

Introduction

This purpose of this paper is to categorise New Labour's education policy ideologically. Is there a 'Third Way' in New Labour policies—in education and elsewhere? Is it centrist, centre-left, updated social democratic, centre-right, neo-conservative, neo-liberal, Thatcherite, or post-Thatcherite? Is Labour's education ideology inchoate and contradictory—a mixture of ideologies? Or does its much vaunted policy priority of 'education, education, education' represent the triumph of Thatcherism, subservient to the interests of 'business, business, business'?

In *Part One*, I summarise various interpretations of New Labour's ideology across 'the big picture' of government policy in general. In *Part Two*, I set out forty-five of New Labour's education policies and identify their eight guiding principles. In *Part Three*, I briefly describe key aspects of various other ideologies in education. In *Part Four*, I identify continuities and discontinuities between New Labour and neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and social democracy, and discontinuities between New Labour and both liberal-progressivism and the Radical Left. In *Part Five*, I categorise New Labour's overall education policy as a mixture of ideologies, but one which is essentially neo-liberal, where social democratic and neo-conservative policies and rhetoric are used only insofar as they do not conflict with a neo-liberal imperative.

Education policy does not exist in an ideological vacuum in national and international political systems. It affects and is affected by other areas of policy, not least financial policy, and it is a major part of overall policy. Hence, *pace* the discontinuities and disarticulations inherent in any state policy, an analysis of New Labour's education policy can inform analyses and judgements about their overall ideological trajectory and about similar Third Way policies in other states, although some of the terminology may be specific to Britain.