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## The Labour Party and the Need for Change: values, education and emotional literacy/intelligence

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**ABSTRACT** The author argues that when the Labour Party has analysed its values emotional development has been neglected. He shows the importance of emotional literacy and uses education as a vehicle to show how Labour when in power reinforced right-wing ideology. Ways of changing education policy are indicated. It is hoped that this article will promote a lively discussion.

A study of the policies published during the last election reveals that the Conservatives were clear in their values, which included responsibility with public finances, social responsibility, enterprise and aspiration. It was also stated that personal ambition should have no limits. Labour were less clear about their values in their Manifesto, but elsewhere stated the importance of equality, social justice, community, fairness, having strong values and a rejection of self-interest. *Hence, Conservative and Labour values appear to be different and this should be reflected in policies.*

One key Labour theme is a commitment to equality, which is often discussed in terms such as how much men and women earn and their career development. However, the attitudes and understandings of each gender towards the other are key to equality, which therefore has a *psychological* dimension that involves emotional literacy/intelligence. Emotional intelligence is usually seen as an individual development, e.g. how good is a person at being self-reliant? How good are they at being empathic? In contrast to this individualistic approach emotional literacy can be explored as being a communal activity. I have argued elsewhere (Matthews, 2006) that all emotional interactions take place in social contexts where power differentials are common. For example, a group of men and women talking may include an

upper-class person, an asylum seeker, a priest and a taxi driver. There could also be varying sexual orientations. When these people talk one could gain an idea of a person's emotional literacy by observing how well they could empathise, listen, reflect, be self-aware and supportive of each individual. I argue that

emotional literacy is both an individual development and a collective activity and is both about self-development and the building of community so that one's own sense of emotional well-being grows along with that of others. Emotional literacy is a dynamic process through which the individual develops emotionally and includes understanding how the nature of social class, 'race' and gender (sexism and homophobia) impinge on peoples' emotional states to lead to an understanding of how society could change. Hence it incorporates an understanding of power exchanges between people and a challenging of power differentials. (Matthews, 2006, p. 178)

The psychological dimension of equality is often neglected, and equality commonly discussed in relation to how evenly resources – mainly earning and careers – are distributed. This is particularly evident in Conservative policies. The attention to the distribution of resources is also to the fore in left-wing documents, although these can incorporate references to social justice, democracy and the ability to think for oneself.

The psychological dimension of equity connects to social justice, which is often not defined in Labour documents. Social justice, as defined by Young (1990), takes into account that people can experience oppression and domination. However, only the person who experiences these can say how it feels and what they believe is required for equality, and so differences have to be acknowledged and taken into account. In order to achieve equality people have to be able to meet together and be able to express and deliberate how they feel and what they consider needs to change. Hence, people must have *voices of representation*. A key element is that people are listened to and recognised for who they are. Therefore, people have to be able to empathise with each other across gender, class and other differences. Taylor (1994) uses the term a *politics of recognition* where people can recognise and understand how others feel. People should meet in a spirit of cooperation and feelings of mutual tolerance to have an adequate representation of identities. In order to do this people need to be able to face up to their own anxieties over differences, such as sexual orientation and religious beliefs. People require a commitment to mutuality and understanding each other across differences and shared characteristics. Moving towards social justice will, therefore, inevitably involve people meeting with others to discuss issues, while requiring recognition and respect for difference such that people can positively listen to those they disagree with. To do this 'deliberative democracy' and 'participative democracy' can be used as ways of developing situations where people can meet to debate freely. However, while understanding differences is important, it is crucial that people gain an understanding of similarities and what unites them so that political action

becomes possible. If differences are focused on too much, mutual concerns can be lost. For deliberations to be as effective as possible it will involve listening, expressing feelings, dealing with uncertainty, resolving problems and participating in decision-making. Hence, it will help if the people involved are open-minded, feel secure in themselves, and are critical thinkers. A developed emotional literacy of the participants will help a participatory democracy because people will have a better understanding of cultural and political differences and what people have in common.

It is important to realise how difficult it is for people in such circumstances. When people meet they always categorise others in either positive or negative ways. So when people meet to discuss they may feel threatened, insecure, angry or over-confident, and so be unable psychologically to fully enter into dialogue. To engage in deliberative dialogue is not a simple process and it means that we have to be committed to learning and understanding the 'other' which includes factors such as social class as well as gender and 'race'. Conscious and unconscious fears and anxieties can have a strong negative impact on us when we interact with others. Emotions cannot be excluded from deliberation, and so it is important to understand the processes involved, which can otherwise be destructive. This is because people gain a sense of themselves in relationships with other people. The similarities and differences between people, and the ambiguities in these, and the relationship between them have to be explored in order to challenge power differences. For example, rich people have power because of wealth, and they often have a way of categorising poor people as lazy and justify this by saying that they do not work hard enough. But the poor can also categorise wealthy people as lazy because they are envisaged as spending their time at the races and playing golf. There are many facets and ambiguities which have to be uncovered to challenge power relationships. Hence, a commitment to developing pupils' and adults' emotional literacy, social justice and deliberative/participative democracy could be central values of a Labour Party if we are to move to a fairer socialist society.

Moving towards *equality* would include economic distribution and a view of people as being of equal worth. From the above outline equality has a psychological aspect that includes ambiguity, uncertainty and requires a commitment to facing up to psychological anxieties in order to achieve understanding of the 'other': gender, class or 'race'. This latter part is rarely mentioned in documents discussing equality. I have given a brief description of the meaning of equality, social justice and democracy and will now use education as an illustration of how they can be applied concretely to a political area.

### **Education**

The Conservatives produced a range of strategies in education to ensure the primacy of its values; individualism, competition and reason. The National Curriculum was introduced to control the curriculum and remove control of

education from educators. The National Curriculum focused on subjects such as English, Maths and Science. The 'non-rational' subjects were marginalised, such as Sociology and Media Studies that had the potential to question society and involve emotions and judgements. Traditional teaching with clear teacher-centred transmission methods was believed in, reflected in the term the "delivery" of the curriculum'. The teacher is the source of knowledge and the pupils are reliant on the teacher; knowledge comes from the powerful. Standard Assessment Tasks and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) were introduced to ensure compliance and a focus on what can be measured. The league tables were to ensure competition between schools. Pupils are generally supposed to learn individually, often in competition with each other. The purpose is to determine those who can learn the knowledge, mainly rational information, as assessed through exams. This incorporates an individualistic, rational and therefore non-cultural/social/emotional view of intelligence. A pupil's intelligence was assumed to be unchanging; the main 'justification' of streaming. Different types of schools, public, grammar, specialist, city technology colleges, and now academies, all serve the purpose of separating pupils to a large degree by social class, especially as different selection procedures are used, even if they are unofficial. Hence, separation and difference are reinforced, rather than cooperation and similarity. A pupil in such an education system is immersed in a set of values where academic achievement, competition and self-interest, are valued. Conservative educational policy is (a) consistent with right-wing values, and pupils and parents are more likely to imbibe Conservative values, and (b) ideological, because its policies do not match learning theory, or address the needs of young people. *Labour education policy continued these values and reinforced, and even strengthened, the same right-wing values.*

What would the education system look like if it were built on Labour values? These include a commitment to equality, cooperation, social justice, deliberative democracy and confronting inner anxieties to gain an understanding of the 'other' while searching for similarities and areas of mutual concern. I would argue for the following principles, as well as a commitment to academic standards:

### *Learning Theory*

A socialist/left-wing education system would be concerned with how children learn, rather than using an ideological approach as used by the Conservatives. Research indicates that learning is a complex social art that involves the use of language to explore concepts, misconceptions and understandings – the constructivist view of learning. At the heart of learning is the need for dialogue and discussion to gain understanding through listening, talking and accepting alternative ideas. Learning and teaching will then occur between peers and older students. Such discussion-based classroom practices deepen understanding of subject knowledge and reasoning processes and can be called 'growing the

mind'. It is worth noting that these are the same processes that are also central to social justice and democracy.

### *Relationships and Emotional Literacy*

We can see that certain factors could be critical for enabling pupils to understand relationships and their fluidity. The basic elements of emotional literacy are important for everyone and for industry. One aspect is the establishing of fully comprehensive schools so that, in so far as it is possible, pupils of all backgrounds are together and hence they have a better chance of getting to know the 'other'. The presence of a range of pupils will help counter stereotypes – girls and boys will be present who can show how restricted the stereotypes are. This will help them face up to ambiguities and to accept uncertainties so that they will become less anxious. With appropriate teaching this can lead into an uncovering of power differentials and lead to better gender relationships, especially if done during puberty. I can provide a few pointers from my research into how emotional literacy can be approached in schools (Matthews, 2004, 2006; Matthews & Snowden, 2007). In brief, pupils can be placed in situations where they can develop socially and emotionally through *experiences* with others. The pupils work collaboratively and then write how well they thought the group got on, and then compare and discuss with the others what they thought (Matthews, 2006). The pupils can benefit if they discuss their learning and relationships at the same time. Developing pupils' emotional literacy can help a movement towards equality. What the strategies do is to expose pupils to some experiences that also incorporate the basic requirements of deliberative democracy. The pupils may learn a set of emotional rules or habits where they, through experiences, discuss social and emotional practices – or any other aspect of life – along with cognitive learning. It could become normative for pupils to make emotional connections and learn to discuss emotional aspects of their lives together, across the boundaries of social class, gender and 'race' and other oppressions. As my research was completed in academic subject lessons, the pupils can appreciate that emotions, cognitive learning and social interactions are intertwined.

### *Thinking Skills*

For pupils to have a chance of leading fulfilling and flourishing lives they also need to learn to think for themselves. Part of this is to know that knowledge generated in a wide range of contexts, and that learning can occur independently of teachers, but mainly to learn critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are important to enable pupils to become part of a democratic society where its citizens are informed and open-minded. Education can play an important part in enabling pupils to grow into caring, cooperative people and can help them be aware of political issues. They will also be more likely to take part in a participative democracy. Critical thinking skills, and personal, learning

and thinking skills (PLTS) have a strong emotional base. These are all aspects that form a transformative education system where one aim is to enable pupils to think about the world and its social and political organisation in order to transform it. As such, transformative learning involves deep changes in our view of ourselves at emotional and cognitive levels and is part of a deliberative democracy. Dialogue and talk in the classroom is a social process that incorporates intra- and inter- psychological development while making people accountable to the community. Discussion involves partial compromises but, essentially, it holds the potential for participants to build an emotional script where critical thinking with others becomes routine. It is easy to see why the Conservatives pay little attention to thinking skills. However, a major reason for developing thinking skills is that these are required for young people to survive in a fast-changing world.

### *Equality, Social Justice and Democracy*

The above principles all lay the foundations for equality and social justice. Such an education system could hold out the possibility that pupils could participate and come to understand how to develop relationships and understandings across oppressions, and in particular to cultivate enhanced sexual and non-sexual relationships. Both boys and girls could learn to discuss their feelings. A pupil in such an education system would be immersed in a set of values where their social and emotional development, concern for others, a belief in equity, an ability to think constructively and critically, be open-minded, and achieve academically were all valued. Pupils could gain an understanding of the ways they are controlled and so feel empowered to shape their lives more. They could learn the skills to build relationships and community; a basis for a participatory democracy. Hopefully the pupils might also imbibe ideals such as considering the common good, seeing that people can work together and valuing them for their differences instead of feeling they are a threat. Relationships will be valued over the pursuit of wealth. Such approaches are best accomplished in comprehensive schools that are multiethnic and coeducational.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion is that the Labour Party would benefit from reviewing at depth its values and rethink how these are put into practice. I do *not* want to prioritise the psychological/emotional over the many other aspects of developing a set of values for the Labour Party, but to say that its significance has been undervalued. I have given a broad brush outline on certain issues, and I have illustrated how a consideration of values can lead to a vision of an educational system, and in doing so I have tried to indicate a process that could lead to a future Labour government pursuing left-wing ideals. It is time for Labour to forge an identity for itself that distinguishes itself from other parties, to have faith and confidence in its vision and move the country to a better future.

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