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The Future Is Not What it Used to Be

SALLY TOMLINSON

ABSTRACT This article briefly overviews the likely future of education as planned after the 2015 Conservative election success. Although education was not a major item in election manifestos or in subsequent discussion, the Department for Education claims that it is rolling out one of the most ambitious education reform movements in the world. How the break-up of a national public educational system is being achieved, primarily through an academies programme and a changed assessment system, and a requirement that all educational institutions, including universities, become competitive businesses, needs far more debate and understanding than any political party is currently willing to undertake.

> A worried teacher went to a séance and spoke to famous educationalist John Dewey.
> He asked him, 'How do we make our schools, colleges and universities places of true learning?'
> Dewey replied, 'Well, there are two ways – the natural way and the miraculous way'.
> 'What is the natural way?', asked the teacher.
> 'God sends his angels down to every educational institution to make it happen', said Dewey.
> 'Good heavens', cried the teacher, 'Then what is the miraculous way?'
> 'Ah', said Dewey, 'That's when the people do it themselves'.
> (Adapted from the John Dewey Project on Progressive Education, 1999)

Introduction

Education was more than a dog that did not bark during the last election. It was a dog that stayed firmly in the kennel and is now fed with a special diet of educational reform – re-form as in the Latinate version, 'restore to the original

condition'. The fragmented system being created has more resonance with the nineteenth-century version of public education in England than a twenty-first-century version. Nineteenth-century schooling, influenced by religious and charitable interests, emerging business interests in mass education post-industrialisation, working-class political organisation that included educational demands, culminating in a social-class-based system, notionally decentralised but with strong central control, resonates strongly with current reforms. The exception may be that having educated a working class to much higher levels than can be accommodated in a digital economy, the civil servant who once complained to Stewart Ranson that 'we are beginning to create aspirations we cannot match ... people must be educated once more to know their place' may have found his time has come (Ranson, 1984, p. 241). Schooling at all levels continued to be sustained throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first by our old friend 'fixed ability' (see *FORUM,* 55(1), 2013). The mantra that every child should be educated to fulfil his or her 'potential' is accompanied by long-standing deterministic assumptions that children are able, less able, average, unable or disabled. Even the largely privately educated politicians and civil servants, clinging to notions of the superiority of an 'academic' curriculum, with Greek and Latin favoured over engineering, scientific, technical and vocational skills, have not read their Plato carefully enough to realise that he invented the gold, silver, brass and iron distinctions as propaganda for political purposes (Plato, *c.*500 BCE, trans Jowett).[1]

Political Concerns

After the Second World War, a Labour government supported a 'tripartite' education system, which as technical schools failed to develop, quickly became a dual system of grammar and secondary modern schools. Dubious psychological advice on three types of minds encouraged this system but there was some democratic input from elected local education authorities. At least the minds thought not suitable for academic or technical education could find jobs. A recession in the 1970s and the disappearance of jobs for young people led to anxiety not over the disappearing jobs, but over education as a preparation for work, exemplified by Prime Minister Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College in 1976, and which resulted in an increase in political influences over the curriculum and standards of achievement. Conservative Members of Parliament Keith Joseph in 1985 (Department for Education and Science, 1985) and Kenneth Baker, with the 1988 Education Act, continued what appears now to be an obsession with 'standards', linking higher standards – that is, more young people passing more examinations at higher and higher levels – to national economic success, despite evidence on this being minimal.[2] It is still an unexplained curiosity that when a hundred-year-old project to actually set up a public education system, much later than our European counterparts, was slowly beginning to be successful, largely through comprehensive education, the main contributors to this achievement – schools and teachers – began to be criticised

and denigrated. Apart from the fears articulated by Stewart Ranson's civil servant that the members of working class were showing themselves capable of passing examinations and might not want low-level jobs, the criticisms may have been necessary in order to introduce private money and market influence into what had hitherto been a national system funded mainly by a tax-paying public, and to remove expectations that good local schools would be available for all children.

The Thatcher government, committed to a nineteenth-century liberal individualism in which ostensibly free consumers embraced the laws of the market and values of personal and familial profit, set the scene for a competitive scenario in schooling. By the 1990s local authorities were sidelined and 'choice and diversity' was the mantra. An expanding middle class competed for the best state schools if they could not afford the private schooling which increasingly led to the political and business networks that gave secure and well-paid employment. The New Labour government post-1997 supported an education system that generally favoured the middle classes, despite a rhetoric of opportunity for the many. There was a much-publicised concern for what was rapidly becoming another old friend – 'the disadvantaged' – and again through the efforts of teachers rather than policies, from 2005 the numbers of children from poorer families achieving General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes increased. But a continuation of overt and covert selective policies legitimised ways of minimising contact with these children. Avoidance of vocational education and practical training, and avoidance of the poor are emblematic of a system in which various middle-class groups, depending on their level of economic and cultural capital, struggle to maintain privilege for their children in a competitive global economy. The Coalition government between 2010 and 2015 extended the process of demolishing a democratic education system, with any local authority influence disappearing as supposedly self-sustaining competitive schools and chains of schools sign agreements with and receive funding directly from central government. The Department for Education (DfE) carries out policies at ministerial whim, with no consultation. Power is centralised in the person of the secretary of state, and the running of a nationalised school system has increasingly been handed over to business and religious sectors and private trusts. The school curriculum and assessment has been returned to pre-World War11 arrangements where the matriculation certificate my mother obtained has returned in the guise of Ebacc subjects, which increases the number of children deemed to be failing. The rationale for this is that raised educational performance is necessary to compete in a global economy. Governments in England struggle to equate international comparisons of achievement with economic performance, despite persisting with a system that is increasingly shown to be dysfunctional in a global economy.

Manifesto Promises

None of the election manifestos gave much space to education, and that which appeared was generally more of the same. The Conservative 2015 Manifesto devoted three pages (33-35) out of 81 to education (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2105). As previously promised, every failing and coasting school was to be turned into an academy, with more free schools to be created by those parents and communities who want them. Children who do not reach the 'required standards' in their Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) at age 11 will be required to resit them on arrival at secondary school, all students are to take an obligatory five subjects for their GCSEs (English, mathematics, science, a language, and history or geography) and schools that 'refuse to teach these subjects' (where are they?) will be refused Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) ratings. Flights of fancy include a promise that 'your child' will be sure of a good primary school place with zero tolerance of failure, presumably of the school not the child, and unspecified help will be available to teachers of mathematics, science, engineering and computing. A somewhat outdated paragraph – it was in John Major's manifesto in the early 1990s – promises that 'we will expect all eleven year olds to know their times tables and be able to do long division and complex multiplication, be able to read a book and write a short story with accurate punctuation, spelling and grammar' (p. 33). Presumably the authors of this text are unaware that most of today's children have access to mobile phones and other technology which can quickly tell the answer to 12 x 11, and even progress on to 13 times tables. In addition, books may be in short supply, as libraries continue to be closed around the country. At post-school level the manifesto promised to lift a cap on university places, and allow universities to increase their fees. The 60% of young people not bound for this type of education were not so lucky. Further education, which at any time has some 3 million mainly young people attending vocational and other courses full or part time in some 250 colleges, was mentioned in six lines. A fantasy figure of 3 million apprenticeships was promised but those 18-21-year-olds with no jobs or apprenticeships are to have no out-of-work benefits. A jobseekers' allowance will be replaced by a youth allowance, which will only last for six months, and there is to be no housing benefit for this age group. The only concession to technical education was a brief mention of Kenneth Baker's university technical colleges and studio schools for 14-18-year-olds. An extension of a National Citizenship Service programme for post-16-year-olds was promised, as was an expansion of military cadet units in schools. In July 2015 David Cameron likened the manifesto to a bible, telling reporters that 'it's all in the good book, the Manifesto' for those making policy decisions (Wintour, 2015).

Academies and the Break-up of a National Education System

Neither of the two major English political parties have openly acknowledged that over the past 25 years policies have created a divisive and unequal

education system, and that England has more unequal outcomes in schooling than in the rest of the developed world. Despite allegiance to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results, which create government panic if students fall behind other countries, studies (see Meyer & Benavot, 2013) now all point out that social class background and poverty influence how well children achieve at all levels, and the separation of middle-class from poorer working-class children in most secondary schools is now almost complete. It has been forgotten that early studies from the 1950s (Floud et al, 1957) demonstrated that the secondary schools that did best for all their students had a mixture of middle and working classes. Obsession with education as a competitive market system persists. Private schools have always marketed themselves; now state schools brand themselves and advertise their wares, and it is hard to find any school not advertising itself as committed to high achievement, excellence in education, raising aspiration and innovative performance. Green has commented that 'Marketisation in education has gone so far that many doubt that a genuinely public system can be maintained at all' (Green, 2013, p. 304). The creation and expansion of academy schools and free schools are, despite central control of funding, curriculum and assessment, intended to remove any democratic involvement in schooling via elected local authorities, and those in control of these schools (increasingly not the head teacher or governors but more often the chief executive officer (CEO) of a 'sponsoring' body) are 'free' to change the curriculum, set staff pay and conditions, and change the length of the school day or term. In a move to create a new middle tier overseeing academy schools and those likely to be coerced into becoming academies, the DfE has created, without any consultation or election, eight Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC), dividing up the whole of England between them. An advertisement for an RSC for Lancashire and West Yorkshire makes the claim that 'the Department for Education is rolling out one of the most ambitious education reform programmes in the world' and the RSC (pay £100,000 to £140,000) will make operational decisions on all the academies, free schools and sponsors in the region, 'driving improvements to those under performing and giving the go-ahead to open new ventures' (*The Guardian*, Jobs, 21 July 2015, p. 39). The Commissioner for London and the South-East is Dominic Herrington, a former director of the Academies Group in the DfE. Again, the curious might like to know why people are urged to vote for elected police commissioners or mayors, but not for anyone in control of education.

The Unaccountability of Academies

The development of the academies programme from the 20 city technology colleges promised by Kenneth Baker in 1986 (though only 15 actually opened), with sponsors from business, the churches and existing trusts expected to contribute £8 million, quickly reduced to £2 million, then virtually nothing, was succinctly documented by Beckett (2007), who examined the fine details in

The Great City Academy Fraud. Although in 1990 the then shadow education secretary Jack Straw was of the opinion that city technology college sponsors were 'second order companies whose directors were only interested in political leverage and honours' (Beckett, 2007, p. 22), under New Labour, with the combined efforts of minister David Blunkett, unelected advisor Andrew Adonis and Lord Levy – chief fundraiser for New Labour – city academies, later just academies, became a major plank in Labour education strategy. The policy combined several agendas – providing a diversity of schools including more faith schools, improving inner-city schools, reducing the powers of elected local authorities and bringing in private money. Continuing the Conservative strategy of denigrating local education authorities and teachers, especially the Inner London Education Authority for its 'failing ' schools, the stated intention was to rescue the disadvantaged from the 'secondary modern comprehensives' which so shocked Adonis. In his self-serving book he claimed credit for the academies programme, although he initially worried that 'my academy strategy' (Adonis, 2012, p. 21) might not take off and he would simply become 'Kenneth Baker Mark Two – creator of a small group of successful new model schools' (p. 94). In fact, the New Labour government had simply set the stage for a full fragmentation and privatisation of public education under Conservative governments.

The policy produced by small groups of politicians and unelected advisors, and pursued by both the New Labour and by the incoming Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments aimed to extend the academies programme to cover all secondary schools and eventually primary schools. The DfE helpfully produces a spreadsheet every month documenting each school that has become an academy from the first conversion in 2002 – Thamesmead Community College, which was sponsored by the Gerrard Family Foundation, and which became The Business Academy, Bexley. By the end of June 2015 when Heversham St Peter Church of England primary school joined up as a 'converter' academy, the list came to 4679. Only around 300 schools actually became sponsored academies under Labour, but after the 2010 election the programme escalated into the thousands as unsponsored schools 'converting' to academy status were encouraged, some being 'given' sponsors. The notion of sponsorship of schools certainly appealed to religious groups, the Anglican United Learning Trust being the most prolific sponsor, and business sponsors also eventually obliged. Even the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, Sellafield, sponsored an academy in the Lake District.

Sponsoring bodies and their boards are required to disclose their business and other interests, and while there is no reason to suppose that those on boards and their CEOs have anything but the school and student interests at heart, there are now hundreds of unelected people on sponsoring boards who can influence the direction of academy schools. The idea that academies replaced 'underperforming schools' virtually disappeared under the Conservatives, with any school able to apply to become an academy and sign an individual contract with the secretary of state, although the narrative persisted that the schools

would raise standards and aspirations. After 2010 both primary and secondary schools could choose to become or be coerced into becoming converter academies, 'introduced as part of the Coalition Government's plan to broaden the academy programme and eventually enable all schools to become academies' (politics.co.uk, 2015, p. 2). By May 2014 there were some 615 'approved' academy sponsors and a majority of academies were 'converters'. In August 2015 David Cameron again insisted that a priority for his government was to enable all schools to become academies.

Under New Labour federations of schools had been encouraged, notionally for good schools to assist the weaker schools. Under the academies programme, sponsoring bodies were encouraged to form chains, overseeing numbers of schools. By 2013 half of schools deemed 'high performing' were in chains, with the largest chain overseeing 70 schools. Substantive information on chains comes from a 2012 report by the National College for School Leadership (Hill et al, 2012). While noting that the academy chain landscape was moving rapidly, the report commented that 'government policy sees the school system being self-sustaining with school leaders being the key players in steering and supporting school improvement' (p. 49), but increasingly these leaders would include the CEOs of expanded chains of schools. Chains could become 'key stakeholders shaping the content of education policy and managing the school system' (p. 36). Thus, any democratic collaboration between local authorities, teachers, unions, parents and communities has been demolished.

Legitimation of an Undemocratic Programme

Despite all this, the rationale for academies – that they raise levels of attainment of all students – is increasingly suspect. A study for the Sutton Trust (Hutchings et al, 2014), which examined the impact of chains on low-income students in the school, questioned the assumed capacity of academy sponsors to deal with the job of improving schools. Some of the chains appeared successful in raising levels of examination attainment for low-income students, the Harris Federation, Ark Schools and the City of London being some named as successful, and the Midland Academy Trust, Mellor Educational Trust and Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust as less successful. The most successful chains had, however, relied on students gaining 'equivalent qualifications' to the GCSE – the BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) particularly – and these qualifications have now been outlawed by the DfE as equivalent to GCSEs.

In effect, the whole academies programme rested on the assertion that academy schools improve weaker schools' performance in raising levels of measured achievement at all levels, especially for disadvantaged children, in ways that schools that remained with their local authority could not or were unable to do. The DfE has always continued to assert, on the basis of very dubious evidence, that academy schools raise standards and that 'The academies programme has transformed the lives of millions of children, particularly those

from disadvantaged backgrounds' (Vaughan, 2015, p. 9). Recent evidence, including the Hutchings et al study quoted above, seems to contradict the claims. Wrigley (2015) analysed academies that had been open for at least five years and found that one in three had 40% or more students achieving less than the official floor target of five A-C grades. He noted the 'Alice in Wonderland' of a policy which was intended to force low-performing schools to become academies, when many academies were as likely to underachieve as non-academies. In July 2015 the UK Statistics Authority questioned the DfE claims that SAT results improved quicker in sponsored academies than in local authority non-academies, pointing out that in the schools with poor test results, the non-academy schools had actually registered faster improvement. The Authority suggested that the DfE should not use data in a way that implied causal links between academy status and improvement (Mansell, 2015a). It is unlikely that those in charge of the academy programme will take this to heart, as this fragmentation of the national school system will need constant legitimation and coercion. The appointment of the Regional Schools Commissioners, together with assistance from their Head Teacher Boards of four academy heads, are intended to push more schools down the academy route, encouraging both primary and secondary schools to convert to academy status, and even match up old and new sponsors. Although the manifesto promised a continuation of the free schools programme, operating under the same rules as academies, and with little evidence to indicate how the schools were functioning, the DfE appears more reluctant to delegate more powers to approve or oversee free schools. Mansell (2015, b) has pointed out that the DfE paper on the new RSC system worries that 'extremist' groups may attempt to open free schools (Mansell, 2015b).

Higher and Further Education and a Skills Agenda

So where will young people progress to in a post-school Conservative world? The manifesto had slightly more than half a page on skills training, further and higher education. Alison Wolf, in a thorough report entitled *Heading for the Precipice: can further and higher education policies be sustained?*, commented that 'The UK finds itself, after a surprising general election, in an all too familiar place (Wolf, 2015, p. 2). The place is one where there is high unemployment, especially among the less well educated, no rebalancing of the economy towards manufacturing, a trade deficit, and more graduates than ever but with employers still complaining about skills shortages. She also noted that debates on higher education take place as though further education did not exist, despite a majority of young people post-16 studying and training full or part time in further education colleges or with Group Training Associations and other bodies with links to the colleges. Even before the election, cuts of some 25% in the funding to all colleges had been announced. Politicians of all parties, largely educated in private or well-resourced state schools and 'top' universities, continue to have little idea of what actually constitutes vocational and technical

education. Those who service their gas boilers, electrical appliances, lawn mowers and cars, put in their burglar and smoke alarms, and fit their solar panels are largely invisible, as are the numbers of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities who are educated and trained in what the manifesto dismissively calls lower level courses. In promising 3 million apprenticeships, including degree-level apprenticeships, the assumptions are that they will be with such firms as Rolls Royce or British Aerospace and those others requiring a level 3 (A level equivalent). The majority of apprenticeships at 16 are in business studies, administration, health and social care, hair and beauty, hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism and animal care where students start with a GCSE-level qualification. In reality, from April 2014 to April 2015 there were only some 375,000 apprenticeship starts, with 100,000 of those by young people under 19, and 125,000 by those aged 19-24, and few in manufacturing or construction, despite employer complaints of a shortage of bricklayers. The majority of apprenticeship starts have been by people over 25 already in work (Skills Funding Agency, 2015).

For over a hundred years vocational education has been associated with lower-level lower-status provision – 'blue-collar' jobs, those in manual, craft, or personal service not requiring a business suit or power dressing. Technical education, of the kind long provided in Germany, Switzerland and other European countries in all kinds of skills – electrical engineering, optics, precision machining, laser and fluid mechanics, and increasingly the high-level interactive computing skills required for a digital economy – are catered for in one sentence in the manifesto, with a vague aim of extending Kenneth Baker's university technical colleges to every city. The small number of studio schools, aimed at 14-18-year-olds, with work placement linked to local employment, get a brief mention, but there is little sign either in the manifesto or in current policies that any coherent system will emerge for all young people, from 14 to 19 or 21. Having closed down the Connexions service, which was much appreciated by young people for job and training advice, the manifesto simply refers to Jobcentre Plus advisors who will supplement schools in offering careers advice, and the obsession continues with the small number of young people post-16 not in education, employment or training, although from 2015 there cannot be any, as legally all are required to be in some form of education or training. No reform of funding is in sight, with an Education Funding Agency responsible to the DfE funding schools, further education and sixth form colleges to 18. Then the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills takes over, with a Skills Funding Agency for all post-19 training courses, young people on these courses now threatened with fees, but promised loans if they cannot find the money for their training. There was no sign that the educational maintenance allowance for poorer students post-16, abolished by the Coalition government, would be reinstated. Although employers have for years been exhorted to take on training responsibilities, there has never been much enthusiasm for this. Those in control of policy are still of the view that all this

vocational and technical stuff is for other people's children. Their own offspring will be directed towards a university education.

University Education for Sale

While the notion of mass higher education, especially in the expanding university sector, took off from the 1990s, becoming the normal post-school destination for the middle and 'aspirant' classes, now including women and more ethnic minorities, questions as to what actually comprised a university education, and who should pay for it, loomed large. Free university education and maintenance grants rapidly became a thing of the past, although the notion that courses should mostly last for three years with long summer breaks survived. As Barnet has pointed out, universities have become complex institutions, and while still based on notions of a search for knowledge, discussion and enquiry, via teaching, research, consultancy, knowledge exchanges and latterly 'impact' on the world, universities are currently best characterised as entrepreneurial, bureaucratic institutions. They are managed as competitive businesses, although with some state regulation since the Treasury via the Higher Education Funding Council still dispenses taxpayers' money to universities on the assumption the money will be recouped as students pay back their fees (Barnett, 2011). Degrees dispensed by universities are more a form of academic capitalism, as students rightly regard a degree as an economic resource, which they hope will lead them to guaranteed employment at 'graduate job' level. The 162 UK universities have helpfully organised themselves into perceived hierarchies of excellence, the Russell group claiming ultimate superiority, with competition for entry into the top universities becoming intense, although attendance at top private or state schools is usually helpful. The introduction of fees of £1000 per year in 1999 by the New Labour government, with a rise to £3000 in 2004 just scraping through on a parliamentary vote, set the scene for an increase to a maximum of £9000 per year, voted in by the Coalition government in 2011, and via the 2015 manifesto universities are free to take in as many students as they please and raise fees if they think fit. Loans are promised for postgraduate courses, enabling students to take on more debt.

The agenda of both Labour and Coalition governments included concern to widen participation and bring in more disadvantaged students, and both now claim that fees have not deterred even the disadvantaged from applying for university entry. Danny Dorling (2015a) has analysed the way 'Money Changes Everything', pointing out that while some 40% of young people aged 19 were by 2015 studying in universities, with more students from poorer backgrounds attending, things are not always as they seem. Despite the Gove era casting aspersions on the BTEC vocational qualifications as not worthy to be equivalent, universities were in fact admitting more students with BTEC vocational qualifications. In addition, although the proportion of young people who had received free school meals rose to 14% of entries by 2014, young

people from poorer areas were seven times less likely to enter prestigious universities than their fellows from richer areas. The rise in widening participation included an increase over three years of 2.3% to 3.2% of children from the poorer areas attending these institutions; for every 100 children this is not even a whole child. It takes some good mathematics to work out that it is possible for poor groups to increase their entry rates while absolute differences between rich and poor remain. However, as Dorling points out, 'the higher education sector is a safe haven in troubled times' (p. 41) when there are few other attractive opportunities for young people. But universities are selling their wares, and will continue to do so to greater numbers – the young people are taking on heavy debts, with estimates that almost half of these debts will never be repaid. Despite the supposed concern for the disadvantaged, a gratuitous piece of policy has been to remove the free maintenance grant for poor students from 2016; all students will then be required to take out loans for both fees and maintenance, unless the richer parents can oblige.

Winners, Losers and the Future

So, after the electoral triumph of the Conservative Party, who will be the winners and losers in the education stakes in the foreseeable future? Losers will be poorer children from the age of four, who, from policy decided before the election, will be 'tested' on their educational achievements before being assigned to top, middle and bottom tables in the reception classroom; those with 'higher ability' will receive a more intense schooling from then on than those deemed to have lower ability. Twelve years later, in GCSE examinations, now graded in numbers instead of the alphabet, A-G, it will be the lower-attaining children who will not make the number 5 – supposedly equating with the current GCSE C mark – although schools will be devoting similar energy to raising these children to required levels for the sake of the school's reputation. The children are then the likely recipients of post-16 education and training in badly funded colleges of further education courses or in lower-level apprenticeships, which will lead to lower-status, lower-waged jobs or unemployment, unless the immigration policies promised in the manifesto have reduced the flow of migrants willing to take the low-wage jobs. Thus, the job of educating some people once more to 'know their place' may well be achieved, and there are no signs of any coherent 14-21 system with fair funding for all. Parents and communities who struggle to prevent their local schools being turned into academies will be losers, as current legislation now allows objections to be overruled. Teachers and parents will both be losers as teachers confront arrogant or desperate parents worried that their children may not achieve, and all the work from the 1970s to the 1990s, showing that when parents worked as co-educators with teachers, rather than as vigilantes, attainments and satisfaction improved, has been forgotten.

Most universities will be winners, able to collect upfront money for unspecified increases in their student bodies, although lower-ranking

universities may well lose some students who decide the debts are not worth the degree. The Treasury and the taxpayer may well be long-term losers, if fees and loans are not repaid. Winners will be the children of the rich, especially those educated in the expensive fee-paying schools with connections to top universities, and overseas students with parents able to pay upfront fees will also win. Losers will be low-income students who will now have to repay all their fees and loans. But for all young people, the future is not what it was in terms of their employment and earning possibilities. Those with parental money, networks and connections will continue to take employment which offers good remuneration and influence, and, as Dorling recorded in talks to school students, those who are destined for the top jobs are the ones most likely to think this is a fair situation (Dorling, 2015b, p. 387). But most of these confident students will not be among the super rich, whose wealth now exceeds national governments, and depends more on investment capital and inheritance than education. They will also face growing competition for good professional and executive jobs from increasingly highly educated young people from around the world. Even during the course of this government there will be changes in the global economy, and rapid developments in computer technologies, robotics and in other areas will alter the nature of 'work' and the preparation needed for new kinds of employment. Maybe the promise in the manifesto to employ more teachers of Mandarin was a pointer to the way the government is thinking of the future.

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Notes

[1] In Plato's *Republic* book III Plato admits his story of people divided from birth into gold, silver, brass and iron, and thus destined for superior and inferior life chances, was simply made up to please the rulers. The story questions whether 'there is any possibility of making our citizens believe it'. The subsequent centuries have demonstrated that the powerful have certainly found ways of convincing or coercing the populace to believe it.

[2] Despite efforts to assert that countries with higher scores in PISA tests have the most successful economies, this is not the case. For example, during the 1990s, when Japan had high scores in tests, the economy declined. Subsequently and currently, the US economy and its employment situation are doing well, although its test scores are lower than many other developed countries. Lauding of mathematics teaching in Shanghai schools (BBC 2, 2015) overlooks the fact that the success of the Chinese economy has long been based on uneducated and low or semi-skilled labour.

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SALLY TOMLINSON is Emeritus Professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Education Department, University of Oxford. She has been researching and writing for many years in the areas of education policy, special education, and race, ethnicity and education. Her recent publications are *Ignorant Yobs: low attainers in a global knowledge economy* (Routledge, 2013) and *The Politics of Race, Class and Special Education: the selected works of Sally Tomlinson* (Routledge World Educationalist Series, 2014). *Correspondence*: s@stomlinson.net