

Review: Journal of In-service Education, 2003 .

Abstract:

A review of a book with a useful focus on issues of equity and social justice, including prejudice, discrimination and bullying in secondary schools. Education policy makers need to explore the extent to which it is important to produce interested, motivated and socially balanced young adults. It is well researched and documented.

Chitty, Clyde 2002 *Understanding Schools and Schooling* Series: Key Issues in Teaching and Learning RoutledgeFalmer.
ISBN 0-415-23879-X

This is a key volume of a series designed for MA and PD courses, focusing on the effect of politics and national policy on schools since 1944. The author is Professor of Policy & Management in Education, Goldsmith's College. This book is not a history of the period, but a critique of key issues. Most of the discussion is applicable to the whole of discussion, but topic choice and illustrations make it clear that he intends this book to be used by secondary teachers. It opens by contrasting different educational missions: to fulfil the individual's potential; to prepare for work; and to affect social change. He critiques the radical right's use of schooling as social control, and points to social reconstructionism, that is the process of understanding and reshaping society through discussion and debate, almost achieved by the mid 1980s, but to be replaced by the advent, under political control, of the National Curriculum and related legislation. Chapter 2 discusses the 35 year period to 1979 as (quoting the legislation) 'a national system, locally administered', a time of post-war social welfare finally challenged in a time of recession by the 'radical right'. Chapter 3 discusses two decades of 'reconstruction and conflict' (1979-1997) as times when Conservative governments attacked the power of LEAs and the notion of comprehensive schooling. Chitty sources opinions of the main politicians from speeches, interviews and parliamentary sources. This period introduced greater diversity into school types, with selection reintroduced via specialisation. There were also experiments in local financial management culminating first in Grant Maintained schools and later in the fuller delegation of school budgets. He argues that much that happened was a deliberate attack on the status of LEAs and on comprehensive education as an ideal.

His exploration of the National Curriculum traces the development from a political non-interventionist attitude to teacher control of the curriculum to several attempts – notably by HMI through the 'Red Books', to create a structured curriculum. He points out that political plans for the new curriculum was a revolution rather than evolution designed to take political charge of the curriculum. Starting with very rudimentary plans, little detail was decided up front, with a great deal of reaction and thinking on their feet. The subject-based curriculum (not unfamiliar to secondary schools but counter to much good primary school practice) had to be rapidly expanded when questions were raised about the status of environmental, health, sex, multicultural, careers and vocational education. Cross curricular dimensions and themes were rapidly born. The subject 'orders' from the working groups were complex, rigid and sometimes controversial (as with History) and many had to be revised and simplified. The desire for testing within a school effectiveness rhetoric led to SATs and league tables. The overcrowded key stage 4 curriculum was eventually substantially reviewed and vocational options introduced. New Labour since 1997 has been concerned to modernise comprehensivisation, and tackle under-achievement especially in inner-cities. To do this it has introduced education action zones, beacon schools, city academies, 'Fresh Start', and specialist schools and colleges.

Chapter 7 concerns Teachers' Conditions of Service and Professional Responsibilities. Discussions of the advanced skills teacher, and of performance related pay, are noteworthy. Chapter 8

explores issues of equality and social justice class, 'race', gender, sexuality and disability, noting that there has been little attempt to integrate thinking about this or to introduce over-arching policies and strategies. "...the time is long overdue for equal opportunities policies to occupy a major role in daily school life" (p.122). Chapter 9 'Issues for the Future – Contradictions and New Aspirations' explores: What is the Blair Project? Modernising the Comprehensive Principle; The Need for Examination Reform; The Privatising Agenda; Teacher Morale; and What Future for Secondary Education. A right wing agenda is still being followed, with little emphasis on equity and social justice. There are glaring contradictions in political attitudes. Chitty focuses finally on New Labour's agenda of modernising the comprehensive principle, examinations, privatising, ending with a negative view of teacher morale, and a pessimistic view, through unanswered questions, about the future of secondary schools. Surprisingly little is said about OFSTED (it is mentioned chiefly for its lack of reporting of equality issues) whereas a fuller treatment would seem justified, since there are implications about supposed measures of school effectiveness, of teacher morale, and of a system that deflects so much time away from teaching and learning.

The secondary school focus is a limitation. Interesting policies and strategies have also evolved in the primary and in particular the early years. The issues are similar, but the exemplars and illustrations different, with different lessons still to be learnt. There are many initiatives for example stimulating learning and achievement in inner-city and low participation areas but which create winners and losers (Surestart worked at first with postcode areas, so a family on one side of a road might benefit, and one on the other side not). Excellence in Cities, Early Excellence Centres and Early Years Development & Training Partnerships would all benefit from rigorous treatment. How might this book be used in CPD courses? It would not greatly benefit action research programmes in school but would serve to raise awareness of policy issues that impact on everyday schooling. When immersed in applying for beacon, or specialist school status, it can be like hacking through the thickets without appreciating the nature of the forest you are navigating through. The book has a useful focus on issues of equity and social justice, including prejudice, discrimination and bullying that need once again to come to the fore of school provision. The level of attainment of pupils is a fine ambition; but education policy makers need also to explore the extent to which it is also important to produce interested, motivated and socially balanced young adults. It is well researched and documented, and deserves to be on the library shelves.

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