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## Governing Education: remaking the long revolution

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**ABSTRACT** Behind the thin veil of the Conservative regime's rationale of deficit reduction hides the final demolition of public comprehensive education and Raymond Williams's more expansive long revolution unfolding over a century of creating a democratic state that affords opportunity, voice and justice for all. Restoring the politics of a pre-war or Edwardian era, opportunity is now being rationed and education returned to its tradition of social selection and class subordination. Autocratic power is being constructed at the expense of 'inefficient' democratic spaces that voice appeal and deliberate policy in relation to need. Yet democracy is not the problem but the solution to the collective action dilemmas facing civil society. The potential of comprehensive learning communities to develop democratic collective agency is proposed.

### **Introduction: 'the true is the whole'<sup>[1]</sup>**

Democratic comprehensive education has been the target of neo-liberal governments – Conservative and New Labour – for thirty years. The project of the present right-wing Conservative regime is to complete the demolition. The fundamental question before the social democratic tradition is thus to ask whether Raymond Williams's historic 'long revolution', unfolding over a century and more, of creating a democratic state that provides opportunity, voice and justice for all, is now halted or even lies in ruins.[2] In this context, an invitation to contribute to a seminar [3] on the progressive development of the democratic governance of local school systems provoked a sense of disorientation. Is the task before us one of extending democracy at the level of school, community and locality, or the urgent necessity of recovering a persuasive public rationale for local democracy as such? The challenge now, I believe, is to rebuild the foundations of public democratic comprehensive education: to remake the revolution.[4] Developing democracy and renewing its rationale are the same task, and the appropriate emblem is that of my city, Coventry: the Phoenix rising from the ashes.

The immediate task is to search for perspective and significance in the bigger picture of the politics of education policy. The first section of this article develops an interpretation of the meaning of the Conservative regime's project in education, both as political ideology and as a neo-liberal response to the collective action dilemmas facing society, the polity and economy. The second section of this article proposes the necessary next steps to remake the long revolution in education. These are, I will propose, to re-imagine ourselves as makers of public worlds [5]; creating a pedagogy of recognition; re-forming the comprehensive from a school to a learning community; and establishing local democratic community governance; all supported by a state committed to justice, opportunity and employment for all. But, what are the conditions for such a transformation, where is the motivation to come from?

### **The Neo-liberal Dismantling of Public, Comprehensive Education**

The education system which expressed the purposes of the post-war social democratic polity – a system of comprehensive schools expanding opportunity for all provided by and accountable to the public authority of democratic local government – has been slowly undermined over thirty years and is being finally demolished by the present Conservative regime. The regime promised to protect front-line services from budget reductions when it came to power in 2010, yet education has experienced substantial cuts, which have been blamed on the purported scale of the nation's financial deficit. I shall propose, however, that the policy of inescapable expenditure contraction masks a deeper agenda of restructuring education and with it the public service welfare state. What follows develops an interpretive analysis of the Conservative regime's five-year neo-liberal educational project:

*Contraction.* The Conservative Coalition's 2010 spending review pledged that no school would see more than a 1.5% reduction in budgets in 2012-13 compared with 2011-12 (before the pupil premium was added), yet the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) reported in October 2011 that spending on education would fall by 13%, the biggest fall in any four-year period since the 1950s. The financial squeeze was to be concentrated on the early years and on the 16-19 age group, with the withdrawal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) damaging participation rates of disadvantaged young people: children's centres and colleges were being sacrificed to protect school classrooms from the worst cuts. Yet schools have not been especially protected. Research by *The Guardian* (December, 2011) indicated that 'shrinking budgets are already significantly reducing the range and quality of education on offer to all pupils across England, from toddlers to teenagers. Even schools in deprived neighbourhoods are making swingeing cuts, despite receiving the pupil premium.' A range of activities and classes have been reduced or cut by schools: music, art, sport, careers advice, after school clubs and holiday play schemes.

The IFS warned that plans to reform the national funding formula, to ensure more 'equity' between schools of a similar type would lead to 10% budget cuts for schools in deprived urban areas. Such local authorities with concentrations of poverty were also being disadvantaged by the Government ending Labour's Building Schools for the Future project which was designed to address the deteriorating fabric of many schools in urban areas.

*Classification and selection.* The school curriculum and assessment are being radically redefined and returned to traditional forms in order to make more explicit the differentiation of children into strata of achievement. A traditional, basic knowledge and skills curriculum has been emphasized at primary school level (June, 2012) and at GCSE level [6] with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBAC) which requires students to achieve five good passes in English, maths, science, a European language, and humanities if they are to be regarded as passing successfully. It is a restoration of the old matriculation. More significant, however, is the impact this traditional reorientation of the curriculum has on the levels of achievement at 15. At a stroke the introduction of the EBAC has reduced by over 40% the numbers of young people deemed to be achieving a good GCSE to 20%. Suddenly most children are 'failures'. When I was doing research at the Department of Education and Science in 1980 a statistician in the Department said this statistic was the one he valued most because it compared with the proportion of children who used to pass the 11+! The EBAC is set to become the new 11+ at 15, potentially enabling selection to sixth forms and beyond to higher education. This initiative is being reinforced at A level by plans to make courses more difficult, strengthen summative above formative assessment by eliminating AS level modular learning, end retakes, and restore the single end of course examination.

Redefining the criteria of achievement will by definition expand failure and potentially deter the progression of young people to higher education. This will be reinforced by a number of complementary measures: the ending of the EMAs, which were clearly supporting participation rates in post-16 education (especially in further education colleges) and the early childhood trust funds designed to support future participation in further and higher education. By raising university fees to a norm of £9000 and by transferring a public good to a private burden for most students, the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills has acted to reduce the attractiveness and financial feasibility of higher education for many families.

*'Autonomy' and stratification.* Pedagogies are typically reinforced by appropriate institutional formations. The Norwood Report of 1943 articulated the preferred tripartite model of selective schooling that shaped schools before and immediately after the Second World War. Following an exam at 11 children would be distributed between types of schools that were deemed appropriate for their purported fixed aptitudes and natures. Though a tradition of selective schooling continued in parts of the country, from 1965 an emergent system of

comprehensive schools became the preferred model, providing opportunities for all children, learning together, to develop their capabilities and potential over time. Many commentators have described the policies of the Conservative regime from 2010 as fragmenting the system of schools, creating disparate 'free schools' and academies. Yet while it is true to say that the comprehensive system is being deconstructed by such policies, what follows is far from incoherent. Rather, the regime is completing the formation of a marketised system of schools which has been unfolding in stages for twenty-five years.[7] The neo-liberal orthodoxy has proposed that standards of achievement will improve if schools are encouraged to compete with each other, promoting their separate specialisms to secure the preference of parents. Sustaining the policies of choice and diversity has been an entrenched mantra that schools must be granted autonomy from local authorities. Beginning with 'delegated management' in 1988, it is now concluding with the Secretary of State universalizing the removal of schools from local authority control, principally through the academy programme, which promises schools autonomy to vary the national curriculum and methods of teaching, determine their own timetable, school day and year, and increasingly to shape their own admissions policies.

Yet far from becoming autonomous, schools are increasingly located in two emergent structures: of pedagogic hierarchy, and of power and governmental jurisdiction. The first indicates the embryonic restoration of tripartism. The market system of parental choice and school competition has generated a hierarchy of schools segregated by class and race.[8] The policies of the Conservative regime can be seen as formalising and overlaying such hierarchies with an emergent tripartite structure of education purpose. The project of universalising academy status masks the 'direction of travel' towards (at least) two tiers of school: those which have proved themselves 'successful', according to Ofsted criteria, may form a tier of 'grammar schools' (pursuing more traditional academic courses, or 'O levels' [9], with another tier of lower or junior 'modern' secondary schools pursuing potentially foundation levels of learning, or CSEs (for 'less intelligent pupils').[10] Other local schools may develop stronger differentiation between the two levels of curriculum. The selective grammar school movement is being strengthened by the Conservative regime. A few months after taking office the Education Secretary indicated that he would allow grammar schools to expand. This year sees the first new grammar school expansion in 50 years. Kent County Council has given the approval for a grammar school to establish a satellite school in Sevenoaks. Other subtle 'grammar' initiatives have been established: one school has established a 'grammar school pathway' to provide an accelerated academic curriculum for selected students, while another school has developed a school within a school system which allocates children to the segregated schools by cognitive ability test (cf. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 15 June 2012).

Meanwhile, Lord Baker is promoting a stream of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) for 14-19 year-olds: 'their purpose is to train technicians and engineers', as he explained in his article, 'At last schools for getting your hands

dirty' (*The Times*, 29 May 2012). Each UTC is supported by a university and employers will help shape the curriculum, which will include academic study oriented to support the technical. The first two were approved by Lord Adonis, in the last years of New Labour, and a further 32 are planned.

While 'autonomy' to develop educational purposes and practices is increasingly shaped by institutional location in a tripartite pedagogic system, schools' freedom is also being radically undermined by the developing structures of power and governance.

*Nationalising and corporatising the governance of schools.* The Conservative regime is introducing a fundamental restructuring of the governance of education. While the structure constituted by the 1944 Education Act enabled a partnership in public service between the state, local government and the relative autonomy of the profession in schools (Kogan, 1971), this partnership has been eroded since the 1980s as power has been progressively centralised and decentralised. But the present restructuring of governance systematically undermines the autonomy of schools through a programme of nationalising and corporatising schools. While the academy and free schools are removed from local authority control, power is centralised in the person of the Secretary of State (Newsam, 2012)[11] to determine the funding of schools and the purposes and characteristics of the market system. Indeed, the historian Ross McKibbin (2012) argues that while the regime's 'education policies were justified as giving parents choice and returning authority to school principals, they will do no such thing. Parents have choice only when they agree with the secretary of state ... The same is true of headteachers. All state schools are, or will be, Conservative Party schools'.[12] In a recent interview on the BBC's *World at One* (24 May 2012) the education secretary emphasised the importance of autonomy from local authorities as the key catalyst to improving performance yet made no mention of schools' subordination to the state, nor to the accelerating creation of 'chains' of schools [13] controlled by private trusts and the business sector. The research of Stephen Ball (2009, 2010) has identified in fine detail the accelerating outsourcing of every layer of school practice to the private sector. The obfuscation of political rhetoric evokes Orwell and the mendacity of authoritarian language. As Mehdi Hasan of the *New Statesman* said (6 February 2012), 'this isn't about the freedom for local communities; it's about freedom for big corporations.' The education services sector in the UK is worth close to £2bn and the regime's policies are designed to expand considerably such privatising of provision. The free school in Suffolk is in the control of a Swedish profit-making company.

Schools are thus to be governed by a new partnership between the Secretary of State and the corporate sector (typically the private sector and churches) which will replace the local authority as the middle-tier management of the national system of governance. The distinctive function of the education secretary in this new system is the fundamental one of determining its essential characteristics, including: finance, institutional form, admissions, curriculum and

assessment, and accountability. He is the guardian of the segmented market to ensure it fulfils its functions, as all markets do, of creating social hierarchy and exclusion.

*The Significance of the Regime's Education  
Restoration Agenda: a conjecture?<sup>[14]</sup>*

The policies of the Conservative regime signal the end of what has been until now an unfolding prospect of universal tertiary (18+) education. If the 1870 Education Act introduced universal elementary education, and the 1944 Education Act established universal secondary education, the recent ambition to expand participation in higher education to 50% of the age cohort is now at an end.[15] The restoration of traditional pedagogies is designed to classify most children as academic failures, encouraging them to identify expectations appropriate to their purported restricted natures and vocational aptitudes. The stratification of schools and achievement, in effect, rations opportunities which are achieved through competitive selection or admission rather than in relation to need and potential. As with the Geddes axe in the 1920s, the nation chooses to educate only those it believes it can afford, while the social engineering of marketisation enables social exclusion to masquerade as choice (and equity), with access to opportunity tied to those with wealth and cultural capital. Education is returned to its traditional function of social selection and class subordination. Most children must once more learn their place and limit their horizons.

This project of social and cultural segmentation is beginning to succeed because of the demolishing of local, public, democratic authority which has provided not only the engine of policies to meet the needs of the people but has provided checks and balances against arbitrary abuse of power. Not only is the 'autonomy' of independent state schools detaching them from the democratic accountability of local government, it is systematically undermining the democratic, stakeholder model of school governance which ensured equal representation of all the partners of a school. Legislation frees academy schools from the obligation to conform to the governance requirements expected of maintained schools and allows them to establish small governing committees composed principally of trust members and business directors of the charitable company.[16] This effectively removes influence of and accountability to parents and local communities, who also lose their rights to object to academy proposals and to challenge the Secretary of State about policies. Citizens must once more become subordinate subjects, bereft of equal rights and justice.

The strange hybrid policies of neo-liberal orthodoxy (choice and competition) and traditional formations (privilege and hierarchy) [17] come together in the same purpose: structures of class advantage, division and inequality. They signal the end of the universal opportunity and welfare state, reinforced by the complementary policies of the regime in the spheres of social security, employment, health and housing. What is being transformed is not just

‘an education’, but the nature of the polity and the membership it embodies. The undermining of local government, the centrepiece of the post-war governance, and the attack on public service professionals signal the termination of the post-war settlement based on consensus politics and partnership between labour, capital and the state, and point instead to the embedding of a neo-liberal state oriented to division and subjugation.

What is the meaning and significance of this political agenda? What could be the possible rationale for such unequal public policies? In part the politics of the regime could find its purported rationale in the collective action dilemmas of the present: the finitude of nature and resources, and the contraction of employment with the substitution of capital for labour. In this context the essence of the neo-liberal project is to justify educating only sufficient young people for a contracting ‘salaried bourgeoisie’ [18] labour market while socialising the rest to accept an austere future bereft of aspiration. Policies remove the obligation of the state to develop the capabilities of all young people in order to prepare most for subordinate places in a social hierarchy, protecting the advantage of the privileged few and reconciling the many to their limited lot. Indeed, skill shortages and joblessness are blamed on the young victims of this period of capitalist (‘white collar’) restructuring.[19] In the previous period of economic (‘blue collar’) restructuring in the 1980s some elite members of the education polity believed that unless educational opportunities were limited to match the contracting labour market aspirations would be created that society could not cope with and social unrest would ensue.[20]

Returning the polity to the pre-war or Edwardian eras implies that the Right blames the problems of the present on the post-war settlement and the social democratic polity that was constructed to support and raise the aspirations of the mass of the people. Behind the credit inflation, the protestations can be imagined, lies the inflation of social expectations. The enemy is identified as the long democratic revolution which for the Right raised most people above their station. The policies of social subjugation strive to restore a social order of class advantage while socialising the mass to accept their place in society once more.

The arbitrary appropriation of power in the person of the Secretary of State to accomplish this political agenda through restructuring education has been astonishing. Once more McKibbin’s analysis is trenchant: what the regime’s policies point to is ‘the central question of contemporary politics: the privatising of social authority and thus power, in England. Having privatised the state’s assets, the government is now privatising its function and responsibilities. The right to determine the relationship between schools and society ... is being removed from elected institutions, gathered up in Whitehall and parcelled out to friends and supporters of the ruling party. It is a fundamental attack on democratic politics, and one carried out as much by New Labour as by the Tories.’[21] One wonders what the Murdoch press and the *Daily Mail* would have made of such arbitrary centralisation of power, lacking electoral consent, if undertaken by a social democratic government. Policies and their implementation have eschewed research evidence and denied consultation

(for example, academies schools, and primary school curriculum and assessment).[22] This is the politics of ideology above consensus which neglects the history of post-war education governance. A number of contributors to the recent debate about inequality and declining social mobility locate one of the key sources in the historic divisions of education in England in comparison with the educational and social cohesion of Scandinavian countries such as Finland. Arguably the accusing finger could point to the weakness of Labour governments in 1945, when private schools should have been abolished, and again in 1965, when grammar schools should have been eliminated. But on both occasions the politics of consensus succeeded above the unilateral imposition of value. The challenge for future social democratic governments will not be to seize the instruments of autocratic powers inherited from the regime, but to return to the task of rebuilding the long revolution of establishing public spaces for democratic participation and voice in common purpose to enable all to become, in Raymond Williams's words, 'equal makers of meaning and value' in a just polity. If shared understanding and common purpose are to be realised for remaking education and the polity it presupposes then democracy is not the problem but the solution to the collective action dilemmas presented by a period of structural change. Addressing these dilemmas suggests the urgency of a new political settlement comparable to that forged between 1943 and 1945 to constitute agreement for a universal polity which redistributes wealth to provide the conditions for all to aspire to a life of dignity, opportunity and meaningful employment. This presupposes a cultural transformation of civil society in favour of collaborative practice if work, wealth and opportunity are to be shared. Such a transformation can be realised only through democratic participation at each level of the polity – the state, local government and in the communities of civil society – if all are to be engaged in contributing to and shaping the common purpose of renewal as well as survival. The following section begins to develop an argument about the importance of extending democracy between the school, the community and the local authority.

### **Remaking Democratic Community Governance for Comprehensive Education<sup>[23]</sup>**

The distinctive task of democratic governance is to *constitute* a public sphere to undertake those activities which individuals cannot do alone, but only together, collectively. Arendt (1963) proposed that establishing such a public space enabled the plurality of citizens to deliberate their different values and beliefs and to act together to resolve their common concerns. For her creating a public sphere, of necessity, often provides the opportunity for a new beginning, an opening up of a common world, and thus the possibility of engaging the common issues that citizens need to confront together in civil society. In what follows I draw upon my research into an emerging cluster and community



governance of schools to ground a discussion of the purposes, practices and structures for remaking the long democratic revolution in education.

*Purpose: transforming the object of learning and governance*

The purposes of education will need to re-imagine learners as prospective citizens, as cooperative makers of democratic communities in which they are to live and work. Human nature is not fixed but unfolding potential, socially and culturally shaped as young people move within and between worlds. The distinctive purpose of the new community-oriented governance of schools will need to constitute the public goods of creating an expanded learning community to engage children and parents, transforming the object of learning as well as the governance of schools. The near universal tradition of providing education has been to conceive the object of learning as the child in the classroom of a school detached from the community, passive recipient of knowledge. Now the object of learning needs to become a more inclusive learning community embracing and engaging family and neighbourhood, with teachers, health and social workers collaborating to support all the learning needs of all children throughout their lives. As in the African saying, 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. The role of governance expands from inward-gazing guardianship of the standards agenda to outward-looking collaboration with parents and neighbourhoods to lead and engage the learning community.

*Practice: participation, voice and deliberation to develop capability*

If the purpose of the new governance is to create a wider learning community, then the practices of governance would need to make three tasks central to their strategic planning: deliberation in developing a pedagogy of recognition, including parents as partners, and enabling a new community and institutional formation of comprehensive practice.

*Deliberating a pedagogy of recognition and motivation.* What has been grasped in research (Wells, 1999, 2008; Hasan, 2005; Moll et al, 2005; Lingard et al, 2008) is that engaging and motivating the learner depends upon meaning, and meaning is constituted by the lifeworlds which shape our upbringing. The learner cannot be educated effectively independently of her community's webs of significance. The process of learning is inescapably a journey between worlds, which connects the language of home and community with the language of the public space. Learning is always a bi- (or multi) lingual experience, as we learn to move between genres and codes of the tacit and particular and the explicit and universal.

A school cannot achieve its purposes without mediating worlds – remaking itself as an institution in and for its communities of difference, understanding the interdependent nature of learning and living, and yet encouraging the capabilities that enable learners to flourish between cultures in

a cosmopolitan public world. If motivation and meaning are to be realised in school then a wider learning community is needed to connect to the worlds of home and school in order to enable the journey between worlds. The task of schools is to develop their curricula and pedagogic practices so as to mediate the language of home and community with the language of the public space. The precious parts of the learners' lived experiences, identity and history need to be recognised and valued within the school. As Richardson (1990) argues: 'their culture, language and dialect, and countless experiences, stories and memories of their families, communities and friends, including in particular stories of oppression and injustice' (1990, p. 101; cf. Richardson & Miles, 2003). If learning is to connect with learners' own history and experience schools will need to learn to value the cultural capital which students bring and devise a socially and culturally relevant curriculum.

*Including parents as partners.* The evidence that governing bodies can make a difference to school improvement has been vital, but expanding understanding of the significance of governing bodies, in addition to knowledge of their variable performance in areas of disadvantage, has only focused the gaze on the capabilities of governors. Have volunteer citizens the capability to govern a major public institution such as a (large secondary) school? Can amateurs, like 'ordinary' parents, rule over a professional community? This problematises what is to count as capability, and which capabilities count. If schools are to be responsible for managing themselves – their finances, land and staff – they have indeed many of the dimensions of a business in the private sector. They will need governors, as well as professional leaders, with the capability to understand and make decisions about resources and infrastructure that will necessarily influence their primary purposes of educating young people. Many heads and governing bodies have sought in recent years to strengthen their capacity to provide the leadership of these business aspects of their institutions by including members with appropriate expertise. They have endeavoured to accumulate *social capital* by appointing governors who bring their networks of information, knowledge and resource contacts to enrich the practice of a school.

Yet although 'business' is an inescapable dimension of the work of a school, it is not its principal rationale. It is a means to their primary purpose of enabling learning and expanding capability. An education is not in the end a technical activity about procedure but has to take into account considerations about the kinds of lives families and communities believe it is appropriate for their young people to lead and the capabilities they ought to possess. Discussions about the ends of learning cannot be separated from the purposes of living, the *making* of lives, and these considerations are social, cultural and political in nature rather than technical procedures. This is so because an education is a journey between worlds – parochial and cosmopolitan – and the challenge for the governance of a school, as well as for teachers, is to mediate these worlds, if young people are to become engaged in learning and commit themselves to developing their potential. The practice of organising and

governing education, therefore, does not depend alone on *techne* (technical knowledge) but on *phronesis* (wise judgement about the purposes and practices that will unfold the potential and capabilities of lives).

The way to develop the capabilities of parent governors is, a senior HMI advised, for a school 'to grow a governing body' if it is to fulfil the demands of constituting a learning community. Parents from disadvantaged communities are more likely to develop the confidence to become members of the governing body when they have been involved in the life of the school. When they are invited to become mentors for young people, use their local knowledge and cultural capital to support the school, in helping to organise festivals, concerts, plays and musicals and artistic events parents will give expression to their varied capabilities. A school that creates forums for parents (in addition to those for children) at the level of the class, year group and schools creates arenas that encourage and support the capabilities of voice, deliberation and collective judgement that are the defining characteristics required for capable participation as volunteer citizens in the governance of schools. In this way governance is not a separate assembly detached from the life of the school. Rather, governance is integrally connected to and grows out of the life of the school as an expanded learning community. Schools, by expanding parent involvement throughout, become the nurseries of capability for knowledgeable participation and leadership.

*A new formation of community comprehensive practice.* The original model of the comprehensive school was an inclusive institution that takes in all abilities and embraces all classes and ethnicities. The child of the doctor and the miner would go to school side by side. If this educational and social ambition is to be recovered the nature of the comprehensive needs to be fundamentally transformed from an independent school institution in a neighbourhood to a campus that stretches across a locality of a city or county encompassing, for example, a post-16 institution, a couple of secondary schools, two or three primary schools together with children's centres. Only in this way can class and cultural diversity be brought together in common educational and social purpose.

An interdependence of traditional educational institutions needs to be supported by the growing interdependence of public service professionals who have traditionally been defined by their training in a specialist body of knowledge which only they can practise with their clients. The emergent practices of community governance, by placing the child and the family first, will mean working out from the complex needs of the individual which will not necessarily fit within the narrow specialisms of any one profession. If the needs of the child and family are to be addressed as a whole then teachers, health and social workers will have to work together in new ways across their professional and organisational boundaries. A further change will involve the professions working much more closely with families and communities and young people,

being willing to listen to their voice and engage them in a conversation about their needs and concerns.

These proposed changes of institutional and professional orientation will require a new community of practice, with professionals working across boundaries to develop a new language of practice to prepare a 'whole system' approach to developing flexible and responsive and integrated processes to children's services. Schools will begin to reconfigure their extended practice in collaborative 'localities and clusters' to ensure the necessary collaboration because all the new services and curricular opportunities required can not be provided by each institution alone. 'System leadership' becomes the focus, moving 'towards a more deliberately collaborative and interdependent system and probably one more oriented towards the locality' (Fullan, 2004). There has been growing recognition that these changes will re-describe not only frameworks of professional leadership but also governance (Bentley & Craig, 2005). The adage needs to develop from 'it takes a village to raise a child' to 'it takes a city to raise a community' (the public institutions of democratic practice).

*Structure: towards a system of community governance<sup>24</sup>*

The unfolding argument proposes that learning grows out of motivation, which depends upon recognising and valuing the distinctive qualities of each and the cultural traditions they embody. If learning expresses a journey between worlds, the challenge for the school is to create a learning community that brings together local and cosmopolitan in its pedagogic practices. This configuration of the school and its communities, by interconnecting the symbolic orders of each, creates the conditions for relevance, motivation and learning. Excellent teachers have always sought, as a defining principle of their individual practice, to relate activities within their classroom to the interests of the child. But the argument being developed here proposes that this configuration is a strategic and systemic task for the school as a whole institution and for schools together in relation to the wider learning community they serve

Understanding this interdependence of learning and living leads to a conclusion that it is the function of governance to constitute the structures of mutual recognition within and between the school and its communities. The professional specialist will have a vital role to play in judging the appropriate learning materials that will forge the connection of meaning between cultures. But the task of creating the learning community to include worlds of difference cannot alone be the responsibility of the knowledgeable specialist. It is, principally, a function of governance to constitute the forms of life in the public sphere and, in so doing, constitute the springs of motivation and the conditions of learning. Realising achievement depends on governance as the condition for recognition and motivation.

The purpose of the governance of learning is thus twofold. The first is to constitute the public goods of educating all children and young people to develop their potential so as to contribute fully to the communities in which

they will live and work. In so doing, governance constitutes what it is to be a citizen. Because an education is about the unfolding of a life, rather than the induction of a skill-set, decisions about the purpose and content of an education are likely to reflect differences of belief and become the subject of contestation and debate.

An essential and related purpose of the governance of schooling, therefore, is to constitute the spaces and processes that enable the relevant interests and voices to deliberate the purposes of learning and capability formation. This dialogue cannot be a technical task of calculation, but will need to be governed by the principles of public discussion – the giving and taking of reasons – that can resolve differences and secure public agreement. This process should include not only those directly involved in a school, such as parents and teachers, but take into account the interests of the wider community, because all will be affected by the public good of educating every child. My recent research on school governance has identified a small number of authorities which, having experimented with new forms of cluster and locality governance, sought to move beyond experiment to establish a coherent system of school, community and local governance. The principles for such a framework of governance sought to accommodate and reconcile the tensions that presently frustrate the practice of good governance of civil society. The authorities wanted the emerging community governance to be multilayered and include: executive and scrutiny functions; specialist and civic knowledge; difference and deliberation; professional and citizen membership.

*The level of the school and neighbourhood cluster.* All the schools and centres in a neighbourhood cluster take on responsibility for care and learning of all the young people and families in the community. The challenge is to engage and involve those families in the value of learning that can enhance their capabilities and life chances. Assuming this responsibility of care is not a substitute for pursuing the highest standards of attainment but a condition for realising them. Elaborating such a learning community can be formed only through cooperation with children, young people and families whose voices are crucial to shaping the purpose of expert knowledge. Forums will be required to allow a neighbourhood strategy and provision to be deliberated and planned. Many local authorities have been working with schools, centres and communities to develop these cooperative practices at the level of the cluster.

*The level of localities.* If the community cluster is to be supported with extended learning activity, then this will require planning and coordination at the level of ‘the locality’, above the cluster and below the Authority. For many local authorities, the locality is a third or a quarter of the authority, perhaps 100,000 people. The number and complexity of voluntary services and agencies offering services to schools and centres needs to be negotiated and managed efficiently, preventing duplication and avoiding market manipulation. The local knowledge and intensity of networking required suggests a point of negotiation and

leverage below the local authority, yet above the school community. Furthermore, if clusters are not to become ghettos of learning, then localities provide a space within which young people can move not only in search of specialised courses, but in order to extend their learning about different social and cultural traditions so that they learn to become capable members of a cosmopolitan civic society. The appropriate tier for governing the diverse agencies and services to develop the practices of partnership and inter-agency coordination, planning and distribution is the locality. A Partnership Board is proposed to include the variety of public, private and voluntary interests, and will focus on preparing the strategic plan for the locality.

*The level of the authority.* What has become evident during the unfolding development of clusters and localities is that the support of the local authority is indispensable. Strategic planning and development will be needed to assess the diversity of needs and to ensure the distribution of resources that meets all those needs. If it is acknowledged that there is no neutral, technical education that can be detached from the perspectives of different lifeworlds, then politics is an inescapable reality of the public sphere. Indeed an essential role of governing civil society is to ensure that differences are voiced, deliberated and mediated. The central function of a local authority is to govern the local political deliberation about the purposes and content of education, through processes that ensure public reason so that the shape of local education as a whole is agreed and is believed to be fair and just. The role of the local authority is to build coalitions that create the climate for, and thus legitimate, change. The local council as the democratic centre of local services needs to be restored to its principal role in leading the public sphere of civil society.

### **Conclusion**

The project of the Conservative regime is nothing less than the demolition of the post-war social democratic education prospectus of valuing the capabilities of each and providing comprehensive opportunities for all. This is being replaced by returning to a distant tradition of rationing limited opportunities through tacit as well as explicit social selection. The underlying assumptions of fixed human nature and of a society that is believed to work only when constituted as an arena of predatory competition serve to provide a rationale for the few to accumulate their advantage above the needs and well being of the many who become socialised once more to know their place and limit their horizons. The complementary agenda of weakening the public spaces of democratic deliberation silences the many to object to the appropriation of power, wealth and opportunity. The regime's project thus lacks legitimacy as well as pedagogic integrity. As dangerous for our future, however, is the belief that democratic participation is the problem rather than the only solution to the astringent collective action dilemmas we face. The regime appears to judge that the solution lies in selection and autocracy. Yet, energy will be conserved, the

environment protected, nature harnessed – let alone work, opportunity, resources and voice distributed fairly – only if not some but all understand these as shared responsibilities in common civic purpose.

The post-war social democratic revolution grew out of the catastrophe of the European and global conflagration. The cultural experience of class interaction and, more importantly, the power of labour to secure a political settlement with capital and the state, to provide the redistributive taxation to pay for universal welfare, education and health, established the conditions for greatly diminishing the huge inequalities which had characterised Britain before the war and in the nineteenth century (Gamble, 2012). The acceleration of inequality in the past thirty years leading to the objectionable gulf of wealth and poverty, together with the decline of democracy, is generating disaffection and disengagement rather than the conditions for common purpose required to address the present predicament.

What are the conditions for renewing the long revolution? Global warming does present a comparable catastrophe, but the present vast inequalities of wealth and power are not being moved by experience of ‘tsunamis’ towards mutual understanding or collective endeavour. Remaking understanding of common goods needs to develop bottom-up through democratic learning communities which can provide a considerable part of the solution to restoring Raymond Williams’s long revolution of expanding participation and voice enabling all to become ‘equal makers of meaning and value in community and civil society’. Governance constitutes the structures of mutual recognition that follow understanding of the interdependent nature of learning and governance: learning grows out of motivation and recognition grounded in detailed knowledge and care of individuals, thus valuing and including forms of life. This can emerge only from creating learning communities that embrace institutions, parents, and their communities, practices of learning which depend upon getting governance right because governance constitutes the communities’ forms of life through public services and institutions, and thus constitutes the springs of motivation and the conditions of learning. Community governance integrates ‘the agora’ and ‘the ekklesia’. Strong local government and a democratic state are needed to provide and sustain the social justice and equality needed to underpin community and civil society.

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#### **Notes**

[1] Hegel’s Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (para. 20).

- [2] Though Raymond Williams believed it was defeated by the late 1960s; cf. T.J. Clark (2012).
- [3] This article was first given to a seminar on 'Democracy, Governance and Local School Systems' at City of Birmingham University on 17 April 2012. I am very grateful for the support I received from Richard Hatcher and Ken Jones in preparing for the seminar and from Michael Fielding afterwards.
- [4] Hannah Arendt's (1963) belief in constituting a new beginning is important here.
- [5] Cf. Ranson (2012).
- [6] Despite suggestions of backtracking, the leaks about the new 'O-levels' continue, reinforced by a further suggestion that the Government wishes to give certificates to teenagers that will show their position in a national rank order of results in core subjects of English, maths and science, together with a graph showing the overall distribution of scores (see *Daily Mail*, 7 July 2012). Perhaps some schools will be encouraged to believe that the practice of some in the 1950s of sitting children in class in their test rank order will reinforce motivation to learn!
- [7] Melissa Benn (2011); Fiona Millar, Clyde Chitty and Ron Glatter (2012); Priyamvada Gopal and William Stewart, have played a leading role in developing public discussion about the emergent system of schools.
- [8] A Chief Education Officer's assessment of the impact of markets on his large metropolitan city. Also, see discussion in Barker (2010) and Lupton (2011).
- [9] The Education Secretary appears to be backtracking on his leaked proposal to reintroduce O levels and CSEs. But the importance for my analysis is that the proposal disclosed his *intention* to reintroduce a divisive system of summative, rather than formative, assessment at 15 years which condemned what the *Daily Mail* called the 'less intelligent' to a subordinate strata educational achievement.
- [10] See the original leak on the new O-Levels in the *Daily Mail*, 20 June, 2012.
- [11] Sir Peter Newsam's letter to *The Guardian* (15 February 2012): 'Mr Gove as Secretary of State for Education is determined to require all schools in England to be contracted to him so that he can then transfer the management of them to agencies in the private sector whose defining characteristic is that they should be approved by him and not elected by anyone. This deliberate disintegration of a public service that has existed since 1870 is likely to prove quite as damaging as Mr Lansley's efforts to do much the same for the NHS.'
- [12] Cf. Sir Tim Brighouse and Sir Peter Newsam (2012) who similarly say, 'academies and free schools are best described as government schools'.
- [13] Cf. Robert Hill (2012).
- [14] A Weberian exercise in constructing an 'ideal-type', a conjecture on the preferred political model that the regime is working to actualise in education.
- [15] Cf. P. Scott (2012).
- [16] Ranson & Crouch (2009) showed this direction of travel even for LA schools that developed Trust sponsorship. The education secretary's contempt for 'local



worthies' (parents and communities) participating in governing bodies was expressed in a recent lecture to the Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association (*The Times*, 6 July). See also letters to *The Times*, 10 July on academy governors.

- [17] Cf. S. Ball (2011) 'Back to the 19th century with Michael Gove's education bill', *The Guardian*, 31 January. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree>
- [18] Cf. S. Zizek (2012).
- [19] Cf. R. Sennett (2012); E. Howker & S. Malik (2012).
- [20] Cf. Ranson (1984).
- [21] McKibbin (2012); also see Ferdinand Mount's (2012) account of the pervasive trend towards oligarchy in the contemporary polity.
- [22] Cf. P. Morris (2012); see also contributors to Helen Gunter (2011) on evasion of public consultation on academies; and Andrew Pollard, as reported in *The Guardian* and *The Times*, on neglect of research evidence on the primary school curriculum.
- [23] This section of the paper draws upon Ranson (2004, 2011) and Ranson & Crouch (2009).
- [24] For a more elaborate discussion see Ranson & Crouch (2009).

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Letter to *The Times Educational Supplement*

**A Meaningless Notion**

Dear Editor

We all want a system that encourages yet more commitment and absorption in learning by school students. But why does Michael Wilshaw continue to peddle nonsenses such as the need to change the education system so that 'all pupils can reach their true potential' ('Access and achievement', July 6)? Doesn't he realise that no one, anywhere, in any school, at any time has ever reached 'their true potential'?. This meaningless notion assumes that each of us has a 'fixed quantum' of something or other that can be reached, or tapped into, by a Wilshaw-reformed school system. That 'fixed quantum' doesn't exist. Along with the discredited notion of 'ability' it should be removed from the educational lexicon and, more importantly, from our professional thinking and practice.

**Colin Richards**