemble a long-discredited behavioural objectives model, and are so numerous as to be unworkable. The danger is that a system of this kind produces mechanical, rule bound assessment, in which monitoring against discrete statements supplants teaching towards understanding. A merely «accounting» assessment against such standards can mean that real understanding of complex practices essential for effective teaching in the long term is discounted in favour of simplistic and low-level short-term procedures.

Although the current Labour administration has committed itself in theory to the importance of «evidence based practice» in education (see, for example, DfES, 2001) there has been a tendency for policymakers to use educational researchers (and «intelligence» more generally), to substantiate and justify policies which have already been decided, rather than as a basis for intelligent and informed decision making (Alexander, 2003).

### The importance of intelligent forms of policy formation

Whereas the interdiction of beards by the *Disaster Reduction Press* in China proceeded *in the absence of* evidence that beards are an environmental hazard, the moves towards eliminating the role of universities in teacher training, and to impose highly unwieldy and bureaucratic competence based models of accreditation has been forced through for ideological reasons, and *against* overwhelming evidence, informed opinion, and professional advice.

By focusing on a particular area of education policy, this paper has attempted to suggest that recent changes to the system of initial teacher education in England and Wales have been characterised by the primacy of ideology over evidence. Most of the changes which have been imposed have not been carefully discussed with those involved, or carefully researched, trialled, and objectively evaluated.

This is important for two reasons. Firstly, the quality of a nation's teaching force is likely to have an important influence on that nation's future prosperity. Commenting on the recent reform of teacher education in England and Wales, Australian educationalist John Thorpe commented, «I came here to learn. Instead I have found that Britain is falling behind the rest of the world. The cost to your country in the long term will be enormous» (*Observer*, 1993). Secondly, this method of making and implementing policy is not confined to initial teacher education, but is symptomatic of the way in which education reform in general and other aspects of social policy have been managed.

As this is not the most intelligent and effective way to manage change, it is likely to have a similar effect to other ideologically driven initiatives which

have had deleterious effects on national fortunes, such as «The Cultural Revolution» in post-war China. The ascendancy of ideology over evidence has resulted in other initiatives in education which have been brought in untested, in haste, and without consultation with «expert» opinion. Even some of those responsible for its inception have conceded that the National Curriculum «has had plenty of builders but very few architects» (Watkins, 1991). Campbell characterises the new National Curriculum as «an experiment whose outcome is uncertain and whose hypotheses are to be put to the test in schools [...] a set of hunches in search of evidence» (Campbell, 1989: 10). White points out that even in 'these reason-sparse times', the implementation of such a massive and portentous educational initiative was carried through with a startling lack of planning and consultation (White, 1988: 178).

Another consequence of the imperatives of ideology in education policy is the subordination of evidence to theory. The misuse and distortion of statistics and research findings in education policy is dealt with in some depth by Gipps (1993) Goldstein (2001) and others. The government's abuse of statistical information has been on a sufficiently large scale to undermine general confidence in the government's official statistical service (see *Guardian*, 1993, 1995b, c, d; *Independent*, 1995a, b; *Observer*, 1995).

This propensity to subordinate statistics to ideology is important because it disguises rather than addresses problems and weaknesses. The tendency to disregard evidence that might not accord with government thinking, eschew consultation with those who hold opposing views, and look for statistics which indicate that all is well with government policy has become more marked in recent years, when contrasted with the Joseph Era, and pre-war approaches to policy making in education. Nor is this confined to education policy; the same tendency could be discerned with regard to penal, health and employment policy. The Times Higher Education Supplement describes a culture of «wilful disregard» for evidence and «visceral anti-intellectualism» in social policy:

The besetting vice is a tendency for conviction to harden into dogmatism, and a refusal to accept reality when it runs counter to conviction [...] Knowledge is too often visceral rather than cerebral [...] Since the answers (researchers) come up with are not those that suit the government, they are ignored. It is one thing for a government not to listen — and entirely another for it to destroy wilfully a long-established and internationally-respected research unit focussed on issues that the government itself regards as a political priority [...] Unhappily it appears that this know-nothing culture is endemic within government. (THES, 1994)

These examples are given to illustrate the tendency for government to discount the need for evidence to support its ideas, or to construct and interpret statistics in a way which lends support to those ideas. Concern over the scale of the ascendancy of ideology over evidence is not confined to disinterested parties and ideological opponents, but was shared by members of the Conservative Party itself. The Conservative Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee for Education accused education ministers of bowing to the views of «extremists»

and «bigots», and losing sight of educational realities in its reluctance to involve educationalists in the process of policy formation (Thornton, 1992).

The Hansard Society itself has been scathing about the quality of the legislative process in England and Wales (Hansard Society, 1993). Commenting on its findings, McKie states, «In education, in housing, in welfare and elsewhere, people have to cope with the consequences of this ill-prepared, undercooked stuff, shoved across the Westminster counter with a sloppiness which would get you sacked from McDonald's» (McKie, 1993).

It is the *extent* of this departure from traditional modes of policy making in education (and more generally) which is both historically significant, and which is likely to have an important influence on the future well-being and prosperity of England and Wales. The tentative hypothesis which will be advanced by this paper is that societies, governments and nations which are able to acknowledge problems, respect evidence and welcome scepticism with regard to ideology and policy, will be more successful than those that disregard evidence, «experts» and enquiry. But these changes also invite questions as to how university departments of education, and the researchers within them should respond to these changed circumstances.

### **How should universities and educational researchers respond to these changes? Reconciling the political and academic tensions of ideology and evidence**

Educationalists and academics do not face the whole gamut of pressures imposed on politicians regarding their approach to «the facts», or «the evidence». The nature of politics, with the need to win general elections, respond to opinion polls, justify manifesto pledges, imposes pressures on politicians to either disregard, or be economical with «the truth», the facts, the evidence. This is one of the explanations for tensions between politicians and academics; they are the product of differing ideologies. Part of the ideology of the university is that those making assertions should be able to substantiate them with evidence. Part of the ideology of politics is the primacy of securing and maintaining power in order to implement policy; policy which often has an ideological rather than evidential genesis.

Where politicians are under pressure to search for clear-cut and justifiable policy, which can be delivered within a reasonable time-scale, the respect for evidence which is at the heart of the ideology of the university, militates against the discounting of inconvenient findings, the limiting of scales of enquiry and scope of consultation, and what Proust terms, «the certainty of the second rate».

Barber's point that academic input to education policy has been prone to dilatoriness and lack of urgency is echoed by Mortimore, who explains governmental antipathy to the educational research community as deriving in part from the tendency of universities to engage in esoteric debate and their inability to work to time-scales which fit with policy needs. Mortimore goes on to suggest ways in which the conflicting imperatives of politicians and acade-

mic educationalists might be reconciled (Mortimore, 1995). As Depaepe notes, this tension between the methods of the politician and the academic is partly due to the nature of the discipline of education. Unlike politicians, «We are, like Sisyphus and his boulder, historically doomed to the patient reconstruction of expositions over expositions, to the task of listening to what has already been said» (De Paepe, 1993).

Having acknowledged this tension however, it is important to note that there is a continuum in the extent to which those in power are prepared to acknowledge and respect evidence which runs counter to policy. It is the *extent* to which evidence, enquiry and «expert» advice has been disregarded which is at issue here. The Hansard Society noted that «The greater the ideology in any government, the less the consultation» (McKie, 1993); less consultation means less evidence, less sceptical examination of proposals and less informed opinion. The complex nature of modern industrial and technological society means that informed, or «expert» opinion has become more rather than less important:

Experts are essential, particularly in a complex culture such as ours, where knowledge is expanding so rapidly that no-one can be an expert on everything. And obviously, certain individuals have such wide experience and deep insight that their advice can be of immense benefit. (Mouly, 1978)

On the whole, British universities have adopted a fairly quiescent role in the erosion of the classical «Humboltian» model of the university as a community or self-governing republic of scholars, independent of government and therefore providing a valuable and «untainted» source of policy advice, and deriving its influence from «the power of truth» rather than the richness of its connections with the state (Walters, 1996: 97). Through the creation of a dependency culture in the university, (enforced through the rhetoric of quality control), the government has been able to divide and rule, to the extent that British universities have on the whole accepted the erosion of their independence, and have tended to scabble for position within the hierarchies and funding regimes established by government. Hence the existence of sub-sets of universities grouping together to further their interests within «the game», such as Oxbridge, the Russell Group and so on (see Scott, 1995, and Cowan, 1997 for further development of this point). The idea of a common resistance to these pressures seems particularly weak in England and Wales —as against Scotland for instance (McLeod, 1993; Menter *et al.*, 2003).

Signs of hope for the integrity and utility of educational research can be discerned from the emergence of a range of academics who have adopted an almost self-consciously oppositional (or at least instinctively sceptical) stance to government claims on the efficacy of their educational reforms, particularly where the evidence in terms of public peer review is particularly «flaky». A good example of this approach is the work of Goldstein, who points to the government's opportunistic and unprincipled use of research, and to its increasing reference to research findings which have not been subject to peer review.

His website presents succinct and powerfully argued cases which effectively expose the government rhetoric about «evidence based practice» (see <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/hgpersonal/>). Against this is the existence of more compliant academics, and those who have not significantly adapted their approach to research in the face of very differing governmental approaches to the use of educational research.

But the vitality and utility of educational research cannot be guaranteed by acts of institutional solidarity, professional conscience and intellectual integrity alone. If educational research is to be effective in improving the quality of policy making in education, in the face of governmental efforts to use it to validate policies which have been ideologically determined beforehand, it will need to think much harder about how it presents its findings in terms of impact and force of argument.

There is still a conservatism of format and a lack of attention to audience in some research in the United Kingdom. There is a tendency in some cases to think primarily in terms of getting the paper published rather than seeing it as a contribution to debate on policy, with the possibility of the research changing policy. As Marx noted, the point is to try and change things for the better, not just to understand them.

The President of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), John Furlong, recently argued that the problem of much educational research in the United Kingdom was that it was «boring» (Furlong, 2003). If other members of the research community find research reports boring, what chance is there that they will have a meaningful impact on those outside the community? Furlong also talks about the tendency towards «research creep»; the gradual gathering of consensus around themes, when «paradigm shift» and steamroller logic is required to shift policymakers' stubbornly ingrained ideological positions. As Elliott (2003) has argued, research is at its most powerful and most effective when it disturbs preconceptions, and challenges established thinking. A good example of this is Lightman and Sadler's research, which shows pupils knowing and understanding less after extensive periods of teaching than before the teaching sessions (Lightman and Sadler, 1993; Sadler, 1994). No politician or policymaker could read the research, or watch the video materials emanating from the project, without acknowledging that the processes involved in teaching and learning are more complex than they had supposed.

As Macdonald *et al.* (1975: 49) noted, «The citadel of established practice will seldom fall to the polite knock of a good idea». How many researchers spend as much time thinking about the presentation of their research at conferences and other audiences as to the writing of their paper? How many write so incisively, marshal their data so skilfully, and deploy new technology (the internet, CD-roms, video extracts) to make maximum «impact», in a way that is so clear and powerful that it makes it almost impossible for even the most brass necked policy makers and «tame» academics to refute the validity of their case? Black and Wiliam (2003) explaining the impact on policymakers of their research on formative assessment argue that researchers need to think about

the rhetorical force of their findings as well as the evidence underpinning them. They also note the importance of making concerted attempts to ensure that the research reaches as broad an audience as possible, writing different types of article for different audiences, and even working with media relations experts to secure maximum press coverage. This does not remove the need to work within canons of academic rigour and respect for evidence, but it does mean thinking about impact as well as reliability and validity.

Until universities and educational researchers show more resolution in resisting the prostitution of academic research, and the government's attempts to divide and rule, and concentrate their efforts on powerfully argued, high-impact presentation of their findings, education policy in the United Kingdom will continue to be a matter of the blind leading the sighted.

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