Introduction

What has gone wrong

England's state schools, colleges and universities have shared the fate of other public services as the post-war welfare state was at first slowly expanded and then, from the late-1970s on, disbanded with accelerating rapidity. However, compared with other public services, education remains unique in the way it has been integrated into the more general economic and social policies of successive governments. This is not only because of the contradiction involved in privatising—ultimately making the public pay for—legally compulsory school attendance, as well as for extended further and higher education and training thereafter.

This book argues that institutionalised 'learning' in England's schools, colleges and universities, together with training in and for work, has come to play an increasing part in social control. In a daily more divided society, whole groups of people are relegated to permanent unemployment and many more to permanent insecurity in employment. Official 'learning' for longer and longer periods substitutes for the guarantee of regular wages in integrating many employees into a changing economy. Dedicated obsessively to the vocational 'needs' of the economy, education, whether in school, college or university, no longer aspires to emancipate the minds of future generations. Instead, it is increasingly foreclosing possibilities. In this sense, *Education Make You Fick, Innit?*

In tracing how this has come about and suggesting what can be done about it, this book charts the seemingly contradictory growth of both state control over schools, colleges and universities and competition between them. The new approach was announced back in 1976 by declaring an end to the previous comprehensive school reform. In its place, a new settlement of education and training was eventually imposed by the 1988 Education Reform Act, together with the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

The integration of this new system of education with training has since gone much further under New Labour governments, especially their 2006 Education and Inspections Act. Yet the White Paper preceding this Act suggested government desperation as an ICM opinion poll coinciding with its launch showed two thirds of parents did not consider schools any better than under the

Conservatives. Later in the year, international comparisons by the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD)'s *Education At A Glance 2006* showed the UK falling in comparison with education indicators of other developed countries. More recently, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee of cross-Party MPs reported that 'the education of almost one million children is suffering because they attend schools that perform badly' (*Observer*, 8 October 2006). Standards would not be raised by 'inappropriate methods and targets', according to the independent *Nuffield Review* the same month.

As evidence piled up that, after ten years of frantic activity, things were still not going right in education, the concerns of Blairite politicians were more immediately felt by large numbers of teachers and lecturers. They faced the problem of what to do during what Willis in 1977 described as an 'endless succession of Monday mornings' and they have drawn similar conclusions, albeit for very different reasons! For many students also, going to school, college, or university has become a daily grind, where much of their 'learning' appears irrelevant to the increasingly complex demands they face from society.

Signs of their dissatisfaction are familiar to the teachers who have to respond to them. School truancy at record levels is the most common of these symptoms but at the most extreme, 20 schools a week (400 a year) are targets of arson attacks (*Guardian*, 4 April 2006). Yet at the same time, for the most examined and certified generation in history, with more and more jobs demanding higher and higher qualifications, 'education' matters more than ever before. So, according to the Department for Education and Skills, about 80 per cent of 16 year-olds remain in school or college, while around 42 per cent of 18-30 year-olds go on to higher education (47 per cent of women but only 37 per cent of men).

The main argument of this book is that the 'success' or 'failure' of all this education cannot be explained simply in terms of the inadequate design of its internal structures or through problems with implementation, even if nobody should question the fundamental importance of these areas. It connects changes in education and training and the relation between them to wider changes in society. Particularly important is the vexed question of social class and its recomposition over the last half century. This affects also the altered gender balance of occupations and relations as well as the situation of various minority ethnic groups. All are involved in perennial debate over the place of the vocational compared with the academic.

How to start putting it right

A central thesis of the book is that it is not too late to reclaim and reshape education. The resistance against the 2006 Education and Inspections Act could signal a changing tide in the battle for an education that encourages real learning and understanding, extends culture and democracy and in increasingly uncertain times aims at sustainability in place of increasing social division and ultimate self-destruction. This book seeks to encourage that process by offering an accessible explanation linking together schools, colleges and universities in a coherent account.

Part of the explanation for failure to recognise *What has gone wrong* and *how to start putting it right* lies in the isolation of teachers in primary from secondary from further from higher education. This is seen not only in the parochial concerns of each sector and the way they recurrently blame each other for the failings of the system as a whole but in our narrow professional and trade union organisation, as well as the limited focus of academic research and debate. The recent merger of the two further and higher education unions to form the University and College Union is a step in the right direction.

The book is therefore intended firstly for teachers in primary and secondary schools, together with those teaching and researching in higher education and also further education. It seeks to enable them to compare their daily experience with that of others in other parts of what we argue is now an interconnected education and training system that has to be grasped in its totality to be understood. The book aims to overcome divisions between the different sectors of state education and relates also to the (growing) private sector, including private training.

The book is therefore also aimed at students in college and university trying to make sense of their experience as the first generation expected to pay so much for what has become mass tertiary level learning, having already been 'tested to destruction' in primary and secondary schooling. Trainee teachers too are key readers for whom the book will provide essential background understanding. Other specialist students, lecturers and researchers in education studies and cognate subjects, including the sociology, psychology, politics and philosophy of education will also hopefully find the book valuable.

However, although academically rigorous, this is not written as an academic text. References—most of them for this introduction in this paragraph—are kept to a minimum, for instance. Unlike recent excellent studies of the education

policy process (Chitty, 2004), or the history of it (Jones, 2003), and the updated second edition of Sally Tomlinson's *Education in a post-welfare society* (2005), this book is not primarily for academics and their students. Nor is it concerned to describe the situation of just a part of education today—usually schools, as in Benn and Millar's 2006 campaigning pamphlet for *A Comprehensive Future*, or Terry Wrigley's *Another School is Possible*. These accounts do not relate what has happened in schools to the rest of education and training. Similarly, Mary Evans' elegantly written *Killing Thinking* (2004) deals only with higher education.

It is important to link not just the sectors of education that are often treated separately but also other related areas, such as training, social security, family and youth policy. These are covered from the perspective of youth work in Phil Mizen's 2004 *The Changing State of Youth*. Phil's title highlights changes in the state itself as well as in public services and their new relations with the private sector. He argues, and we agree, that these have led to a crisis of legitimacy for the new market-state. One of its responses has been an extension of social control through education, its tests, examinations and certification. As a result there has been, as Phil writes (p. 41), 'a huge expansion in education's influence over the lives of the young.'

We therefore disagree with much of the academic explanation of change in education. Typically this sees 'the development and dissemination of a *global policyspeak*' (Ball forthcoming) as somehow determining events. This sort of 'discourse analysis' cannot explain why events happened when they did (and not sooner or later, for instance). Nor does it grasp the education and training system as a whole in the wider context of which it is a part.

Unlike the books above, though, our account of education is restricted to England, while recognising that devolution within mainland UK to Scotland and Wales has allowed space for the creation of at least partial alternatives to the crisis-ridden English dead end. These alternatives may grow more divergent as they build towards rejecting the English model in whole rather than in part. This account of the recent development of education in England can therefore be taken as a negative example or awful warning to readers elsewhere. Our comparisons with international developments illustrate this. They expand the explanation of what has gone wrong to connect it to the educational agenda of international bodies to which the UK and EU are signed up, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and, in particular, the WTO's 1994 General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

"The bamboozling of a generation"

There is a growing general realisation, shared especially by those without any vested interest in the growth of education and training, that the expansion of 'lifelong learning' and all the emphasis put upon it and 'foundation learning' in schools by successive governments over the past 30 years has not led to greater knowledge and enlightenment. Instead, we suspect what the great French educational sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu once called, *The bamboozling of a generation* as education looms larger than ever before in the lives of young people and in the concerns of their parents. This concern is seen in widespread allegations of what is incorrectly called 'dumbing down' (also incorrect because being unable to speak does not necessarily imply stupidity). These allegations have paradoxically but not coincidentally accompanied the recent expansion of and emphasis on education.

We explore this paradox, drawing upon the two authors' own experience, previous research and publication. We offer a diagnosis that does not fall into the simplicities of genetic, psychological or political reduction. Instead, we give an explanatory narrative that is clear and comprehensible but without simplification. Unlike many other books that have detailed the workings and implications of education policy, we address the crucial issue of what sort of alternatives are required to restore public confidence in education and to make it enjoyable and worthwhile. Most importantly, our concern is with how education can regain its purpose of handing on the expanding body of human knowledge for new generations to build a sustainable future.

As far as we know, the human species is unique in being able to learn not only from our own individual mistakes but from the collective account of human and natural history and science. In this sense our species can be characterised, as William Morris said, as 'the learning animal.' Yet control over organised social learning is being relinquished to the competitive global economy to which its whole purpose is now dedicated. This is happening at the same time as the ecology that sustains human life is being disrupted by the unconstrained expansion of that same global economic competition. This could be considered as 'ecocidally insane' and the opposite to any kind of learning from experience to alter behaviour in the future. How English education came to contribute to this collective insanity and what can be done to change it is detailed in the chapters that follow. The argument is necessarily compressed in the following section of this introduction.

Outline of the book

Chapter 1

The opening chapter charts the issues that will reverberate throughout the book. It reviews current thinking about education, economic performance and social progress, to identifie a number of contradictions. For example, on the one hand governments have given education a major new role in securing national economic survival in a global marketplace. They have also emphasised education's importance in encouraging greater democracy and participation. On the other hand, education has been used to both maintain divisions between and to limit the capacities and aspirations of many of the young people it now puts in academic competition with one another. To resolve this contradiction, the chapter examines how changes within the workplace have led to a recomposition of the class structure and, as a result, to changes in the relationship between education and training/skill formation. It asks whether, in an age of information technology, divisions of knowledge still reflect differences in power; and why some educational credentials continue to be worth more than others. Finally, it discusses what it now means to be 'qualified' and whether this is necessarily the same as being 'educated'?

Chapter 2

The second chapter describes how the expansion of education in the post-war years both reflected and supported economic expansion, but also accommodated rather than challenged many of the historical inequities and 'peculiarities' that have been a feature of English society. For example, why was it that England, the first industrial country, trailed behind other developed countries in the creation of a system of public education? The 1944 Education Act, for example, belatedly introduced free secondary education for all. But it also replicated wider social divisions of labour and knowledge by dividing young people on the basis of spurious psychological tests into the tripartite system of state secondary schooling. At the same time, the domination of the élite private schools was preserved linked to admission to the antique universities and their exam boards. The chapter argues that even though the 1944 Act represented a significant marker in the long process of educational reform, it also failed to energise popular support for increasing educational opportunities in the period of post-war reconstruction.

The chapter then moves on to examine how the comprehensive reformers of the 1960s and the progressive primary practitioners of the 1970s struggled

in face of an unequal playing field—an educational terrain still dominated by the privilege and élitism of the surviving grammar and private schools—and how as a result, in many areas, the comprehensive ideal remained embryonic. The chapter argues that instead of being a 'failure' in the way that 'bog standard' comprehensives you 'wouldn't touch with a bargepole' have been portrayed by both the Conservatives and increasingly by New Labour, it is to their credit that comprehensive schools managed to achieve as much as they did.

Alongside the child-centred primary schooling that could flourish once the age of selection was raised from 11-to 16-plus (although it soon dropped back to14), comprehensive schools established a legacy that politicians since have been unable to directly deny. As a result, even Blair/Brown and Cameron today are forced to repeat that 'There will be no return to selection' as a result of their proposals. Instead of such a return, the comprehensive ideal of 'equal opportunities' has been perverted by Mrs. Thatcher's translation of it into 'opportunities to be unequal.' Twenty years on, this perversion of the comprehensive principle is seen in the lip-service education ministers pay to 'individual and personalised' learning with 'inclusion for all.'

While it begins by emphasising the importance of education in supporting economic prosperity, the chapter concludes by providing an insight into how the fortunes of education, and particularly its progressive and comprehensive aspirations, were undermined by deteriorating economic conditions. It examines how Labour, the political party most associated with educational expansion, faced with unfavourable economic conditions during the 1970s, increasingly cast schools and teachers as responsible for hampering economic recovery rather than as catalysts of progress. Indeed, Prime Minister Callaghan in calling a halt to Old Labour's policy of comprehensive reform actually blamed teachers for not producing 'employable' workers, thus scape-goating schools and colleges for an economic recession and unemployment for which they had no responsibility.

This 'Big Lie' was repeated many times during the succeeding phase of education policy that we call (following Finn) *Training Without Jobs*. By contrast, in criticising the subsequent and continuing subservience of education to 'what employers want'—even whilst many employers continued to lay off workers and deskill many of their remaining employees through automation—the chapter points towards a realistic assessment of the part that education to all levels can play in contributing to sustainable economic development.

Chapter 3

After defeating resistance by organised workers who included not only the miners but teachers engaged in prolonged industrial action over pay, successive Conservative governments went on to 'roll back the state' and privatise nationalised industries and welfare provision as a way out of economic recession. In this context, the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) imposed a new settlement on English schooling. It moved from the national system locally administered of the 1944 welfare-state settlement towards a national system nationally administered through contracts to meet targets in what was becoming a new market-state.

As responsibility was contracted out to a periphery of 'agents' and 'providers' like schools and colleges, power contracted to a central core. The ERA reduced the powers of democratically accountable Local Education Authorities (LEAs) by delegating budgets to schools and, more significantly, gave them the option of leaving local authority control completely. It also made a 'National' Curriculum compulsory in all state—but not private—schools in England (Wales, in a significant concession, gaining its own version—Scotland always had its own independent education system). In another of the perversions of the comprehensive principle that this book records, this National (and in history and other remaining subjects, Nationalist) Curriculum was sold to teachers as a comprehensive entitlement for all their pupils but in which league tables compared their results in Standardised Assessment Tests for 5, 11 and 14 year-olds and in GCSEs at 16.

The ERA was complemented by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act which 'incorporated' the further education and sixth form colleges as independent bodies in competition with one another for students. They followed the polytechnics in establishing their independence from LEAs and became dominated by a new funding regime tied to student numbers. The justification for this was that it would 'free' the colleges from the dead hand of bureaucratic LEA control but, as was to happen with the same process in schools and higher education, the result was a new centralised state bureaucracy following an incomprehensible funding formula while recreating little bureaucracies within each institution, thus multiplying 'red tape' overall.

In a process which was later to be inflicted on schools and then higher education, college staff also became subjected to inspection and direction by a variety of external quality auditors and inspectors. This regulation initiated a new education and training market for further education as a plethora of competing

Youth Training Schemes were made compulsory for the rising numbers of jobless school leavers. The chapter concludes with a brief explanation of how the market in trainees and students determined provision in the competition that now infects the entire system from primary to postgraduate schools.

Chapter 4: Putting it right or making it even worse? New Labour's new ideas

Chapter four takes us to the present and to the latest 2006 Education and Inspections Act. New Labour elevated education to an unprecedented position even compared with Mrs. Thatcher who abolished the rival Department of Employment. The welfare state commitment to full employment was dropped. There was no longer any economic policy other than opening markets to global competition. Instead, the merged Department of Education and Skills (once Education and Science) was charged with securing 'employability' for new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market. Meanwhile 'Science'—significantly for the future of state-sponsored research—was hived off to the Department of Trade and Industry. Education and training also appear as the main instruments of social mobility (even as this is reducing), thus preserving illusions of 'meritocracy'—that all jobs are open to anyone irrespective of their social background and that opportunities if not circumstances remain equal for all.

At the same time, education and training has been assigned a leading role in the 'active labour market policies' to reform the welfare state urged on successive governments by international bodies such as the OECD and other representatives of globalising corporate capital. Aimed at meeting the demands of intensified global economic competition and using new communications and information technology (ICT), such policies also involve handling the 'social exclusion' of a section of the traditional manual working class left behind as the welfare state has contracted and the social deprivations following upon this economic restructuring have multiplied.

Forcing young people from 'deprived'/discriminated against backgrounds into an education that has systematically failed and excluded them from the earliest ages is inherently contradictory. As a result of retaining, rather than challenging, these key Conservative policies and because of the importance given to appeasing those who have benefited from economic restructuring, rather than protecting those who have lost out, New Labour has presided over continuing and heightened inequities in education as in society as a whole.

In schools this reality can no longer be hidden by what the government calls its 'standards agenda' and the faltering Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. In fact,

the system of perpetual crisis management policed by the Inspectorate has driven schools into an impasse from which the 2006 Act presented independent trust status on the City Academies model as the only way out but without the funding to sustain it. This is an invitation to the private sector to move into the provision of public education in line with the European Union commitment to the General Agreement on Trade in Services, though whether this private provision of public services happens more or less immediately may depend on local circumstances. The same commitment to privatisation is taken further in the accompanying 2006 Further Education White Paper with its proposals for private provision and voucher-style arrangements for funding. The raising of student fees in September 2006 also aims to create a market in higher education.

In post-compulsory education and training the concept of 'lifelong learning' has become central as it supposedly builds upon the 'foundation learning' of those in primary and the early years of secondary, even though this 'foundation' is increasingly inappropriate for what would previously have been recognised as in any sense 'higher' education (if only for a minority). For those (mainly boys) who are not sent to college or even to work on 'apprenticeships' at 14 and for whom an alternative 'work-based route' has repeatedly failed to replace the old apprenticeships that finally collapsed along with heavy industry in the 1980s, 'widening participation' offers the substitute of a mass higher education. 'Experience of higher education' is intended to be available to fifty per cent of 18-30 year-olds by the end of the decade—a target that has already been achieved in Scotland but which will not be achieved in England (unless 'higher education' is redefined as 'higher education but not as we know it'!)

As well as being contradictory with the aspiration to widen participation to social groups hitherto under-represented in higher education, raising student fees instead of progressive income tax to fund university expansion has led to the intensification of traditional hierarchies already entrenched under Conservative governments. Divisions within and between the élite Russell Group of universities and other institutions, particularly those given university status after 1992, have also been reflected in divisions between 'researching', 'teaching' and 'training' universities. In the latter, competence-based courses, like many of the two-year Foundation 'degrees', remove the independent and critical thinking supposedly characteristic of higher education.

At the same time as higher education is thus turned into further education, parts of further education may be renamed 'higher' as further education follows the 2005 Foster Report recommendations for a new tertiary tripartism

separating academic sixth forms from technical centres of vocational excellence and generalist 'skills' colleges. Further education was given a new role by the 2006 White Paper *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* of 'equipping young people and adults with the skills for productive, sustainable employment in a modern economy.' So a narrow focus on vocational so-called 'skills' relegates the mass of students attending further education to work-related training programmes. For many, these will begin at 14 with vocational diplomas dictated by employer-run Sector Skills Councils. This is the government's *Skills Strategy*. Typically, Foster also recommended the private take-over of 'failing' colleges that New Labour has encouraged for schools and LEAs. 'LearningFare' for second language learners, those with special educational needs and others failed by the increasingly academically selective system may then be the only free (if compulsory) courses available.

There are now eight and a half million full-and part-time students and trainees in the UK. The Learning and Skills Council claimed to be funding six million learners in sixth forms, colleges and training schemes in and out of employment in 2004-5. In addition, there are nearly two million Higher Education Funding Council funded undergraduate students with half a million more postgraduates at the 2003 maximum. They are paying more and more for less and less as terms become shorter and classes larger in increasingly chaotic and virtual universities.

As further and higher education fees rise, mergers and closures of colleges and universities can be anticipated while the uncapping of the initial £3,000 limit on student fees may allow the 'Magic Five' universities (Oxbridge, Imperial, UCL and LSE) to privatise themselves out of the system by setting their own fees for different courses accountable to no one but the market. Despite limited bursaries, entry to different levels of further and higher education will then transparently be linked to ability to pay in the worst of both worlds—a mass higher education for the many combined with an élite higher education for the few.

Chapter 5

Although many of New Labour's education policies represent a move away from the comprehensive ideal back towards the 1944 system of tripartism and selection, the changes in class, occupation and workplace reorganisation that they are responding to are not unique. Neither are some of the particular policy initiatives that have been introduced. For example, the publically funded independent schools in Sweden have been cited as the inspiration for trust schools outlined in the 2006 Education Bill, while the plans for specialised

vocational education from age 14 are, government claims, modelled on practices elsewhere in Europe. U.S. influence has of course also been pervasive in a country derisively referred to as the 51st State of the Union ever since Mrs. Thatcher's embrace of Reaganomics.

These chapters set the previous narrative in this wider context. They relate the 'neo-liberalisation' of education to economic arguments for a so-called 'knowledge economy' and how this is reflected in the desires of successive UK governments to privatise and outsource significant parts of the education system and to allocate educational resources through 'market' principles rather than those of equality and social justice. Thus in England, first further education and the polytechnics were removed from local education authorities to compete for students, then higher education fees were introduced and then raised to create a market in students and now schools are being set 'free' to become responsible for their own admissions of students/pupils. Despite the attempts by opponents of the 2006 Act to limit this last move, at all levels of learning the ensuing competition is leading to merged institutions, closed departments and intensified teaching.

This process of what Colin Leys called 'market-managed consolidation' is happening despite increased funding. We will show that money has been spent ineffectively—on inspection and target-chasing by centralised agencies, rather than being given to schools, colleges and universities to use as they know best. For what is the use of the Chancellor's largesse if the extra money goes to consultancies and private partners in PFIs/PPPs, or is poured into Academies sponsored by businessmen in return for peerages and/or the privilege of indoctrinating pupils in 'creationism'? This is state-sponsored privatisation where the only equality between state and private will be when both are private. It is prompted not just by the urgency of Prime Ministerial pressure or concern for his 'legacy' but to meet the timetable set by the US-dominated WTO for transnational investment in education in this round of the GATS together with continuing European integration along 'free market' lines.

So these chapters expose these real reasons behind Blair and Brown's 'modernisation' and Cameron's support for it. The commitment of both main Parties is to privatise the remaining public services, following Mrs. Thatcher's denationalisation of industries, transport and communications in the 1980s. New Labour's 'modernisation' of education thus accompanies Post Office privatisation, together with what remains of NHS dentistry and the reintroduction of the internal market to hospitals with money following patients,

just as it does students in higher education, further education and, since the 2006 Act, schools.

Chapter 6

The concluding chapter of the book is perhaps the boldest in that it confronts the difficult task of constructing alternatives. Here it is unlike most other recent accounts of education, many of which have provided rigorous critiques but have held back from promoting remedies. Preceding chapters refer to the opponents of particular policies—striking school teachers and lecturers, anti-SATs campaigners, the National Union of Students and the Campaign for Free Education, journalists critical of government spin, researchers evaluating particular policies, parents opposing Academies, Liberal-Democrat and Nationalist opposition in Parliament joined by Labour back-benchers and Green and other national and local opposition. There has indeed been resistance but it has remained fragmented. What has yet to be developed is an alternative project as coherent and as wide ranging as New Labour's neo-Thatcherism, one that seeks to 'join up' the fragments of dissent and produce a distinct and viable alternative.

By way of a contribution to this task, the chapter outlines clear alternatives in the areas where New Labour has been seen to have failed. It draws upon a range of policy documents about curriculum and assessment practice produced by organisations like the National Union of Teachers and the National Union of Students, together with statements of intent from campaigning bodies across all sectors of education. It thus seeks to answer the question 'what is education for?' in ways that many other authors have avoided and it argues why, irrespective of its importance to economic performance, education does indeed still matter (Wolf, 2002). It distinguishes between an educated society and one that is schooled or merely 'certified' (Ainley 1999).

Finally, it seeks to intervene in those areas of policy where New Labour have enjoyed a monopoly and where progressives have had little to say. For example, it addresses the issues of 'personalised learning' in schools and further education with its use of ICT to promote learning. It opposes blaming the groups of young people who are failed by predominantly academic schooling and exposes their relegation to 'vocational' routes in training and education and to more restrictive social control in other aspects of their lives. It confronts accusations of 'dumbing down' in higher education and argues for 'free' rather than 'free market' universities and colleges. It contrasts education in and for citizenship with education for consumers in relation to a multicultural society and global

sustainability. It does not claim to provide a definitive alternative in the shape of a blue-or even *Redprint for Education*. But it will have served its purpose if teachers and students at all levels of learning can act upon the ideas and proposals it presents to restore and extend the sustainable education needed to contribute to human survival in the future.