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Book Reviews

An Aims-based Curriculum:
the significance of human flourishing for schools
MICHAEL J. REISS & JOHN WHITE, 2013
London: Institute of Education Press, Bedford Way Papers
72 pages, £14.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0854739981

One of the unexpected surprises in this powerful and important book is that John White and his colleague Michael Reiss modestly refrain from pointing out that the big idea at its heart is by no means a new one. There is never a hint of the tetchy spouse ('How many times have I got to tell you?') or the smug parent who is always right ('I told you so!'), which is quite a feat, given that John White himself has been patiently explaining, for as long as I can remember, that a curriculum, any curriculum, let alone a National Curriculum, is worthless unless it makes clear *what it is for*. Prescription without purpose, principles or aims is not a viable way of shaping an education system or defining what it is that schools should do. The authors only go so far as to remind us gently, on the very first page, that the problem of aimlessness, or purposelessness, has been around in the field of curriculum, in many parts of the world, for many, many years. For a recent example we may take the 1988 version of the National Curriculum for England and Wales, which was virtually aims-free; later versions, with tacked-on lists of 'overall aims', were no better, since the aims were not used to generate the small print of subject-matter, content and coverage.

This short book sets out to do better – and brilliantly succeeds. The authors formulate an aims-based curriculum in the simplest of terms, all the while acknowledging that this very simplicity is a radically different approach, antithetical to traditional subject-based curriculum planning and the current policy direction in this country. There will be, if not blood, many problems and challenges along the road to its (let's be hopeful) glorious implementation.

Reiss and White boldly formulate their two-fold aim for the curriculum in terms of human flourishing: the task of schools (all schools) is to provide all children and young people with what they need to lead personally flourishing lives, and to help others do so too. Subject specifications, knowledge aims and comprehensive coverage are of minor importance. In the pithy summary that follows their detailed examination of what these two broad aims mean for schools and teachers, the authors declare:

> Knowledge is central to any decent education, as we hope our own aims-based scheme has abundantly illustrated. But it has to know its place. ... 'Content' is not the heartland of the curriculum. The centre to which everything in it must always be returning is the sort of people we want our students to become. (pp. 45-46)

At which point in my reading I was tempted to stand on my chair and shout Bravo!

Even in such a short book (of 68 pages) there is room for a good deal of argument and exposition, as Reiss and White move from their simple formulation to more specific and substantial proposals. They examine the key components of each aim, emphasising at every turn the importance of personal *dispositions* – the inward qualities, not the outward signs of achievement, that are necessary 'if life is to go well'. Many fine words appear on the pages devoted to these dispositions: companionship, fortitude, courage, reflection (which is always to be balanced with purposeful action), benevolence, fraternity, imagination and humour: all good things for schools and teachers to attend to, but many of them sadly absent from current policy pronouncements.

Another theme that runs throughout the gradual filling-in of the whole approach is what the authors see as a third, under-pinning aim: a broad background *understanding* of the world we live in – thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, presumptions, puzzles, conclusions – about ourselves as human beings, about what is known through science, history, geography, our cultural institutions, our intellectual and artistic achievements, and 'ultimate questions about why there is anything at all'.

The second half of the book sets out to illustrate, through selected examples and with the broadest of strokes, how the original simple formulation of aims can be taken further – how it can be used to generate specific aims that would satisfy any curriculum planner anywhere, at national, local or school level. The strength of the material in this section is that it goes well beyond the 'what' of the curriculum and offers many important indications of 'how' this aims-based approach is to be taught and learned.

The principal criterion for worthwhile learning that Reiss and White advocate here is *whole-hearted involvement* – in activities and relationships that students find 'enjoyable, wholly engaging and in which they can find success'. Only in this way can teachers ensure that students do not learn to switch off, to disengage, to see themselves as failures, or to be diligent without desire. Only in this way can students leave school as eager to go on learning as they were when they entered it at four or five years old, 'rich, strong and powerful learners', as the educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy never tire of reminding us (Rinaldi, 2006). Looking further back, we can see more than a hint of Dewey here, and his conviction that 'the most important attitude that can be learned is that of desire to go on learning' (*Experience and Education*, 1963[1938]).

But whole-hearted immersion in the curriculum is not the end of the story; Reiss and White also emphasise the absolute necessity of *participation* – the ways

in which students themselves contribute to the flourishing life of the school and everyone in it, the ways in which they live democracy, equality and fraternity, rather than simply studying them. The authors argue convincingly that school policies, practices and expectations all play their part in the growth – or stunting – of the personal qualities, the dispositions and the understanding that their curriculum framework is designed to foster. In particular, they continually emphasise the centrality of discussion, dialogue and debate in all kinds of learning, in and out of the classroom, referring in passing to discussion as 'that most-neglected learning activity' (p. 26).

Another significant 'how' factor in the authors' analysis is the exercise of choice as a sine qua non in the growth of autonomy and the reflective use of personal freedom. The necessity of choice is linked to interesting – and challenging – proposals about which aspects of the traditional subject-based curriculum need to be compulsory, for all students, in every year of schooling, and which would be better provided for as optional, occasional or taster courses. Reiss and White are sceptical about the value of modern foreign language teaching as a compulsory element in both primary and secondary phases (and give their reasons); they are downright dismissive of the need for all students to be marched through the further regions of algebra and geometry. Here they echo the views of Nel Noddings, mathematician and passionate advocate of an aims-based curriculum. She is clear that students need to know the purpose of what is done to them in the name of education: when disaffected students ask, 'Why do we gotta study this stuff?' she acknowledges that the question deserves an answer. She argues that the answer must relate to the students' need for meaning, their need to understand how schooling is related to real life (Noddings, 2005a, p. 154). In her wonderful long book *Happiness and Education*, she is scathing about the intellectual priorities that dominate the subject-based curriculum – 'the insistence that all students study algebra and geometry but not parenting, even though most of us become parents and relatively few use algebra' (Noddings, 2003, p. 11). This book prefigures much of what Reiss and White are arguing today, ten years on; it is a stimulating companion piece, especially because of the differences between the two texts. Noddings' version of curriculum focuses on educating young people for making a home, for parenting, for love of place; these compelling priorities for human flourishing, which she prefers to call 'happiness', do not figure prominently, if at all, in *An Aims-based Curriculum.*

But there is no conflict here: perhaps the greatest strength of Reiss and White's approach is that it can readily accommodate Noddings' account of what is essential to a flourishing life.[1] Their framework is not a rigid, grid-like structure, but elastic and generous; it guarantees time, space and attention for a wide variety of worthwhile curriculum studies, as long as they can be justified (as Noddings does) in terms of the good life, for individuals and society, not in terms of academic achievement, the economic growth of the country or the political whims of its leaders.

Which brings us to the rub – the political context in which this publication appears. In one of the concluding sections of their book, Reiss and White turn to political issues: the role of the state in education, the limits of state control, the needs of a liberal democracy; they argue that '[a] liberal democratic society, in which every citizen is treated as of equal worth, should have a mechanism in place to ensure that aims are in line with and promote such a society' (p. 48). The mechanism that Reiss and White propose is a national consultative commission, 'protected from political meddling', which would recommend national non-statutory guidelines for all schools, including the independent sector, academies and the so-called free schools. They accept that this is a stiff challenge to the status quo, and eloquently marshal their arguments against any form of political control which is not aligned with the core values of liberal democracy – 'personal autonomy, equality of respect and co-operation in the common interest'. Indeed, 'these are central values in the aims-based curriculum we have outlined' (p. 52). But in spite of a passing reference to Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level* (2009) and their analysis of 'the poison of inequality', Reiss and White do not sufficiently consider, in my view, the scary possibility that we do not in fact currently enjoy the benefits of a fully functioning liberal democracy, in which every citizen is treated as of equal worth.

This possibility seriously weakens the authors' optimistic view of how their proposed national commission would work. They even suggest that the aims of the new curriculum, 'deriving as they do from the principles by which we live as democratic people', would become something like an unwritten constitution. Even as a card-carrying optimist myself, I cannot follow them this far. Of course they speak for themselves, and for the principles by which *they* lead their lives as democratic people. But they do not – and cannot – speak for everybody, or for those who live by a very different view of what society is for and how it works.

On the other hand, the last few pages of the book contain a splendid list of 'Twenty practical suggestions' for implementing the aims-based curriculum in practice, which did much to revive my capacity for hope. The list ranges widely across what practising teachers could do, what the subject associations could do, what schools could do together, how Ofsted must be redirected from a punitive 'grading' role to a supportive one, how SATs must be abolished and replaced with records of achievement, how Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development can be changed for the better, and how the examination system must be reformed to free schools from the stranglehold of the present requirements. It is a magnificent wish-list. I would just like to know which of our present political parties will be including this list in its coming election manifesto.

Mary Jane Drummond

Note

[1] See also Noddings' inspiring discussion of the concept of 'care', fully elaborated in *The Challenge to Care in Schools: an alternative approach to education* (Noddings, 2005b).

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New Labour and Secondary Education, 1994-2010
CLYDE CHITTY, 2013
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
204 pages, £50.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780230340619

After eighteen years of Tory rule, the election of Tony Blair's first 'New Labour' government in May 1997 felt like a breath of fresh air. And nowhere was the sense of optimism more keenly felt than in the teaching profession. In staffrooms across the country, teachers hoped – some even dared to believe – that the Blair government would usher in a new 'golden age' in education. The constant criticism of schools would cease, tests and league tables would disappear, Chris Woodhead would be sacked, and – perhaps most importantly of all – selection for secondary education would finally be abolished. There were good grounds for believing this. After all, Shadow Education Secretary David Blunkett had promised: 'Read my lips. No selection by examination or interview.' But the hopes were soon to be dashed: the first New Labour government would prove very different from any previous Labour administration. Indeed, in many ways it would be virtually indistinguishable from its Tory predecessors. How this came about is the subject of Clyde Chitty's new book.

In his introductory chapter, Chitty acknowledges that 'doubts and misgivings ... are often expressed about the value of writing contemporary history' because 'all the judgments one makes have to be transitory and provisional'. He justifies writing the book, however, on the basis that 'the writing of all history is as much about explanation as it is about judgment' (p. 3). He begins his explanation with an outline of the history of the three main political parties in England, noting that the 1944 Education Act, part of the 'post-war settlement', was regarded by all parties as a cornerstone of the welfare state. The 'national system, locally administered' was 'a source of much pride' (p. 26). This post-war consensus lasted until the economic recession in the 1970s, when the Conservative leadership 'began to embrace a new updated version of the classical market liberalism of the nineteenth century' (p. 27). The Thatcher government's 1988 Education Reform Act marked 'the abandonment of the essential principles that had governed the organisation of schools since 1944'. Henceforth, education would become 'a commodity to be purchased and consumed' (p. 28). He argues that a new period of consensus began with Tony Blair's election as Labour leader in 1994 – but this one was 'largely on the Right's terms' and involved the rejection of most of the principles which had underpinned the 'welfare capitalist consensus' of the post-war years (p. 29).

He then reviews the education policy of the Labour Party between 1944 and 1994, which he describes as a period of 'missed opportunities and uneasy compromises' (p. 31). The party had never been able to agree what it meant by 'secondary education for all' and the notion of differentiated schooling persisted after the Second World War: 'there was still ambiguity in Labour thinking as to the likely fate of grammar schools' (p. 37). By the 1960s some local authorities, with popular support, were beginning to experiment with comprehensive schools, so when the Labour government finally decided to make comprehensivisation a national policy, it was not being 'radical' or 'revolutionary', it was simply 'responding to, or taking account of, local initiatives of a widespread nature' (p. 42). Its decision to *request* but not *require* local education authorities (LEAs) to submit schemes for comprehensivisation in Circular 10/65, coupled with a lack of clarity as to what comprehensive reform actually meant, played into the hands of the Right, and after 1979 the party was forced to react to the radical education policies of the Thatcher and Major administrations. Its problem was that 'it could not be seen to be against choice and diversity', even though it was well aware of 'the basic inequalities that Conservative policy produced' (p. 56).

The party's commitment (albeit half-hearted) to comprehensive education was, in any case, to be short-lived. Tony Blair's election as leader – and his adoption of Andrew Adonis as one of his closest advisers – ensured that the party's policy would now be reconsidered. David Blunkett, the new shadow education secretary, 'was quite prepared to rethink Labour's education policy' (p. 70): 'No selection' (1995) became 'No more selection' (1996). It is, Chitty suggests, easy to conclude that under Tony Blair the Labour Party jettisoned its previous commitment to comprehensive education, choosing instead to focus on

'standards, not structures' (p. 75). However, it is 'difficult to claim that Blair and his allies were reversing a policy that had the unequivocal support of all the leading figures in the party', because the party had never been clear about what it meant by 'secondary education for all' (p. 77).

Chitty charts the steady abandonment of the comprehensive ideal during Tony Blair's decade as prime minister. The 1997 Labour manifesto made it clear that there would be no return to the 11 plus, but it also rejected 'monolithic comprehensive schools'. Instead, New Labour preferred schools which identified 'the distinct abilities of individual pupils' and organised them in 'streamed or setted classes' which were designed to 'maximise their progress in individual subjects' (p. 80). The 1997 white paper 'Excellence in Schools' repeatedly asserted that 'standards matter more than structures', so it seems 'somewhat ironic', says Chitty, that the 1998 act was, in fact, 'chiefly concerned with structure' (p. 88). Indeed, by the time David Blunkett left office in June 2001, 'there was a hierarchy of at least 16 types of secondary schools, each with its own legal status and unique admission procedures' (p. 93). The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, launched in 2004, went even further and proposed the creation of a network of 'independent specialist schools' to replace 'traditional comprehensives' (p. 100). There was widespread criticism of the white paper which followed, and the 2006 Education and Inspections Bill was eventually passed – 'but only with the support of the Conservative opposition' (p. 104). Summing up the education initiatives of the Blair years, Chitty argues that the 'Third Way' was a vague concept which seemed to require the creation of many new types of secondary school, to 'attract the support of the middle and aspirant classes'. For New Labour's critics, this rigid hierarchy of schools 'served chiefly to undermine the Blairite rhetoric of 'equality of opportunity' and to sharpen divisions and insecurities' (p. 105).

Chitty goes on to examine two issues which have dominated educational politics during the past thirty years: privatisation and the erosion of the National Curriculum. He argues that the privatisation of education in the 1980s marked 'the systematic erosion, and possibly even abandonment, of the commitment to a common educational service, based on pupil needs rather than upon private means, and accessible to all young people on the basis of equal opportunity' (p. 108). In considering how Tony Blair responded to the liberalising agenda of the Thatcher and Major governments, he argues that 'the precise positioning of Blair's political philosophy is open to debate' and that there were 'both significant continuities and significant ruptures between Thatcherism and Blairism' (p. 117). He concludes that under New Labour 'the privatisation of schools is a development that has come to dominate the educational landscape' (p. 128), with concerns being expressed about the abandonment of the principle that schools should be 'a public service under direct local democratic control, administered by people who know the schools, the local area, and the local people' (p. 128).

In his chapter on the erosion of the National Curriculum, he notes that the Key Stage 4 curriculum 'was in the process of being abandoned, even before it

was actually implemented' (p. 133), and that, by the time the Conservatives left office in 1997, it 'bore little resemblance to the framework devised ten years earlier by Kenneth Baker' (p. 136). New Labour sought to build on the policy advocated by Ron Dearing in 1994 of seeing curriculum provision for older students in terms of a 14-19 'continuum'. Its 2002 green paper set out 'an evolving vision for far greater coherence in the 14-19 phase' (p. 138), but to the dismay of many it advocated making modern foreign languages and design and technology optional subjects at Key Stage 4. Another discussion paper followed, and then Mike Tomlinson was asked to look again at 14-19 reform. He recommended that GCSEs and A levels should be components of a new wide-ranging diploma, but even as he was speaking, Blair and his education secretary were 'desperately seeking to distance themselves from the report's main conclusions' (p. 144). Two years later, Gordon Brown's schools secretary, Ed Balls, announced the first 'academic' diplomas, which he hoped would become the 'qualification of choice for 14- to 19-year-olds' (p. 147). But his proposals were lost in the election of 2010: 'The change of heart over the Tomlinson Report had come too late' (p. 148).

Finally, Chitty reviews recent education developments in England in the context of the international scene. He describes the post-war popularity of the American high school and the later attempts to undermine it. He notes that comprehensivisation in Australia is an 'unfinished project' (p. 161), and that New Zealand's schools have been transformed into 'autonomous, self-managing units, competing for their students in an economic marketplace characterised by consumer choice' (p. 163). In Scandinavia, however, governments have been less inclined to succumb to 'neo-liberal, market-driven ideologies'. Here, state comprehensive systems have been successfully developed because strong social democratic parties have made 'genuine alliances ... with liberal groups' (p. 164). Research has shown that what 'more equal' countries have in common are 'the structures and processes typically associated with the radical versions of comprehensive education'. He notes that, while such findings are heartening for educational reformers, 'they do not seem to have prevented a number of countries from introducing policies leading in quite the opposite direction' (p. 166).

He concludes that, while there were undoubtedly some 'blatant continuities' in education policy-making between the Tory and Labour governments of the past thirty years, it is important to note that in some areas New Labour made changes for the benefit of all pupils – including increased funding, new and refurbished buildings, investment in technology, more support staff and the Every Child Matters strategy. However, for the most part New Labour was 'prepared, and indeed happy, to pursue an education agenda set by its Conservative predecessors', so that education was still viewed as being about 'preparing youngsters for the position they would come to hold in the jobs market'. Worse, it was about accepting the notion that children had widely differing 'abilities' and 'talents', and would therefore 'benefit from being educated in different types of schools offering various specialisms' (p. 168).

Finally, with the increasing privatisation of the education system, we are now 'well on the road to viewing education, like other public services, as a commodity to be bought or sold in the market-place, like all other commodities' (p. 168).

Clyde Chitty's comment that 'the writing of all history is as much about explanation as it is about judgment' is the key to the quality of his book: it is clear, factual and authoritative. It is also a thoroughly enjoyable read. He has managed to cram an enormous amount into its 168 pages without once giving the reader literary indigestion. There are no wasted words: the narrative is supported by fascinating snippets of information and quotes from original sources – letters, news items, etc. – all of which add colour and authenticity to the unfolding story. The organisation of the book works well, too.

As to judgment, the conclusions Chitty draws from the history are always considered and fair: the book is no polemic. Indeed, there are times when one feels he might have expressed his opinion more forcefully. Perhaps the most delicious understatement is his comment that, in piloting the 2006 Education and Inspections Bill through the Commons, Ruth Kelly 'found it difficult to mount a coherent defence of the government's broad agenda'. If I'd been writing the book, the words 'inept' and 'incompetent' might have crept in at this point!

The most crucial judgment – the one on which the whole book hangs – concerns the extent to which Labour's educational philosophy and policies changed with the election of Tony Blair as leader in 1994, which Chitty describes as 'a defining moment in the history of the Labour Party' (p. 63). Some things certainly did change, though 'the precise nature and significance of the reform programme rolled out between 1994 and 1997, and then implemented with all manner of modifications between 1997 and 2010, is still a matter of dispute' (p. 63). Was it, he asks, 'a cynical abandonment of the party's 'social democratic' values for reasons of electoral expediency', or was it 'a principled and necessary response to the changing needs of a changing society?' (p. 63).

However, the view that 1994 marked a complete change in Labour policy is, he argues, simplistic. The party had had disagreements about education right from the start, with Keir Hardie arguing that it should be 'free at all stages and open to everyone, without any tests of prior attainment at any age' (p. 32), while others – notably Sydney Webb – favoured 'specialised and differentiated schooling at the secondary stage' (p. 32). This latter view became party policy in 1922; it was still prevalent in the post-war Attlee government; and the ambivalence continued into the 1960s and 70s, resulting in the Wilson governments' failure to create a fully comprehensive school system.

Chitty's book, then, is not a polemic; neither is it a piece of Labour Party propaganda. Far from it. He concludes that it was the party's 'conspicuous failure' over many years to embrace the 'total concept' of comprehensive education that made it 'comparatively easy to dismantle the whole structure once disillusionment set in' (p. 168).

New Labour and Secondary Education is, as you would expect, well written and well organised, thoughtful and thought provoking, informative and enjoyable. It is an excellent book which will be of interest to all those who care about education in this country and invaluable to students of educational history and politics. It deserves to be widely read. It is therefore very sad that Clyde and his readers have been so poorly served by the publisher. There are various problems. First, and most obviously, there is the use of American spellings. This is a book about English education, by an English author, in a literary style which is clearly English. It is therefore somewhat jarring, to say the least, to come across words like favor, rigor, program, labor, centered, labeled, colored, skeptical, modeled, defense and councilors. Who did this and why? Did someone at Palgrave Macmillan believe that American educationists were so stupid that they would be unable to understand favour, rigour, programme, etc.? Did they believe that, somehow, by changing a few spellings, they were translating the book into American English? This is absurd – an insult to the author and an irritation to readers. A second peculiarity is the removal of many hyphens, producing strange words like semiautonomous, cosponsors, nonessential, nonselective, nongovernmental, preeminent etc. Third, there are many inconsistencies in the text. For example, the 'Academies Programme' is always presented with its English spelling, but the term 'Learning Support Centers' (p. 93) is Americanised. And although American spellings are not used in quotations, there are some inexplicable exceptions:

- in a quote from the 1997 white paper 'Excellence in Schools' we find 'neighboring schools' (p. 84);
- a quote from Benn and Chitty (1996) has 'modernizing' when the original had 'modernising' (p. 153);
- even more confusingly, there is a combination of US and British spellings in a quote from the 2004 Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: 'personalization' (the original had 'personalisation'), but 'centre-stage' (p. 100).

And finally, if you must translate the book into American, why not 'math' instead of 'maths'?

Other inconsistencies throughout the book include the use of hyphens in the phrase describing the age of pupils, so that we find, for example, 'four year-olds' but 'seven-year-olds' (both on p. 81); and the positioning of quotation marks randomly before or after full stops and commas. There are also numerous typographical errors. In fact, the text is such a mess that I seriously wonder whether it was created by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. How else does one explain 'Mitt Tomlinson' for Mike Tomlinson (p. 142)? Even more extraordinarily, the term 'modern foreign languages' appears as 'modem foreign languages' on all ten occasions in chapter 7 – a classic OCR error. Did anyone bother to proofread the text? This is shoddy work. If Palgrave Macmillan want first-rate authors like Clyde Chitty to write for them, and

expect the public to fork out £50 for the privilege of reading their books, they should at least be prepared to do a decent job of presenting the text.

Derek Gillard

New Labour and Secondary Education, 1994-2010
CLYDE CHITTY, 2013
New York: Palgrave Macmillan
204 pages, £50.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780230340619

Clyde Chitty is quickly establishing a reputation as one of the 'heavyweights' of the history of education, widely recognised for his trenchant and incisive dissections of the interplay of education and politics. He has already devoted monographs to two important themes. First, his *Towards a New Education System* (Falmer Press, 1989), published only ten years after Margaret Thatcher came to power as prime minister, was the first serious attempt to demonstrate the ways in which New Right thinking was taking over among education policy makers in Britain. More recently, his book *Eugenics, 'Race' and Intelligence in Education* (Continuum, 2009) filled a gap which had existed since the late 1970s, when, for the first time, a few learned articles had drawn attention to the ways in which eugenicists had sought to influence the debate on schooling from the late Victorian period onwards. However, this long-overdue book did not follow the obvious course of filling in the dots, but, by exploiting new and unknown sources, threw a completely fresh light on what was becoming a well-rehearsed theme.

This latest monograph is therefore very welcome and will again fill an important gap, offering, as it does, the first serious analysis of the origins and development of the policies pursued by Labour and Conservative parties in power since 1994 in respect of secondary schooling. Chitty begins with an account of the development of policy in each of the three main political parties, showing how a new consensus began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s which rejected the Keynesianism which had driven policy immediately after the Second World War. He moves on to outline the messy set of compromises which constituted Labour Party policy towards education for much of this post-war period, contrasting this with the more coherent (if self-contradictory) set of policies which emerged under Thatcher during the eighties. This is followed by an analysis of the new set of compromises that resulted in Blair's refusal to back comprehensive education unequivocally. The book then considers Labour's record in power from 1997, with its emphasis on choice and diversity, before examining the multi-faceted nature of the privatisation which has increasingly become a characteristic of the English education system. Chitty goes on to look at the long retreat from a national curriculum and concludes with a chapter which demonstrates that all this took place in a quickly changing global

context, with not dissimilar policies being adopted across the developed world. It is, therefore, an ambitious and a very coherent book, cramming much into a relatively brief volume.

The book has many strengths. It makes a complex set of issues accessible in a single volume, with a helpful reading list for those wishing to range more widely or to follow up particular details. As is characteristic of all Clyde Chitty's work, the book is lucid and very clearly and coherently explained. His exemplary writing style makes for clear explanation of complex issues. Third, the book demonstrates the continuity of the debate on education and the ways in which what look like about-turns were in fact inexorable outcomes of earlier compromises and failures to spell out the underlying principles of education policy.

It must be understood, though, that this is a political history. Chitty gets inside the world of politicians and educational researchers brilliantly and shows us what they were thinking and planning. It is interesting to me, as a social historian of this same period, that by relying on a slightly different set of sources (such as the correspondence of teachers and educationalists with the press), my own book, *The Death of Progressive Education: how teachers lost control of the classroom* (Routledge, 2007), has far less to say on the making of policy but more on what it felt like on the ground to be a recipient of it. Perhaps the two should be read alongside each other. My final critique is that I thought that the book might have had a little more to say also about the changing socio-economic context in which all these policy developments emerged. Changes in the media, in 'social networking' and the presentation of politics, as well as in the expectations of a quickly-changing labour force all contributed to the muddle which emerged at Westminster. The media-savvy youngsters who now inhabit our schools, the growing rift between rich and poor, the quickly changing ethnic composition of Britain are all worthy of consideration as factors contributing at least indirectly to the development of policy. It should be added too (by someone who ended his career in Wales) that this is essentially a book about policy-making in England and that a work which set out to chronicle developments for the whole of the United Kingdom would necessarily have to cover even more convolutions of policy.

But this remains a very good book. There is no better introduction to the complexities and confusions of educational policy-making during the most recent thirty years, and it should be read by all those entering the teaching profession and by those working within it. Whether lone voices such as Clyde Chitty's can halt the runaway train that is policy-making at Westminster, or even divert it onto a less damaging trajectory, is doubtful, but at least, with such clear and precise works as this, we can gain some idea of exactly why we are all going to hell in a handcart.

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Modernity Britain: opening the box, 1957-59
DAVID KYNASTON, 2013
London: Bloomsbury
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The historian David Kynaston has embarked on an ambitious project: putting together a series of volumes covering the history of post-war Britain from 1945 to 1979, under the collective title 'Tales of a New Jerusalem'. The first two books, *A World to Build* and *Smoke in the Valley*, were gathered together in the volume *Austerity Britain*, covering the years 1945 to 1951; the next two, *The Certainties of Place* and *A Thicker Cut*, came together in the volume *Family Britain*, covering the years 1951 to 1957. So *Opening the Box* is the fifth book in the sequence, and comprises the first half of the volume *Modernity Britain*, which is intended to cover the years from 1957 to 1962.

A time when Britain is coming to terms with an ever-spreading consumerism and 'youth' emerges as a cultural force, when 'meritocracy' becomes a new buzzword and the comprehensive revolution looms on the horizon, the late 1950s are viewed here as the fulcrum on which our whole understanding of the post-war period turns. In particular, Chapter Nine of this fifth volume, titled 'Parity of Esteem', has many illuminating things to tell us about the educational changes in the eventful years of Harold Macmillan's 1957-59 Conservative administration. Through David Kynaston's unique approach to the writing of history, what we get in this extraordinary chapter, as well as in the rest of the book, are the fascinating insights of those who wrote articles or kept diaries at the time – it is their voices that drive the narrative.

Kynaston is well aware of the huge significance of the 11 plus. He points out that the exam itself was usually taken in January and often at the actual grammar school, with the teachers invigilating. 'Even I feel nervous,' wrote one such teacher in 1957 about the experience of superintending a classroom of excited hopefuls (in this case at Ashby-de-la-Zouch Boys' Grammar School in Leicestershire):

> The starting-bell makes one sallow child visibly start, but only for a second. Immediately all are at work: their fingers nervously attached to their pens, their lips pursed, or tacitly murmuring as they do their sums. Somehow they now look years older than when they came in: already on their foreheads frowns are beginning to appear which time will etch more deeply. ...
> One boy upsets his ink-well; I help him to mop up the ink which has divided his answer book into blue and white sections. I notice that his hand shakes. Another boy absorbed in his work sits on his leg and rather dirty shoe. Yet another picks his nose and then puts his finger in his mouth. I feel embarrassed that he has noticed that I have noticed; he probably thinks that I will take a mark off! ...

> I wonder if it is possible to estimate their intelligence from their physiognomy. Surely that intense boy with the tousled hair is intelligent? I walk up the aisle only to discover that he has not written down anything. His vacant-looking neighbour, who has at least half a dozen badges on the lapels of his green blazer, has half-finished the paper. ...
> At last, at 12.30, the final bell shatters the silence. I collect in the papers and tell them to be careful crossing the road. They become young again, and some even say 'Ta-ta, sir!' as they leave the room. It is over. Some parents are already at the school gates to take their offspring home after what for most will be their one and only visit to a grammar school. (p. 214)

We learn that close friendships were often disrupted by the varying outcomes of the selection process. One boy called Ken Blakemore went to his primary school on the all-important day, where he found that he and two of his friends had passed, while a friend who had really wanted to get into a grammar school, Clive Bevan, had failed. 'He was sullen, red-faced with anger and disappointment, and couldn't bring himself to talk to us.' Several months later, in September, after Ken had started at the grammar school, he decided to go round to see Clive at his home – a little bungalow. 'It was an attempt on my part to ask if we could still be friends. We couldn't' (p. 216).

Although there were notable exceptions, such as St George's-in-the-East Secondary Modern School located in the grim surroundings of Cable Street, Stepney, where a remarkable, inspirational headteacher, Alex Bloom, made every child feel counted and created a real sense of school community, the depictions of a secondary modern education cited by David Kynaston are invariably negative and depressing.

In June 1957, *The Spectator* published a stark piece by Colm Brogan, based on the experience of a female teacher he knew who was working in a co-ed secondary modern taking its pupils from an East End working-class housing estate. These were Brogan's scathing comments about the general attitude of the pupils:

> The School had nothing to offer them that they believed to be of any value whatsoever. Educationists may talk of deepening the aesthetic experience, rounding the personality and enriching the lives of secondary modern pupils, but these words are as thorns crackling under the pot for the pupils themselves. With the exception of the minority who have agreed to stay on, the sole aim and object of the children is to get out the instant the law releases them. The world outside is Eldorado, to which their eyes and thoughts are ever straining. (p. 230)

As Professor Kynaston shrewdly observes, it was against this background that many middle-class parents, alarmed by the possibility (however statistically

slight) of their children actually failing the 11 plus, joined the campaign to abolish the idea of 11-plus selection and replace grammars and secondary moderns with a comprehensive system of secondary education.

In short, this is a wonderful book, rich in detail and full of amazing insights.

Clyde Chitty