

# Blitzer and the graminivorous quadruped: Oddities, myths and mysteries of the average and the normal

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A useful on-going educational myth is that of the 'average' child based on some sort of nebulous ill-defined concept of 'normality' which invites comparison between schools and an arbitrary judgment of performance. For example, The Department for Education (2016) categorises pupils at key stage 2 and 4 as low, middle or high attainers and it is against this criteria the child is measured and, to an extent, the quality of school provision. This is highly mechanistic, simplistic and misleading reducing educational outcomes to a level of measurement akin to how many miles per gallon a car attains. It ignores all the joy and wonder of discovery, the obvious fact that children are individual and learn in different ways at different speeds and in different contexts. Sadly, the higher education sector operates to a similar philosophy hence the hierarchical and bizarre league tables celebrated by The Guardian and Times Higher Education Supplement and berated by our Vice Chancellor (Thompson, 2015) Making sense of this artificial

characterisation of humankind is difficult and puzzling. A good starting point might be the 1943 Norwood Report which confirmed the tripartite system as

- the academically-minded would be provided for in grammar schools;
- the scientifically-minded would go to technical schools;
- the rest would go to secondary modern schools

There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that children could be so readily divided and the categories are based on the misjudged notion of differentiating by assessment and therefore selecting to a deliberately hierarchical model. Doing so usefully maintains the status quo and ensures privilege for a minority whilst creating a mass pool of workers for economic production as documented from many years ago, for example, Althusser,(1969) or Friere (1970). Beach (2010) sees the issues in terms of marketisation across Europe. More recently,

Fitzner (2016) laments a common concern increasingly explored in educational research of the effects of neo-liberalism and marketisation whilst Harris and Little (2016) explore further Richard Hatcher's ideas of a social movement against government policy. So, quite rightly and correctly, there continues to be a great deal of debate as to what constitutes quality. In higher education, for better or worse, the measure is often via research, The Russell Group attracting the biggest share of the sector's research money and widely perceived as being the UK's best universities. Which brings us to this edition of the journal. Here we have again a very wide selection of educational research, all written by students, but note the main theme, all are concerned with teaching and learning and it perhaps here that we ought to evaluate quality rather than via contrived and arbitrary national measures. Bolton is informed by a policy of 'teaching led, research informed' and here are many examples. I hope you enjoy reading them.

# References

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