FORUM
Volume 60, Number 1, 2018
www.wwwords.co.uk/FORUM
http://dx.doi.org/10.15730/forum.2018.60.1.133

FORUM

Book Reviews

Betraying a Generation: how education is failing young people
PATRICK AINLEY, 2016
Cambridge: Policy Press
142 pages, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 978-1-44733-211-4

Sally Tomlinson, Professor Emeritus at Goldsmiths, University of London, usefully sums up this book in her cover blurb: 'Human capital theory is dead. From those tests for four-year-olds to the clutch of GCSEs, A-levels and degrees, will there be a job at the end and what sort of job in this global economy? This book shows clearly what is really happening and offers some very real solutions.'

Patrick Ainley, Professor of Education at the University of Greenwich and Visiting Fellow at New College, Oxford, divides his book into five clear chapters, each with titled sub-sections. This review will look at each chapter in turn. It is worth noting from the start that this relatively small paperback is jam-packed full of references, many of which are worth following up, whether you agree with Professor Ainley's analyses or not.

Chapter One, 'From Jobs Without Education to Education Without Jobs', covers the period from the 1944 Education Act to the present day. It briefly considers the aspirations of post-war education in the Welfare State, the move to comprehensive schools in the 1960s and '70s and the interaction between education and social mobility. He sees the link as tenuous, the growth of the middle class in this period being a result of job changes rather than education. Even in the 1960s there persisted a strong working-class ethic to leave school at 15 and get a job with decent pay. I wondered whether he would agree with Professor Selina Todd's 'Myths of Social Mobility in 20th Century Britain' as given in her lecture at the annual conference of the Social History Society in April 2017.[1] The picture Professor Ainley paints of changes in class structure, the effect (or lack of it) of education, and the reality for the masses on low income matches much of what Todd says. Her sixth myth, and the most important to bust, is: 'Social Mobility is a Social Good'. She concludes her lecture by saying, 'It is time to listen to those who argue not for mobility but equality.' The direction Patrick Ainley takes in this book would seem to support this view, but he does not explicitly say so. I wish he had.

Even in the mid-1970s, Ainley notes, it was still the case that almost 40% of young people left school and moved into employment at the earliest opportunity (as I know from my own experience in my home town of Luton –

the town of 'The Affluent Worker' – where young people could confidently expect a job at Vauxhall Motors or one of its related factories). Ainley moves on to consider the change in employment, and the rise in youth unemployment, which went along with the change from the industrial economy to the 'knowledge' economy. He comments on the raising of the school leaving age and the growing acceptance among many working-class children that education would help them avoid 'falling down the employment escalator'.

Chapter Two, 'New Times', explores the growth of the global economy. It opens with interesting statistics that contrast with the New Labour government mantra of 'Education, Education, Education'. Felstead and Green recorded that 5.9 million UK jobs required no qualifications but only about 1.5 million of the economically active had no qualification, and that while 8.2 million people had a degree, only 6.8 million jobs stipulated that a degree was necessary on entry. Throughout the chapter, Ainley looks at the impact of the change from 'Fordism' (jobs in the era of mass production) to 'Post-Fordism', where the promise of jobs in cutting-edge, capital-intensive manufacturing was not realised although a massive growth in the service sector was. There are a wide range of references to research looking at the knowledge economy, at developments in school examinations and university education, and at employment changes. The sub-section 'Fungible labour in a "knowledge economy"', otherwise known as Post-Fordism, examines the reality of modern technology and the current mass employment situation. It takes in such issues as zero hours contracts and the confusion between 'knowledge' and 'skill'.

'Class Structure in the 21st Century', Chapter Three, contains a fascinating look at how widely used concepts such as 'middle class' or 'working class' apply in the twenty-first century. Has John Major's classless society arrived? Was Tony Blair right when he said 'the class war is over'? Again there are many references to research looking at whether the class structure is pyramid shaped, diamond shaped, hour-glass shaped or pear shaped. Based, among others, on the work of Thomas Pickety, Ainley's conclusion is that the class structure is pear shaped. Using Pickety's data, Ainley states that 'after falling significantly between 1910 and 1970, the proportion of wealth owned by the top percentile is now approaching 40% and for the top 10% it is 70%. All boats are therefore not rising along with the wealthiest. Nor, to put it another way, is their wealth trickling down.' He goes on to say that the bottom layer of the class structure comprises, as Guy Standing calls it, a 'global precariat' cut adrift from the established working class, and enjoying little contact with, and little faith in, its trade union and other 'labour movement' organisations. The summary to the chapter refers to an 'underclass', or, in Marxist terms, a Reserve Army of Labour (RAL), in permanent precarity, with 'the current generation of young people likely to be the first to occupy a lower occupational/class position than their parents, in spite of being much better qualified'.

Thus, the fourth chapter, 'Running up a Down Escalator', examines the impact of the new reality of the class structure on present-day educational experiences and expectations. An early conclusion in the chapter holds that

'[d]espite all the claims for it as a doctrine of individual salvation, education, at all levels, teaches people to know their place and only in exceptional cases enables them to leave it'. In twenty-five pages we get a résumé of the changing narrative from the Blair years to Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan. We hear again Gove's claim that he is 'restoring standards and the credibility of public examinations' and removing what he considered to be inferior vocational qualifications from equivalent status with GCSEs in league tables. Gove's ideological approach, dismissive of academic educational research, led to the creation of academy schools and chains, and free schools. His claim for their success in raising standards had no basis in hard evidence. Meanwhile, he attacked local authorities, whether they had demonstrated school improvement or not. Professor Ainley points out the influence on Gove of the US educationalist E.D. Hirsch, which led to Gove's valorising the concept of 'core knowledge' and deeming only those written exams which privileged remembering knowledge as suitable to demonstrate raised standards. Gove used a narrow curriculum to differentiate students, and designated the arts, sport, music and drama as unworthy to count among essential core subjects. There was also the problem of how to deal with legitimate vocational routes and their equivalence, if any, with academia. These issues are extensively discussed with reference to the report by Professor Alison Wolf, which contained the universities' response to Govian policy contextualised by student fees and the limited success of apprenticeship schemes. Ainley draws comparison with Germany, particularly in relation to the provision for apprenticeships. Governments, including the current government, have not succeeded in matching education to the skills needed for a successful economy, nor secured higher levels of achievement, nor ensured equitable outcomes for families from high levels of deprivation. A new approach is needed!

Chapter Five, entitled 'A New Politics in Education', attempts to offer just that. Professor Ainley's suggested solutions start with a look at widening access to all levels of learning. In acknowledging the block to progress constituted by England's uniquely dominant private schools, he suggests that little can practicably be done about this immediately. I believe him to be right about the block, but I would have hoped for a more radical approach. However, Professor Ainley does go on to praise the approach put forward by the National Union of Teachers (now combined with ATL to form the National Education Union) in its pre-2015 election paper, 'A Manifesto for Our Children's Education', which had a lot to say about curriculum reform and the restoration of local democratic control over schools. Under a sub-section entitled 'Towards a Democratic Professionalism', Professor Ainley is encouraged that the National Union of Teachers' new approach aimed to mobilise members around popular alternative education policies, and to engage with parents and communities which themselves engage with schools.

However, he is critical of some campaigners, such as the New Visions Group, which he sees as trying to restore the 'old order' and as being unsettled by Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party. He is also critical of

the Campaign for State Education (CASE) and the Local Schools Network which, he says, support a return to local authority control. As he is an experienced academic I found this criticism astonishing, for he has completely misrepresented the views of these organisations. Misconception arises from his incautious use of the term *local authority control*. This phrase is deployed by the Tories to justify the change to academy schools. It is used widely in error by the media. Local authorities have not controlled schools since the 1988 Education Act. What CASE and others campaign for is *local democratic accountability* in the face of the lack of accountability in the free school and academy system furthered by the Tories. It is very different from 'control'.

Having got that off my chest, I recommend the reader to consider Professor Ainley's ideas, such as the need for there to be a voice for young people in educational policy discourse, alongside the voices of parents and professionals. Quite how this aspiration could be instituted, or in what form, remains to be worked out. Professor Ainley's discussion of the interaction between student and teacher, with its call for less teaching to tick-box requirement and for an emphasis instead on making learning stimulating and enjoyable, is worthy of mention, even though it is not new. A reformed system would render Ofsted neither necessary nor appropriate. As Ainley says, 'a huge amount of resources could be redeployed if the prime function of education was stimulating learning, not quantifying and measuring it!' He is not alone in proposing a complete rethink of our exam system. He proposes a general diploma at age 18, and suggests we look again at the Tomlinson report of 2005 as a starting point for reform. A fresh and enabling look at the role of further education (FE) colleges as tertiary colleges, or as institutions akin to the USA's community colleges, is urged, along with a thoroughgoing re-examining by universities of their *raison d'être*. Professor Ainley looks at the idea of 'socially useful education', citing the work of Ruth Silver at Lewisham College. Addressing transition, he says: 'One example of how changes to education and training could combine with economic and statutory measures to rebuild a process of "youth transition" might be in a real reconstruction of the apprenticeship system, together with a reaffirmation of the original vocational purpose of academic education.'

I have tried to indicate the direction taken by Professor Ainley's arguments and analysis, and to provide examples to whet your appetite. I think his book is a useful contribution to the dialogue around a 'National Education Service', to which he refers several times, and which I hope will be a real development in the future.

Richard Harris

Note

[1] A review of the lecture can be found in 'Education Politics', *Journal of the Socialist Education Association*, June 2017, no. 132. The lecture itself is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39UvyAbEy1U

Cleverlands: the secrets behind the success of the world's education superpowers
LUCY CREHAN, 2016
London: Unbound
304 pages, hardback, £13.55, ISBN 978-1-78352-273-6

It is only too easy to become gloomy about the pass we have reached in English education, and *FORUM* readers might well find themselves in the front ranks of the downcast. In this review, I want to make a rather different case, to argue that we have reached a potentially important crossroads with some interesting possibilities and new directions brewing beneath what appears to be a most unpromising surface.

Last year's widespread discussion on the proposed expansion of grammar schools, proposals which were shelved following Theresa May's botched general election gamble, revealed the depth of cross-party opposition to this backward-looking idea. When figures as diverse as Sir Michael Wilshaw, Angela Rayner, Sam Freedman (former special adviser to Michael Gove) and Michael Rosen unite to condemn the return of the 11-plus, one senses how firmly the comprehensive principle has become anchored in national consciousnesses. Theresa May did not just lose her enabling majority in 2017, she lost a crucial argument on the direction of our school system.

At the same time, a younger generation, many of whom grew up under New Labour and came to political adulthood under the coalition government, are now grumbling in semi-public about the failure of so many of the initiatives of recent years: the unholy mix of marketisation and centralisation which has led to pockets of corruption and unacceptable authoritarianism, within a system more generally creaking under the weight of serial bad political decisions. England's schools are now acknowledged to be dangerously underfunded, run by overworked, overly controlled and underpaid teachers, with too many schools systematically shorn of vital arts subjects, vocational education in a continuing mess and a growing unhappiness about the school experience among many young people. At the same time our system is as segregated as ever, with no discernible rise in overall achievement.

Interestingly, the more intelligent of the coalition-era reformers are disinterring the ideas of earlier generations, such as intelligent assessment and accountability, high-quality early years provision, increased teacher professionalism and autonomy and proper careers guidance in schools. There are even glimmerings of rebellion on the vexed question of considerable state subsidies to the independent sector.

To further complicate this picture, there are now Labour's plans to consider. The party's election manifesto *For the Many Not the Few*, cooked up in a necessary hurry by Corbyn's key advisers (well, actually by one man: Andrew Fisher), contained within it the bold proposal for the abolition of university tuition fees and a rough sketch for a National Education Service (NES). Labour didn't win the election, and no one on the centre right will go anywhere near

the idea of an NES (for now), but the party's daring changed the immediate political weather, if in surprising ways. As I write, there is a growing rebellion over what many see as excessive vice-chancellor pay and too-generous packages enjoyed by senior staff at some universities.

We remain unsure of the ways in which Labour will develop its proposals for a National Education Service. A ten-point charter issued in the autumn of 2017 erred on the side of the too-general. More nitty-gritty proposals are still awaited, but with considerable uncertainty as to who, essentially, will be in charge of the process: Corbyn's advisers, the shadow education team or other forums within and beyond the party? Meanwhile, those on or around the broad left are using this period to develop their own ideas on reform, many of which chime with the concerns and ideas I have already outlined, currently emerging from the centre right tendencies that are now disillusioned with many Gove-era reforms.

Surely, then, one of the obvious political tasks of this era is the seizure of the policy high ground. Reformers must now concentrate on constructing a coherent framework for the future of education that might not only win over debt-laden students, Momentum activists and the National Education Union, but will also gain the support of a far broader swathe of parents, students, teachers and citizens who now realise that we have reached the end of a long and fundamentally mistaken policy road and that something fresh and radical is called for.

Enter Lucy Crehan's excellent *Cleverlands*, one of the big hits of 2016/17 in educational publishing: a personal journey through some of the world's top performing education systems which takes on particular significance in this broader political context. At the risk of making too great a claim for a single book, *Cleverlands*, a deft and nuanced summary of the overpowering logic and pragmatism of comprehensive education, is a potentially important landmark on the long road towards the creation of a national consensus on the necessity of reform. As Crehan herself notes, decades-long debates in countries like Japan, Canada and Finland have eventually produced much fairer and more highly achieving systems than our own.

In this context, it is particularly significant, then, that neither book nor author emerges from anything like the radical left. Indeed, among the 360 individuals who helped crowdfund publication of the book are well-known figures from the Gove years (such as Daisy Christodoulou from the ARK chain and Jonathan Simons, formerly of the Policy Exchange, and now with the Varkey Foundation) and senior figures from within the independent sector. In addition, *Cleverlands* has attracted an array of endorsements from well-established figures within the edu-firmament such as Dylan William, Tim Oates and Michael Barber.

Like many of the emerging stars of recent years – Christodolou herself, Robert Peal, author of *Progressively Worse* or Laura McInerney, editor of *Schools Week* – Crehan has trodden the now-familiar Teach First-style path in which graduates from leading universities spend several years in the classroom before

moving into research and policy, where they wield astonishing influence. Unlike deliberate polemicists like Peal, Crehan has not sought to define herself in opposition to a generation of educators that the brash young right continues to insist brought us crap comps, chaotic classrooms, photocopied worksheets, lazy local authorities and all the other stereotypes regularly dished out over the past 20 years.

Indeed, Crehan cleverly shies away from the domestic scene altogether, apart from an opening chapter that sets out her stall in low-key fashion. A teacher for three years in 'a secondary comprehensive school in a deprived part of London', she describes how 'the hard work I was putting in wasn't making much difference to the children in my care. Much of it – lengthy lesson plans, extensive marking and regular data entry – was required by the school management to help them meet external targets and pass high-stakes school inspections. What time and energy I had left didn't seem enough to overcome the systemic disadvantages that many of my students faced… I wanted to understand how education systems could be run better – how they could support their students to get better outcomes and have better opportunities without running their staff into the ground – and I looked beyond our borders.'

Puzzling over the difficulties of how to decide which countries have the 'better' systems, Crehan lands on five of the top-performing jurisdictions in the world according to PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) data, the go-to comparators of the early Gove years. No slouch in the data department herself, Crehan claims she was curious to develop a 'more holistic, visceral understanding' of the countries at hand, begins to make contacts with educators and parents in Finland, Japan, Singapore, Shanghai and Canada, and sets out on her 'geeky gap year'. (I should add that she sensibly chose from *among* a spread of top-performing countries, rather than the chart-topping five, in part because rankings will always shift, but also because to take only those with the highest results would include too many Asian countries with potentially punishing educational cultures, such as South Korea with its acknowledged high rates of suicide among school-age children.)

It is hard to write engagingly about education policy but Crehan manages it with a remarkably light, lucid touch. She frames her account as a personal journey, with each country section beginning with a nicely observed vignette about her own moment of arrival: '"Oh, I'm sorry I'm late, that's not very Finnish of me!" Kristina hurried over to find me under the clock at the central station in Helsinki just a couple of minutes after our arranged meeting time.' 'My first educational encounter in Singapore was with a small Muslim lady at passport control in the expansive and expensive Changi airport [who] raised one eyebrow and pursed her lips. "You think Singapore has the world's best education system? No. We put too much pressure on kids too young."' Staying with teachers and families, working in schools herself whenever the opportunity arises and talking to all the educators and experts she can find (which turns out to be quite a lot of influential people), she puts together a readable and

fascinating account not just of systems, structures and outcomes but of national histories and cultures, and of the human beings at the heart of the process.

Crehan deftly identifies key themes within each jurisdiction, working carefully through the pros and cons of potentially controversial policies or ideas. In Finland, she examines the evidence for and against a late start to formal schooling (finding very little against, it's fair to say), the Finnish approach to teacher education and autonomy and the dominance of mixed 'ability' teaching. In Japan she explains how important it is for citizens to be part of, and take responsibility for, the group – 'The nail that sticks out will be hammered in' – and how this shapes classroom practice, in startlingly different ways, throughout the school years. She also illuminates the central and burdensome role that 'education moms' are required to play in their child's education, a feature of neo-patriarchal parenting that has crept into English culture in recent years.

Singapore is the clear outlier of the group under consideration, in that it separates young adolescents into rigid and unforgiving streams from early adolescence, in effect determining a child's professional path from an early age. The Primary School Leaving Exams (PSLE) are a nightmare national version of the 11-plus, with a third of Singaporean children recently declaring that they were more afraid of the PSLE than they were of their parents dying. Crehan digs into the history of Singaporean nation building as part-explanation of this cruel form of educational apartheid, calmly concluding that 'this model of education is based on an outdated and inaccurate understanding of intelligence'. Ever the even-handed reporter, she praises the relatively high performance even of 'lower attainers' within the country, putting this down to excellent teacher education, so different from our own increasingly unregulated system.

In Shanghai she again finds young people weighed down with unforgiving masses of homework and a thriving tutoring industry but a far greater belief, deriving from Confucian culture, in the importance of the role of 'effort' in educational success. She quotes approvingly from studies that show 'not only that East Asians persist longer in the face of challenge, they are also more likely to seek it out… they are actually spurred on to work harder in the face of failure – the opposite reaction to typical Western students'. Inevitably, Crehan connects the East Asian emphasis on effort to Carol Dweck's advocacy of a 'growth mindset'. There is a cogent section on the Hukou, a household registration system which allows the Shanghai government to limit the number of migrant students taking part in PISA tests, and so manipulate the results in its favour. This also ensures that 'schools with the best resources are only accessible to those whose family have the money and contacts'.

Finally, to Canada: a geographically dispersed country that combines extraordinary cultural diversity with 'relatively high scores'. Canada's provinces devote significant resources to helping struggling learners; they don't select until age 14-15; school inspection is based more on the principle of support than on punishment, and the country's schools offer a broad range of subjects, with a mix of 'academic' and 'vocational' emphasis right through the upper-secondary level. Crehan quotes Canadian author Jennifer Walner, who asserts

that 'across ... all the provinces, secondary education is underpinned by a commitment to extend flexibility to students; it affords them considerable time to determine where their strengths and skills lie before sending them down a particular path'.

In an interview with 'Bob', a comprehensive school principal, Crehan unpicks several of the interlocking principles which make Canada's system so successful, including the idea that academic-style intelligence is not the only 'trait of relevance' in the modern workplace and also the idea that 'intelligence' is not a fixed entity, 'but rather something that develops'. She salutes this awareness that 'different children are ready at different ages, [so] recognising that talents and abilities develop at different rates in different people'.

Canada, Crehan declares, is the country where she would most like her own children to be educated (she is not a parent yet), but she is not entirely uncritical of the system, divining the occasional lack of challenge to students and concluding that the recent introduction of 'discovery-based learning' in maths has led to a dip in the country's scores. With all due awareness of the arguments raging here in England about progressive versus traditional teaching, Crehan diplomatically refuses to come down on one side or the other, declaring herself in favour of a mix of teaching styles.

In conclusion, Crehan draws the various strands of her journey and argument together, setting out five principles for 'High-performing, Equitable Education Systems'. If someone could convert the arguments of this section into a wall chart, I would be happy to take it round to every politician who is charged with anything to do with education, now and in the future, and personally pin it onto the office wall.

Principle no. 1: *Get Children Ready for Formal Learning.* This is, in effect, a sustained argument for high-quality, play-based pre-school learning.
Principle no. 2: *Design Curricula Concepts for Mastery (and Context for Motivation).* Under this slightly more obtuse heading, Crehan argues for a stripped-down national (or regional) curriculum and greater autonomy for teachers.
Principle no. 3: *Support Children to Take on Challenges, rather than Making Concessions.* Anyone paying attention to Crehan's overall pedagogical trajectory will find this no surprise. On the one hand, she clearly rejects the idea of fixed intelligence; on the other, she reframes the oft-repeated mantra of high expectations (probably one of Gove's most popular straplines) as a pragmatically based argument for universal human educability. Every child should be considered, and treated as, capable of learning to a high degree and an intelligent education system should, and will, find ways to achieve that. 'Of the five top-performing systems I went to, four of them had common standards that nearly all children were expected to reach, right up until age 15.' In case anyone is any doubt as to the implications of her arguments, she spells out the importance of delaying any form of selection, streaming or tracking until 15 or 16. (Unsurprisingly, Singapore, with its rigidly streamed system, does not feed into, or figure much, in the book's final conclusions.)
Principle no. 4: *Treat Teachers as Professionals.*

Principle no. 5: *Combine School Accountability with School Support (rather than Sanctions).*

These last two are fairly self-evident and eminently sensible.

Of course, with a book of this geographical and thematic spread, it is perfectly possible for reviewers of varying political stripes to cherry-pick the bits they like and ignore the overall argument. In so doing, to mangle T.S. Eliot, they risk having the experience but missing the meaning. However, most intelligent and honest readers cannot fail to take away a clear message from *Cleverlands*, not just about the countries under review, but about the many missteps of our own system in recent years, which have resulted in the continuing segregation of our schools on the shaky basis of everything from so-called intelligence to faith and social class, many of these changes pursued under the largely discredited flag of 'social mobility'. Our country's leaders, of all political parties, have consistently failed to grasp the intellectual, political and economic challenges involved in the creation of a genuinely high-quality and fair education system. With *Cleverlands*, Lucy Crehan gently nudges the nation towards a saner educational future.

Melissa Benn

Harold Rosen: writings on life, language and learning, 1958-2008

JOHN RICHMOND (Ed.), 2017
London: University College London, Institute of Education Press
582 pages, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 978-1-78277-189-0

One September around the turn of the millennium, the pupils hurrying to my classroom door – Year 7 pupils anxious not to be late for their very first English lesson – began to volunteer cheerily that they didn't like my subject.

Didn't like English? I'd never heard of such a thing. English is reading, writing, talking and listening: what's not to like?

They put me straight. English wasn't what I thought it was. It wasn't even 'English'. It was 'Literacy'. And it would take some un-learning.

How such a sorry situation came about, or how, in Harold Rosen's words, the ground gained is lost again, but not entirely and never for ever, is one thread running through this collection of his educational writings. Its nearly six hundred pages divide into seven sections: three Parts, three Interludes and an Ending. The three Parts comprise: 'The Politics of Language and English Teaching'; 'The Role of Language in Learning'; and 'Story'. Brief editorial contextualising and explication helpfully introduce the academic pieces which make up the bulk of the book. Rather than traverse it cover to cover, a reader is more likely to dip in and read one of the pieces, then stay to read another which relates to the broad section heading or engages with the issue in question. And then perhaps read another...

For Rosen's way of coming at the world in writing, his manner of articulating what he thinks and perceives, in a word his 'voice', can be compelling. It helps to unify the collection. That voice, interested as we will see in everyone else's voices, gives voice not only to academic papers, articles, talks and essays (including one not previously published), but to letters, stories and poems. His first writing here is a poem which celebrates people in a place. There are photos too, and they have something to say. All in all, then, a big book, and more besides: a marker put down, and a mate near at hand, and a memorial.

In his introduction, John Richmond describes Harold Rosen as 'a leader of thought in the world of English teaching in the second half of the twentieth century' who, with others, 'forged and sustained a new understanding of the purpose and possibilities of the subject English within the school curriculum'. Born in Massachusetts, and so a US citizen, Rosen was brought up in London's East End. He was politically committed from an early age, a member of the Young Communist League at the height of Stalinism in the 1930s. (He would quit the party in 1957.) Called up in 1945, his year of service with the US Infantry included a spell in Berlin. A teacher in grammar schools after the war, he was a founder member of the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE). He joined one of the earliest comprehensives, Walworth School off the Old Kent Road, as Head of English in 1956. According to Pete Medway, he made sure to teach the bottom streams. At this time only a small minority of pupils were readied for school-leaving exams, and schools had the chance, if they wished to seize it, of constructing their own curriculum rather than delivering one constructed elsewhere.

At Walworth, Rosen chose to base the work of English teachers on the experience and the language which the young person brought to the classroom. It remains a strikingly radical choice. The Walworth School English Syllabus, written by Rosen, contains this foundational statement:

> Whatever language the pupil possesses, it is this which must be built on rather than driven underground. However narrow the experience of our pupils may be (and it is often wider than we think), it is this experience alone which has given their language meaning. The starting point for English work must be the ability to handle effectively pupils' own experience. Oral work, written work, and the discussion of literature must create an atmosphere in which the pupils become confident of the full acceptability of the material of their own experience. Only in this way can they advance to the next stage. (p. 208)

In this encounter with the other person, the pupil who is to be listened to, whose language is to be respected and built on, and for whom the teacher – which is to say the tradition – exists, English teaching begins. That tradition, with its literary canon and its necessary linguistic 'correctness' and accompanying freight of questions, is itself to be understood as reconstructed in

the classroom and contributed to by the pupil as cultural agent, and not merely 'passed on' in some mysterious fashion by the teacher. This vital, and potentially dialectical, relationship between one's experience and one's language might be seen as a way to grapple with the educative dimension of experience with which John Dewey was concerned. If education is 'the continual re-organisation, reconstruction and transformation of experience', as Dewey puts it in *Democracy and Education*, then language is centrally implicated in these three activities. Isn't it through language, the attempt to articulate our experience to ourselves and to others, that education most powerfully institutes itself?

Consideration of the role of language, not just in the curriculum subject English but in learning as a whole, suffuses this collection. Rosen writes about language and culture; 'language across the curriculum' (an idea and catchphrase originated by LATE); the relationship between thought and language; the development, and politics, of writing; and the proper stance of the educational researcher. Informing all is a conception of the young person as having 'rich and varied strategies for learning and communicating' (p. 328), and an understanding that debate about the teaching of English is another front in the class war of ideas. A decision to value and respect the language young people bring to the classroom implies a commitment to value and respect the language of the communities from which young people come. Perhaps this impulse stemmed from Rosen's childhood within a working-class Jewish community for whom political awareness and class solidarity were crucial means of maintaining a place in society and for being acknowledged as equal citizens. Such a commitment, together with a historically informed understanding of the tenacious deficit models of language which still pertain, results in powerful arguments articulated here about central aspects of the teaching of English, both spoken and written. These arguments take in questions about the status and role of Standard English and the teacher's obligation (if any) to enable pupils to command it; the place of grammar teaching; and issues of genre, audience and culture(s).

Rosen joined the Institute of Education as the sixties began and went on to help make its English Department indispensable to the work of English teachers in the Inner London Education Authority and beyond. Richmond stresses Rosen's commitment to collegiate collaboration, and his constant focus on what would serve practitioners. Harold writes to his wife Betty, herself a scholar, that the role of the researcher must change: 'We must turn research upside-down. No more pirate raids [on schools and classrooms] for "data".' The voice that sounds in the letters, poems and stories belongs to a narrator always looking at and listening to the world, and particularly to other people within it, and concerned to convey not only what people say but the changing manner in which they say it. Alert to the interplay of power between individuals, and tuned to injustice, this narrator swiftly and precisely weighs character, mood and intention. His writing favours plainness and precision, the concrete and empirical, the telling detail. He remembers place names, for these hold the door open to history. Shaped and considered – always more than anecdotal – the

writing in the non-academic pieces never seems studied or calculating. Its voice looks you in the eye, so to speak. It knows its roots, the ligaments of personal and family history as well as the 'larger' social and political history. It knows the power of language. Or rather of languages, for as well as Yiddish it can speak several varieties of English, including Marxist and bureaucratese... It is witty, droll, full of other people's utterances: their speech rhythms and lexis, their turns of phrase and jokes, sometimes their paragraph-length rejoinders, their 'exclamations, curses, threats, proverbs' (p. 367). A world speaks in it, albeit a world that has been all but left behind.

And yet, not quite. The opening academic piece is a sustained critique of the theories of Basil Bernstein in relation to language and class. In an era when 'poor parenting' is regularly blamed for the apparent educational failure of swathes of young people, and where the working-class young remain labelled as inadequate, this essay continues to resonate. Rosen notes how valuable, for some, Bernsteinian notions were at a time when the credibility of IQ as a way to talk about young people was breaking down. Belief in the idea of language deficit, or of the 'inadequacy' of working-class speech, continues to be a proxy for that older calumny which holds that the limits of human educability can be known in advance in any individual case.

Another issue of abiding concern is the encounter between the student's own language and the language of school subjects or intellectual disciplines. In an essay on the language of textbooks (from 1967) Rosen notes how the textbook is all too easily seen as 'a visible guarantee of real secondary education' (p. 228) even though the impersonality of the textbook's language and its assumption of 'a kind of evenness of development in any group of users' (p. 228) render it more a barrier than a bridge to the student's confident command of the language of the discipline. Textbooks 'show little awareness of what pupils will make or fail to make of [the textbook's] language beyond some crude notions of easy and difficult vocabulary and shorter sentences' (p. 228). Yet the encounter between student and textbook is the liminal moment of entry into the discipline. Rosen writes:

> Probably, for all their shortcomings, subject textbooks have for many pupils real value. However limited their impersonal language, it is from the textbook that they learn it. Having said so much we can then recognise that textbooks also do harm... [Their language] looks at children across a chasm. The worst way to bridge this chasm is to encourage children to take over whole chunks of it as a kind of jargon (examinations have been the great excuse). (p. 229)

Rosen's recognition of the 'empty verbalism, sanctioned utterance and approved dogma' which results from this 'taking over', and the way it renders irrelevant the personal view of the student, which is to say the extent to which the student has reconstructed rather than 'taken over' knowledge, seems to have been forgotten in official circles. 'Language and experience have been torn asunder' (p. 229), Rosen notes. Hence, the distortion of learning. His words put me in

mind of a newspaper article about the new-look English Literature GCSE exam, taken in 2017, whose closed-book approach deliberately thwarts the possibility of a candidate's responding in any sustained authentic way to the text in the light of the question. The exam over, so it was reported, one candidate told his classmate how pleased he was to see the question on the set poem. He had remembered what to write about its opening, and had managed to say X, Y and Z. Yes, his friend agreed, he too had written the exact same things.

The final section is about 'story'. For Rosen, story is the way we make sense of ourselves as history, or at least as memory. We say ourselves into being, and keep saying. Rosen suggests that our culture disparages story-telling in adulthood. Stories are for children, and so narrative, as a way of thinking, is to be seen as immature. In our culture, stories are set against truth rather than recognised as being made of truth, and as pointing to truth or constructing it. Stories enable the exchange of experience, a power Rosen celebrates.

> We might be disposed to take stories that much more seriously if we perceive them first and foremost as a product of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others. (p. 389)

Rosen cites the work of the critic Barbara Hardy and endorses her view of narrative as 'a primary act of mind'. Story-making: it's a way to give order to the flux of what happens. Story-making equals meaning-making, and teachers are concerned with how their pupils make meaning. This is the pupil's 'high intent', as Michael Armstrong puts it. Teachers want to help develop pupils' meaning-making, to help them make meaning in ways which are fuller, more accurate or imaginative, more capacious, fulfilling and resonant. This ambition leads Rosen to offer a defence of his interest in oral narrative: 'The resolute insistence on narrative in education in defiance of other priorities is then at the very heart of the attempt to keep meaning itself at the centre of language education' (p. 399). Language education, which is to say, the subject of English, shall have at its heart not fronted adverbials and the rest of the cod-grammar grab bag, nor the strictures of 'the rule-governed setting' (p. 400) which vitiates the story-teller's rights, but meaning: that which is meaningful to the learner in the classroom.

I am prone to like this kind of thing. How can I not? It helped to form my practice as a teacher, and to sustain it when, as Rosen writes, we found ourselves 'in the midst of the most direct assault we have ever known on the best intentions of English teaching' (p. 398). Will those from contrary traditions, or who await Year 7s at the door of today's classrooms, and who must work in today's governing conditions, be as enthused by Rosen's insights and equipped by his arguments as I was? Will they be as moved to read his stories? It is to be hoped they shall. For the task remains the same. As Rosen puts it: 'When the pie was opened the birds began to sing. How to open the pie, that's the problem.'

Patrick Yarker

Taught Not Caught: educating for 21st century character
NICKY MORGAN, 2017
Debden, Suffolk: John Catt Educational
£12 (paperback) 128pp 978-1911382331

Nicky Morgan, recently Minister for Education, has written a book on 'character education'. In a gushing foreword, Lord James O'Shaughnessy tells us that she was a brave minister who went against prevailing educational orthodoxy by seeking to place character development at the heart of the Cameron government's approach to education. That may be so. But surely most readers and most parents will regard the education of 'character' – or a focus on the whole person and not just on academic attainments – as simple common sense? How did the country arrive at a situation where it is considered brave of an education minister to believe what has been obvious to serious thinkers throughout history: that education is about the development of character as well as the attainment of knowledge and skills? The book itself would be braver – and deeper – if Nicky Morgan had explicitly discussed exactly how her thinking on education differs from received opinion and from mainstream educational thinking in her party. Particularly brave would have been some account of how her educational beliefs differ from the evidence-free thinking and policy-making of her immediate ministerial predecessor, Michael Gove.

The book has a number of omissions. Morgan claims that 'the English education system used to do character development very well' (p. 124), but her book offers no explanation for why this is no longer the case. During the past seven years, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and the government's continuing over-emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects are just two examples of how the overall curriculum has been narrowed, thus ensuring that schools in general are less likely to prioritise character education now than they were even 10 years ago, let alone in previous generations. Also, Morgan does not address how her version of character education relates to so-called British values or what it might mean for the PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) curriculum in schools. Nevertheless, some parts of the book are well worth reading, if only because Nicky Morgan is a rare politician who is prepared to question, at least implicitly, the narrow instrumentalism of most education policy-making. Her book makes clear that there is an important national debate to be had about the purposes and the values of the nation's education system. In addition she shows great respect to some educational 'experts' – that is, to many practitioners in schools up and down the country whose character education projects she visited as Secretary of State. In prose that is passionate and enthusiastic, rather than fluent or stylish, she describes how these professionals are attempting to put 'character' explicitly into the curriculum. In return, they and their successful

projects provide her with a strong evidential basis for her beliefs. Nicky Morgan's educational credo is easy to summarise in three short phrases: education is about 'academics plus character'; character can – and should – be taught and learned in all educational institutions, from infancy onwards; schools that focus on character education will also do better in academic attainment and grades.

The book's opening chapter asks the question 'what does "character" mean?' Very sensibly, Morgan does not attempt to provide a universal or comprehensive checklist of character traits which all schools should include in their curriculum offering. Such externally imposed or 'government-approved' lists would almost certainly end up in a filing cabinet, and would deserve to do so. Each school needs to have the debate and to reach its own consensus about the educational values and personal qualities it wishes to promote. As Morgan puts it, 'there is no one clear definition of character ... no one easy list of boxes to tick' (p. 16). The only way that 'character education' can become something real, something more than a vague set of aspirations and something that is part of the everyday experience of both learners and teachers, is if the concept itself is explicitly and regularly discussed, and therefore 'owned', by the entire school community.

Thanks to extensive quotes from sources in the university, secondary and primary school sectors, the first chapter is the best as well as the longest in the book. Recent research and thinking on character education are covered, as is the extensive vocabulary, some traditional and some newly minted, of educational values, personal virtues and character traits. For example, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at Birmingham University has updated a list of human virtues first identified by Aristotle, re-classified them in four categories – intellectual, moral, performance and civic – and showed how they remain relevant in today's world. Morgan also describes how different schools have developed and implemented their policies on character education. A Barnet primary school aims to develop positive traits of character to make every Year 6 pupil a 'Golden Child' (p. 23), while a secondary school in Warrington has produced a booklet called 'Character Counts' which informs pupils that 'a young person's character is the summation of his or her values, attitudes and behaviours... Good character doesn't happen automatically, and it's too important to be left to chance' (p. 31). This first chapter alone, because of its detailed exploration of the concept in many contexts, would enable any school or educational institution to initiate its own debate on 'character education' should it wish to do so.

The other nine chapters are considerably shorter and on the whole less useful, except in those passages where the author describes more good policy-making and teaching practice from the projects she supported and visited as minister. Overall, the book lacks critique as well as depth. Morgan appears educationally naive. Her argument for having a better balance between a knowledge-based and a character-based curriculum is re-stated many times, but she seems unaware that there are some long-standing and contentious questions

about the conceptual boundaries of education and debates about how desirable teaching and learning practices have to be distinguished from undesirable practices known as propaganda or brainwashing. Just how far do schools have the right to 'mould' character or to 'impose' their values? Is this a matter solely for parents or does society as a whole need protection from 'rogue schools' and from unacceptable practices? Such issues need further exploration even among those of us who would largely subscribe to Nicky Morgan's credo and to her robust, common-sense approach to character education.

Morgan shows some political naivety as well. In chapter two she professes herself to be a 'one nation Tory' in the mould of Disraeli. She deplores the gross inequalities in society and in education. But because she does not discuss any political or historical contexts, her writing on these matters comes across as disingenuous: 'my belief, though, is that we will fail to really turbocharge the social mobility which can be provided by education if we don't offer all pupils both a knowledge-rich, academically rigorous curriculum and the building of social capital' (p. 39). She shows no recognition of the ways in which the past 40 years of neo-liberal economic and educational policy have reduced social mobility and deepened if not caused the social and educational inequalities which upset her.

In chapter three, which focuses on how character education is related to mental health and well-being, Morgan comes close to the familiar political position of expecting schools to solve all young people's problems. 'As we see more and more young people reporting rising anxiety, depression, self-harm and behaviour problems, then it is clear there must be a place for a whole school focus on wellbeing and resilience to help to address these issues' (p. 47). Well, yes, maybe. But if it is to be effective, any 'whole school focus' on well-being in all English schools would require a concomitant 'whole government focus' on well-being throughout the nation – and this in turn would require new government policies on, for starters: ending poverty; reducing inequality; providing social housing; increasing NHS spending on mental illness and positive health promotion; and, not least, restoring professional youth work and youth clubs throughout the nation in order to complement the schools' provision.

In chapter five, on adult role models, Nicky Morgan recognises that schools have a 'hidden curriculum' which also contributes to character education. She points out that any educational institution's values are going to be picked up by students one way or another, even where there is no attempt to put explicit character education into the overt curriculum. But she seems unaware that this well-established notion of the hidden curriculum rather undermines her choice of title, *Taught Not Caught.* Understandably, she wishes to stress the explicit teaching of values and 'character' over the unplanned, random 'catching' of values and ethos. But in real life, as her own evidence indicates, this is a false dichotomy: a school's ethos is going to be 'caught' whatever attempts are also being made consciously to define it or explicitly to teach it. Indeed, if she had called her book 'Taught *and* Caught', she might have greatly

strengthened this chapter on adult role modelling. She could have emphasised, for example, that all those in an educational institution – adults and children alike – are learning about character from the role models they see around them. In educational organisations, the principles of good character, good conduct and how people behave towards one another need to apply everywhere, at all times, up and down the institutional hierarchy: they do not apply only in classrooms. In other words, the whole school community, including governing body members and midday supervisors, the senior leadership team and the caretakers, might usefully be part of an ongoing debate on what is meant by institutional ethos and, more specifically, on what their school's 'character education' policy might mean for them in their particular job or responsibility. In this way the school's ethos would combine educational and democratic values and would be 'walking the talk'.

Chapter six, 'Preparing for the Workplace', is the shortest in the book, which is surprising because it could have offered Nicky Morgan some telling examples in support of her argument about the significance of character development as an educational goal. Research over several decades has consistently shown that employers are just as concerned about the personal traits and attitudes that young people possess when they leave school as they are about their academic qualifications or practical abilities. These human attributes, or 'soft skills', desired by employers are often defined in the same kind of language as character education: the 'virtues' typically looked for include reliability, perseverance, confidence, communication, organisation, negotiation, leadership, teamwork, and so on.

Chapter seven, 'Assessing Character', is the most problematic. Nicky Morgan has imbibed uncritically the modern orthodoxy that for assessment to be real and effective something always has to be measured. She tells us that one of Whitehall's mantras is 'what gets assessed gets done' (p. 85), which is a weaker version of the ubiquitous McKinsey motto from the 1980s, 'everything can be measured and what gets measured gets managed'. Yet the evidence of her own eyes, as she visits successful character education projects, compels her to admit that personality and a child's character formation over time cannot be meaningfully measured. A braver writer might then have acknowledged that both the McKinsey premise and the Whitehall mantra are wrong, at least in the instance of character education, because personal or character development involves the kind of truly human encounters and engagements which make precise measurement or assessment of the learning involved quite impossible – and quite irrelevant.

There will never be a valid, reliable, objective way to measure character education, just as there is no accurate or numerical way to measure other deeply human activities like love or friendship or empathy. But unfortunately, in the current neo-liberal and managerial Whitehall world – the world that has helped to make character education unfashionable in recent decades and therefore in need of Nicky Morgan's advocacy – no exceptions are permitted. The audit must always prevail and something has to be measured in quantitative terms. So

although she is prepared to acknowledge that internal dialogues, self-evaluations and self-critical assessments might be useful aspects of character education projects, she fails to appreciate that these are in fact the *only* kinds of assessment which have relevance in 'character education' or that the professionals engaged in such important developmental and potentially transformative educational work have to be trusted to do their good work in good faith. Because their work is quintessentially human and because it is always situated in a unique context, it is not reducible to a computer algorithm and cannot be successfully managed at a distance. The McKinsey motto has always been wrong for much that is important in education: not everything can be measured and not everything needs to be externally managed.

Fortunately, from her accounts of their work, one can deduce that the real-life practitioners in the field of character education observed by Nicky Morgan can in fact be trusted. In her fervent prose they are presented to the reader as dedicated educators who would certainly not need external assessments, league tables, targets or performance indicators to motivate them. In this respect they are of course just like many thousands of other professional teachers. However, Nicky Morgan does not want to trust the evidence of her own eyes and she ends her chapter by calling for Ofsted to inspect character education projects in schools to 'assess the teaching to ensure they do [*sic*] reflect the traits and values each school has identified as important'. In its current form, Ofsted offers entirely the wrong kind of inspection model for the evaluation of character education projects. Until Ofsted inspectors are encouraged to recognise complexity, nuance and uniqueness in a school's curriculum and until they are expected to engage routinely in long-term developmental dialogues with individual schools and teachers before coming to their inspectorial judgements, Ofsted would be more likely to do harm than to do good to Nicky Morgan's splendidly ambitious nationwide project.

Even though Nicky Morgan's book is too superficial and non-analytical to be recommended unreservedly, let me end this review on a positive note. She has undoubtedly achieved her stated aim – 'to demonstrate not just why explicitly teaching character is both possible and necessary but also that it is already happening in many excellent state schools up and down the country' (p. 108). Moreover, she is a serving politician who has written a book with practical proposals that seek to improve the educational experience of all children and has justified her proposed educational reforms by looking closely at the good practice of professional educators and teachers in the field. So two cheers for Nicky Morgan!

Allen Parrott