

Urgent: solidarity needed in key dispute at Barnfield College in Luton

Over the last few years, draconian contracts have been introduced at several colleges just north of London in Hertfordshire and Essex, for example by Mark Dawe at Oaklands, Colin Hindmarch at Harlow, Fintan Donohue at North Herts and at Epping Forest College in Loughton. All have involved large scale redundancies and attempts to break UCU branches. The dispute at Barnfield College in Luton extends this pattern but also recalls the struggles that followed incorporation in 1993.

Barnfield is an FE college which leads a federation (the Barnfield Education Partnership Trust) which now includes two secondary academies, a primary free school and a studio school offering vocational courses for 14-19 year olds. A-level provision in the college is being moved to the academies within this federation. The college chief executive, Peter Birkett, leads the federation, although the college has its own principal. (Birkett was previously VP at Sheffield where he closed a technology department at the Castle site)

In allowing FE college corporations to dissolve themselves and transfer their assets and liabilities to another organisation, the Coalition's 2011 Education Act stipulated that a corporation's assets must then be used only for charitable educational purposes. However, Birkett plans to get round this by setting up two new companies. One of these would hold the college assets, carry out its educational work and attempt to generate surpluses, while the other would be an investment vehicle for private equity, receive an agreed portion of the surplus, invest in the college and sell management services.

Birkett has said: 'Colleges have been incorporated for around 20 years. They've become more businesslike, more entrepreneurial. But they need to step up now. . . *We need to sweat our assets.* . . There's a lot of research that suggests you maximise the educational standards and outcomes and financial benefits up to a turnover of about £180m. That's about 40 academies.'

In the week beginning 4 April 2011 the press reported that Moorlands, a 300-pupil prep school in

Luton, was to join the Barnfield Federation, which already included the two academy schools and the studio school, and which expected shortly to include a university technical college (UTC) as well.

In November 2011, Michael Gove visited Barnfield and told the media, 'What Pete Birkett has done is truly amazing - he has created an education model that others should follow.' Gove has also said that: 'I think Pete [Birkett] would not just give some independent schools a run for their money, he would out-compete them.'

In April, Birkett made public his plan to seek private equity investment, and on 16 June, ten days after an Ofsted report downgraded Barnfield from 1 to 3, Birkett was knighted for services to Further Education and the Academy Movement. Immediately after this he set about forcing lecturers at Barnfield onto a new contract, according to which the College will 'issue the days and times of delivery and will set the number of hours as the business requires'. Annual contact hours would rise from 651 to 806, representing an increase from 21 to 26 contact hours per week.

There are 174 full time lecturers at Barnfield plus part timers, and about 140 UCU members. All but 27 have now signed the new contract. (Those who have signed have received timetables which include up to 10.5 contact hours in a day and a 6-day working week.) The 27 non-signers started working out their notice from Monday 1 October, having been told that if they don't sign by 5 October they will be sacked for 'some other substantive reason'.

The UCU branch opposes the contract, demanding a cap on annualised hours, no more than 23 contact hours per week and withdrawal of dismissal notices. On Tuesday 2 October, it held a day of strike action, with lively, well supported pickets across the college's ten gates.

Messages of support, collections, and solidarity offers should be sent to Barnfield UCU branch vice chairperson Diane Parkins, contactable on diane.parkins@tesco.net.

A UCU concept of professionalism

Dan Taubman

UCU has produced an initial discussion document on the kind of professionalism that fits with how UCU members see themselves and their values and work. This document arose out of the discussions within UCU around our dispute in FE with the Institute for Learning (IFL) and the massive rejection by UCU members of the kind of professionalism that IFL and successive governments had pushed.

If we correctly rejected that concept of professionalism, what did we mean when we said we were professionals and what concept of professionalism could and would UCU and its members subscribe to?

As work began on answering these questions, it became clear that any concept of professionalism had to cover all UCU members and go beyond professionalism in FE. In addition to UCU HE members who teach, any policy had to encompass UCU members who are researchers, and those in academically related posts and those working in distinct professions such as health educators.

All UCU members carry multiple professionalisms and identities. The main issues are to try to define and describe a professionalism around what UCU members do as education workers and around their subject or area of work.

The need for UCU to develop a form of professionalism that fits UCU members and their position and values is, for a variety of pressing reasons, urgent. The most devastating neo-liberal attacks on education and on all public services for generations, along with the prospect of recession, austerity and rising unemployment and despair are but the most obvious. The discussion paper sets the context for this debate. It also attempts to define what the main characteristics of professionalism are. It sets out three of the most current common forms of professionalism: traditional, managerialist and democratic professionalism.

Drawing on the work of various academics, the paper sees the dominant form of professionalism, especially in the public sector now, as managerialist that is, stemming from a position of and being around a particular set of values that sees managerialism as unproblematic, neutral and a given part of the landscape of public education. Managerialism is seen

as inherently good, managers are heroes and should be given the room and autonomy to manage, and other groups should accept their authority. This form of institutional and ultimately state control needs a hegemonic concept of professionalism to ensure its dominance. Managerialist professionalism is this. Professionalism then becomes divorced from the social and political context in which it is practised. It relies on regulation and compliance rather than springing from the lived experience and knowledge of the participants, the professionals. Such a concept leaves aside the realities of the particular situation and context in which the professionalism is practised. It is against this that we can set up a UCU concept of professionalism.

The paper sets out a form of what is termed democratic professionalism and an accompanying activist identity as being the form of professionalism that UCU and its members can subscribe to. These concepts stem from the work of an Australian academic, Judyth Sachs. She worked in the early 1990s with the Australian teachers union against a backdrop of changes in education which we then became increasingly and despairingly familiar with. This democratic professionalism and activist professional identity are set out in some detail in the paper.

The paper also draws heavily on the work of Stephen Ball, the leading academic, on educational marketisation and privatisation in the UK. Ball sees the on-going dynamic of marketisation and privatisation as being facilitated by managerialism and the managerialist view of professionalism. Ball talks about performativity. For him this is the process whereby managerialist values and practices have been and continue to be pumped into all of us. However, these values and practices are so at variance with the values we came into education for that it can set up both internal and external conflicts for us. These have the potential of disabling us in the fight for the values and practices that we all came into education to propagate. This internalisation and both the internal and external conflicts it raises hollow out professionalism and leave education and us ripe to be picked off.

The paper also draws on the work of Ingrid Lunt around the development of a set of values for modern professionalism that can underpin democratic professionalism.

If we succeed in identifying and describing our professionalism, then it will greatly help in all aspects of UCU's work. We then campaign not only as education workers but also as professionals. It will impact on industrial relations policies at local and national level. As professionals we demand reward and opportunities for professional development that are commensurate with professional status. It should make recruitment of members clearer as we will be offering not only a trade union that fights for education workers, but also a professional organisation that fights for education itself. With managerialist professionalism and values so all-pervasive, democratic professionals become the guardians of true educational values.

The need for a different concept of professionalism than the one that we are offered is imperative across education. The school teacher unions are beginning to have similar debates now that the GTCE has been abolished.

The paper concludes by raising a series of unresolved questions that will need to be answered before we reach the stage of any final draft. These include: what is UCU's position with regard to separate professional bodies? How can the multiple professional identities, including one around educational work, be accommodated? There of course will be other questions that we will need to discuss.

So what happens now?

The paper went to UCU Education Committee in July. The Committee agreed that the paper was a good start to a discussion on professionalism within UCU. This is exactly why it was written. It aims to be the start of a debate rather than to give some final and authoritative position.

The UCU Education Committee also asked me to undertake to speak to branch and regional meetings on the issue. The paper will also take in particular sectors of UCU members: HE, FE, adult and community learning as well as defined curriculum and subject groups within UCU such as health educators, HE academically related staff and prison educators. It is intended that there will also be meetings in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. A national event on professionalism is intended for January / February 2013 and then it is hoped that a final paper could go in some form to UCU 2013 congress.

If you and/or your branch want(s) the full paper and/or the long or short summary, or even all three, contact Dan.Taubman@ucu.org.uk. Also contact me if you want me to speak at your branch or region, and I will try to get there, diary permitting. I am happy to receive written comments, but I can't promise at this stage to enter into long email debates with individuals. But really everything you have to say is welcome and will be considered. So let's begin the discussion!

S.E.A.

The Socialist Education Association (SEA) is affiliated to the Labour Party and seeks to inform and influence party policy on education. SEA members include parents, governors, teachers and other education professionals from all sectors and people with a general interest in education.

The SEA is seeking to engage positively with the Party and to support the development of popular policies which will help Labour win. We believe that Labour's policies on education should be based on our core values of equality, democracy and solidarity. SEA is committed to developing policy which is based on research and evidence of what works in the UK and abroad, and we offer the following key proposals: To develop democratic and comprehensive alternatives to marketisation and privatisation which divide communities and increase inequality. Like the NHS, the locally accountable community comprehensive school is a successful and popular expression of our values . we should champion it.

To develop a single, broad and inclusive framework for the curriculum from early years to adult education. We need an alternative to the bewildering choice of qualifications, which can limit opportunities and lead to segregation by social class. This should include choice, depth, breadth, stretch and progression, and value what learners know and can do so that all learners can be proud of their achievements.

To develop ways of targeting educational investment to reduce inequalities and promote achievement as an alternative to regressive spending cuts which hit the poorest hardest. This means keeping educational routes open for all learners throughout life.

To develop, with others, an education charter based on the principles of equality, inclusivity, democracy and solidarity.

To promote the development of locally elected bodies which would be responsible for scrutinising education provision in their area.

The SEA wishes to promote the widest possible debate about the future of education and welcomes any suggestions or responses to these proposals from all those with an interest in education.

If you are interested in joining, contact Martin Dore, General Secretary of SEA, at: socialisteducation@virginmedia.com

The lost Every Child Matters agenda

Ian Duckett

Every Child Matters (ECM) is both the manifestation of a fundamental principle and a significant piece of active legislation and yet both the coalition government and Labour seem to be letting it wither on the vine.

Apart from the vital nature of the issue, it is not just another policy which can be silently forgotten. It embodies a crucial principle which the Tories and their Lib-Dem allies want to trample into the political wasteland and that socialists should embrace as a banner, with the words of an entitlement for all children and young people to be healthy, to enjoy/achieve, to be economically supported and given positive support to be written in large red letters and congregated around.

It is crystal clear that they do not believe that ECM has a role to play in their education politics agenda and, along with Gove's bring-back-grammar-schools policy, thinly disguised as it is in the rags of a return to the unproven rigour of O-levels and ditching the more progressive GCSEs, we should not expect anything else. What is more surprising and worrying is Labour's willingness to abandon its commitment to those children who are not of high ability and can be so easily neglected.

ECM was a crucial and largely effective government initiative for England and Wales that was launched in 2002 as one of New Labour's flagship policies. It was ignited at least partly in response to the death of Victoria Climbié, but its remit was much more far-reaching.

It is one of the most important policy initiatives and development programmes in relation to children and children's services of the last decade, and as socialists and educators we should keep it in mind. For although the coalition government has moved away from the terminology and the funding for the ECM agenda, and although it is unclear how far the principles and structures of ECM will continue (in what seems like an attempt to let it wither and die), it is still policy, and the principles remain central to much of what the Socialist Education Association (SEA) and others are trying to achieve.

A little history then: ECM is the title of three government papers, leading to the Children Act 2004. ECM covers children and young adults up to

the age of 19, or 24 for those with disabilities. Its main aims are for every child and young person, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy, and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being. Each of these themes has a detailed framework attached whose outcomes require multi-agency partnerships working together to achieve it. The agencies in partnership may include children's centres, early years, children's social work services, primary and secondary health services, play-work and child and adult mental health services (CAMHS). In the past it has been argued that children and families have received poorer services because of the failure of professionals to understand each other's roles or to work together effectively in a multi-disciplinary manner. ECM seeks to change this, stressing that it is important that all professionals working with children and young people are aware of the contribution that could be made by their own and each other's service, and to plan and deliver their work accordingly.

It is the central goal of ECM to ensure that every pupil / student is given the chance to be able to work towards the goals referenced within it. Most of the legislation passed, and the guidance, applies to England and Wales, and all maintained schools have implemented the policy. Many FE colleges also have policies that commit them to the ECM agenda. A campaign to save ECM is a battle worth fighting. The left believes that every child matters. The right does not. That's fundamental.

Alarming, while ECM has not been revoked and . as far as I can tell . remains current in terms of policy, the publication has been archived on the DfE website and the link carries these words: "This publication has been archived. The summary text below [the summary is still there and does follow I.D.] was correct when the item was first published. It has been made available for reference use but should not be considered to reflect current policy or guidance"

This in itself would seem to make the case for a campaign.

The great exam rigging scandal: time to reassess exams

Sean Vernell

Every year at this time students, teachers and parents have become used to the usual chorus of the Tory Right mantra about a decline in standards and a dumbing down of exams. Such yearly rantings undermine the hard work of young people and dedicated teachers, reflecting the elitist views of the *Daily Mail* and their ilk that refuse to accept that ordinary working-class people can achieve at the same level as their middle or upper class cousins.

This year, however, the exam boards, clearly encouraged if not instructed by Government department, have gone one step further in denying working-class students access to further and higher education, by rigging the results.

Students who achieved the same results have been awarded different GCSE grades depending on when they sat the exam. The students who have been hit the most are on the borderline between a C and a D, many of whom come from BME backgrounds.

Doing this during the time period of one GCSE has exposed the arbitrary nature and manipulation of GCSE exams to suit a political agenda. This scandal has enraged students, parents and teachers across Britain and rightly so.

According to the *Guardian*, the worst affected GCSE English syllabus for grade reductions was

AQA. 96,000 students sat this exam this summer and 70 per cent achieved a D grade or below.

For over 25 years successive governments have created an education system where the exam is regarded as the sole and key determinant of knowledge and intelligence. Teachers have been pushed by league tables and Ofsted to place the emphasis of teaching on exam results. This has resulted in teachers spending most of their time during large parts of a child's education drilling them to pass exams. Teachers' complaints about the stultifying effect of this on ensuring that education is part of the development of happy and rounded human-beings have at best been ignored, and at worst labelled as the failed ideology of utopian lefties. Although, of course, within the elite schools debate and discussion is still embedded in the curriculum to ensure creative thinking.

Teachers have got on with implementing the exam-oriented syllabuses and have become adept at getting young people through exams. No longer is the A grade simply the domain of middle class children, many more working-class pupils are achieving good grades. Rather than celebrating these achievements we find that year on year, egged on by the right wing press, governments say that this can't

be right, the exams must be too easy. How can our universities tell who is really suited to attend when everyone gets good exam results they complain.

Governments have tried a number of different ways of sifting out the really able student who truly merits being at university. For example, they introduced the A*. However teachers have drilled their students too well and the wrong types were still getting A*s.

This is of course very useful for the Government. They will now be able to claim that the raising of fees has not deterred young people from applying to university. There are plenty of places left. Students just can't get the required grades, they will argue.

Grade inflation we are now told, by those who have been the main drivers of test mania in education, must be driven down! It is a nonsense, they cry, to expect a year on year rise - as there has been for the last 25, in GCSE grades. The exam boards therefore decided to rig the exam results to ensure that significant numbers of young people did not get the good grades that they should have.

However, students, parents and teachers are not fooled by this crass attempt to reimpose Cameron and his wealthy friends' control over the pathways to power and wealth.

The TUC conference voted unanimously to support a motion calling for students who sat their exams in January to be regraded, and for an enquiry into the fiasco. The Welsh Education Minister has intervened and instructed the Welsh Joint Education Board to regrade their students. We need to campaign for Gove to do the same.

This latest scandal has done more than simply expose their naked class cynicism and crookedness. This scandal has opened up an opportunity to take on the whole exam-orientated education system.

Of course we must ensure that we apply as much pressure as possible where we can to get the Government to reverse the grade boundary changes so that all those students get the grades they worked so hard for. However, we need to go further. We need to take a step back and look at what this fiasco has shone a light on: the bankruptcy of using exams as the main form of assessment in our education system.

At best exams are memory tests. We file tens of thousands of young people into dark and dingy church halls and gymnasiums, start a clock and fire a starting gun. No talking, no looking and no thinking . just scribble down as quickly as possible what you can remember.

The exam results do not really measure intelligence or how much knowledge one person has compared to another. But there again, they were never really meant to. Access to smaller class sizes, private tuition and a more varied curriculum meant that the system always favoured the sons and daughters of the wealthy, allowing them access to the pathways of power and privilege.

It is not a coincidence that one of the countries in which the market and competition has penetrated furthest into the

everyday life of its citizens is also the one in which young people sit more exams than their opposite numbers in other countries.

Exams teach the young from a very early age that competition is the natural way of life. It is human nature. Some are strong and some are weak. The strong go on to survive whilst the weak don't. Exams instil a sense of individualism: look after yourself and don't worry about others . in fact, distrust others. After all, they probably want to steal your knowledge.

We should argue to scrap exams as the main form of assessment. Continuous assessment has proven to be a far more effective way of developing the creative possibilities in every young person. It is not natural to teach young people to act as individuals or groups of individuals competing with each other. In fact, real life is about working collectively to achieve and create. If the restrictive frame of the market and competition was taken away we could really see what human-beings are capable of.

While invigilating exams and watching my students file in one by one, obediently taking off their hats, turning off their mobile phones, and anxiously waiting for the firing gun to start them on a journey that will unfairly decide their futures, I wander off into a dream. In the dream a student breaks the silence of the exam room, stands up and demands that all the students push all their chairs and tables together so that they can answer the question collectively - and they do. But then I wake up and see all those scared young people sat at their desks. This can't be right.

Where we stand:

Post-16 Educator seeks to defend and extend good practice in post compulsory education and training. Good practice includes teachers working with students to increase their power to look critically at the world around them and act effectively within it. This entails challenging racism, sexism, heterosexism, inequality based on disability and other discriminatory beliefs and practices.

For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.

Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.

Post-16 Educator works to organise readers/contributors into a national network that is democratic, that is politically and financially independent of all other organisations, that develops their practice and their thinking, and that equips them to take action over issues rather than always having to react to changes imposed from above.

Doing HE in FE - a success or a struggle?

(The author has chosen to remain anonymous.)

Commitment, motivation, enthusiasm and dedication should be recognised in all sectors. For example early years, primary, secondary and FE. But I think recognition of these qualities is needed more when delivering HE in an FE context, mainly because the sectors are so different and the role of an FE lecturer can be significantly different from that of an HE one. This article is not meant to stab people in the back or criticise institutional working practices; instead I wanted to write about my feelings, thoughts and experiences, and wondered if there were other practitioners working in the FE sector that had experienced anything similar.

Learning and teaching

I currently lead one Foundation Degree programme and one BA (Hons) programme in an FE college and have been doing so for the past four years, and gradually realised the workload and commitment of an HE lecturer in comparison to an FE lecturer. For example, the time it takes me to mark fifteen 4,000 word essays (Level 4 or 5) compared with 15 Level 2 portfolios; also the time it takes to prepare a session to facilitate learning at Level 4, 5 or 6 compared with Entry Level, or Levels 1, 2 or 3. When planning for an HE session I needed to read extensively round a topic, ensuring I was up to date with relevant research, government initiatives and consultations. I needed to consider how best to help students understand theoretical concepts and extend their current knowledge and understanding of a topic. Arguably, a lecturer could say the same for a Level 3 learner. The point I am trying to make is that at a higher level the lecturer needs sufficient time to plan a high quality session, for example in finding a suitable journal article for students to critique. As there was no additional time provided to research topics and new research in the field, it relied solely upon me as the lecturer reading around topics in my own time, which often impinged on personal and family commitments. I got very frustrated with the system and the fact that some staff would happily and comfortably accept this for their students and would refuse (as the unions would agree

with them) to carry out additional work in their own time unpaid. Having been told on a couple of occasions by a few staff, I quote: 'You don't have a family, you can afford to spend time reading and researching'. I find these comments hurtful and unfair and to some extent discriminatory (young female aged 33, single, no dependents). Surely all lecturers should put the same amount of effort into their work whether they have a family or not.

I was also very aware of the fact that students came to college between 4.30 and 9.00pm, and I had to take on board their learning dispositions after working a full day. Another point I am trying to make is that I needed additional time as an HE lecturer to deliver innovative, interesting, worthwhile, good quality sessions that were conducive to learning. At times over the last four years I have been expected to work 9am to 9pm with some breaks and duty hours (not direct teaching) and still provide high quality teaching for HE students in the evening. The point I would like to make here is that there needs to be more recognition and appreciation of workload, and empathy for staff who are doing their best for their students at all times in difficult circumstances.

Having taught in a traditional HE setting, I would still choose to deliver sessions to Level 4, 5 and 6 learners in an FE context, because there is more opportunity to get to know the students and build a rapport with them, rather than lecture to a large group of 50 and never get to know them as individuals or professionals. Activities can be tailored to small group work, whereas in a lecture theatre the room is not always flexible and versatile, and limits the learning and teaching approaches. Some of the benefits to learners doing HE in FE are not being subjected to long lectures where they sit passively; instead, they can get involved and engage in a more co-constructive way that promotes learning. I was very pleased with a Year 1 Foundation Degree group having the opportunity to make a short film about children's rights. There are more opportunities for students to build positive working relationships with their peers where they try to understand each other's views, values and beliefs. I believe there are clearly some advantages of delivering HE in an FE context. The students I worked with were

able to access HE provision locally and this was an added benefit.

Working environment

A typical day in the office work room would include six staff, kettle boiling, general chattering, office phone ringing, students knocking at the door and a colleague's mobile phone ringing to notify them of a text. However, I was expected to mark a potential 1st class (A grade) level 6,500 word essay that was comprised of theoretical depth and critical analysis. Situations like these were difficult to cope with at times, particularly when I had to meet deadlines and mark twelve Level 6 essays, and moderate the work, all within three weeks.

Furthermore, it is only this last academic year that we were allocated our own computer on our desks. Previous to this I worked in the same office work room with six staff with just two computers. This added additional stress and tension to what was already a demanding role. What with all the added stress and workload pressure, the external examiner for the courses stated that: 'The quality of teaching and learning is on a par with other HE institutions' I can help thinking this is what senior managers want to read but, I argue, at what expense?

I am not a great mathematician and those who know me really well can verify this, but a typical HE lecturer might teach approximately 550 hours in a year compared with an FE lecturer (delivering FE and HE courses) who would teach for approximately 880 hours. There is a significant difference in teaching hours and there isn't parity. I want to make it clear that I am not in favour of parity between the sectors, as they are different, but FE institutions may like to consider the needs, demands, roles and responsibilities of lecturers delivering HE programmes.

Raising the profile of HE in FE

Even though students are studying an HE course in an FE college they have never really gained recognition from the staff they work with. For example, the following comments have been made:

'You are doing a real degree; I thought you were just going to night school.' and 'I can't believe people can do part-time degrees when proper students study full time for three years . . . ' What are your thoughts on students gaining a degree from an FE college?

Recognition

I contacted the marketing department to inform them that one of my students gained a first class honours

degree and I wanted an article in the college newsletter informing people of this, and it was a straightforward process, but I couldn't help feeling a little disheartened when I read the final comment from the principal of the college: 'Many students at the college are experienced professionals in their field looking to upskill, and improve their knowledge and personal development. We are keen to encourage more professionals to explore further education routes to higher education, and to continue to deliver first class teaching in FE institutions. Congratulations to the student on her achievement. I am sure she will inspire more mature students to realise their potential.'

It is clear from the quote above that there is no recognition or thanks to the staff who go above and beyond (sometimes to the detriment of their families and personal life) to ensure the students of his college succeed. Equally, in his defence, he may not realise - or even consider - the additional effort and hours that are required to deliver first class HE teaching within an FE context. Limited praise, recognition and appreciation from all levels (from other colleagues to senior managers) in providing quality HE sessions in an FE context was always a frustration of mine. The following quote could be considered by all employers in all work settings: 'Appreciation is a fundamental human need. Employees respond to appreciation expressed through recognition of their good work because it confirms their work is valued. When employees and their work are valued, their satisfaction and productivity rises, and they are motivated to maintain or improve their good work. Praise and recognition are essential to an outstanding workplace' (Harrison, 2012, www.cuttingedgepr.com).

I write this article on my final day at the college, as I embark on a different kind of academic journey, but I feel I can now confirm my feeling of 'not belonging' to an institution, and got very frustrated with other staff when professionalism, dedication, creativity, innovation and hard work was not always something that was at the forefront of their work . . . or if it was, it was too much like hard work! Having said this, there were staff who I worked with at the college who, when I spoke with them, understood me and my rationale and desire for wanting to try new approaches. I would like to think that if I was ever in the same situation with similar working conditions I would do the same for the students, and provide them with a service they deserve as HE students studying in an FE college. I have come to the conclusion that working in education can often be a struggle, but it is up to the individual lecturer to make it a success!

Welcome to the panopticon: blogs as machines of educational surveillance

Cheryl Reynolds

Blogs as educational platforms, wherein learners are compelled as part of their programme of study to make public representations of their learning, are often presented as a democratising, empowering medium. Student-centred, participative and flexible, they belong to the learner who has control over the look, feel and content of their own site, in ways that cannot be achieved within a traditional Virtual Learning Environment. This article explores the counter argument, that blogs can potentially disempower and objectify learners and cause them to self-censor in ways that would not occur in a traditional classroom. It arises out of a conversation with a learner who said that, for her, blogging felt like entering the panopticon.

The panopticon is a type of prison building designed by the social reformer Jeremy Bentham, such that prisoners knew not at any given moment whether they were being watched. This was a kind of therapeutic surveillance which, it was thought, would cause the prisoner to internalise the imagined watcher's standards of behaviour, so that the surveillance would eventually become unnecessary.

Similarities with the hyper-visible medium of the blog are evident. The output of the learner, made persistently available online, may be viewed at any time or not at all. Unless a comment has been left, the learner cannot know who has read their work or when or with what level of attention they've done so. Nor can they gauge the imagined reader's response. Moreover, comments may be left by visitors who punish the author but without the usual recourse to a reply, since the author has no guaranteed way of following the commenter and defending their ideas or making their responses heard. To what novel pressures does this subject the learner?

Foucault made masterful use of the concept of the panopticon in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979). He argued that we live in an increasingly panoptic society, evident not just in prisons, but in factories, military institutions, hospitals and schools, where we are constantly subject to the vigilance of intersecting gazes

(Foucault, 1979, p217). This, he argues, renders the exercise of power over each individual complete, since covert, subversive or rebellious behaviour are subject to the constant threat of discovery and punishment.

The potential for covert observation is a defining characteristic of the blogging medium. The consciousness of the gaze of others might conceivably, therefore, cause learners to self-regulate, constantly amending and editing their output on the basis of the imagined readers' perspectives. Learners may do this regardless of whether or not they are being watched, particularly in the context of a taught course with links to assessment. Further, their output is eminently auditable, searchable for key words and retrievable in a way that spoken utterances can never be. The frequency of the use of particular words can be used to trigger intensified surveillance and evidence of transgression is easy to locate, reproduce and be used against the author.

There is, however, a more optimistic view of the educational potential of blogs. Benign surveillance, focused on developing or liberating the learner, is a possibility. Blogs facilitate what Basil Bernstein called an 'invisible pedagogy' (1990, p201). The tutor provides the space in which the learner is enabled to act and to make his own mark. As more and more of the learner becomes visible to the tutor, she is able to make and remake increasingly valid judgements about him and what he needs to do next. The tutor's pedagogical thinking is invisible to the learner who is developing through what he sees as play. Unconscious of the developmental agenda of the teacher, the learner acts in a less inhibited, more natural way and therefore makes clearer his readiness to develop further, as well as how this might be achieved in his particular case.

Because blogs are a far less formal medium than more traditional channels of academic exchange, such as essays, written portfolios and reports, playful participation of this kind is more frequent. Learners' contributions are often more clipped, informal or even arch than would normally be thought

acceptable. The tutor is enabled to let this pass to a much greater degree than would be thought necessary in other media and all of this tends towards an invisible pedagogy par excellence.

Bernstein argued that invisible pedagogies were favoured by the new middle class those who work in the field of symbolic control, usually within the public sector. These pedagogies were expensive because they entailed an open ended, resource-hungry mode of delivery with high accommodation costs and the need for a good student to staff ratio within large educational spaces. His observation was that the old middle class whose employment has a direct relation to the economic field and the production, distribution and circulation of capital (1990, p204) favoured visible pedagogies instead. These pedagogies are typified by overt surveillance, articulated rules and publicly shared transitional stages between one level of learning and the next. Learners can be piled high and sold cheap and would be encultured into a compliant, punctual mode of behaviour suited to working in factories. This, of course, suits the requirements of old industrial, manufacturing interests.

This paper argues that, whilst these old middle class incentives to favour the visible persist, some of their motives for resistance to invisible pedagogies have fallen away with the advent of online learning. The spaces and resources are virtual and therefore cheap, once the IT equipment is in place. Much of this has already been and continues to be purchased with public money (Simmons, 2006) or is bought by the learner. Similarly, the delivery models facilitated by online learning have inherent economies of scale built into them. Bentham's design was always conceived of as a utilitarian solution, giving the greatest good for the smallest possible investment. He called his panopticon a mill for grinding rogues honest, and idle men industrious (Bentham, J. & Conway. S. ed., 1994, p226). Blogs and other Web 2.0 technologies might be used as just such another mill, an economically efficient way to produce the flexible knowledge workers needed by the global economy in sufficient numbers to make their labour costs increasingly cheap.

The imagined outcome of the whole process here is a key factor in judging whether the surveillance might be thought of as benign or malignant. For who and for what purpose is the learning being pursued? If we are concerned only with churning out workers, ready to think for themselves but also to make all of their decisions open to public scrutiny and critique, then it may be that we become implicated in the reproduction of inequality and exploitation. The pecuniary concerns of global capital are brought to bear upon the learner through our agency and we make our learners vulnerable to forces from which

we have a duty to insulate and protect them.

This is something we ought to be wary of and to resist. We must not assume that blogs are neutral environments when we compel learners to participate in them as part of a taught programme of study, particularly when they are linked to assessment. If, however, we educate learners about the attendant risks and ways to ameliorate those risks, we might also use the medium to help people to develop the language, knowledge and behaviours that will enable them to participate in those larger conversations about what society is and what it ought to be. We might use blogs to liberate learners from factors that have hitherto militated against their achievement in face to face situations, such as their gender, age, disability or ethnicity. Blogs might provide them with a stage upon which they can rehearse or assume new professional identities, which they can use to form coalitions and challenge controversial ideas or what they see as social injustice.

We might then, with Foucault, say: My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism (Foucault 1983, p231).

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'New thinking' reveals only paralysis

Patrick Ainley reviews Louis Coiffait (ed.) *Blue Skies. New thinking about the future of higher education, a collection of short articles by leading commentators*

Introduction

Engels . or was it Lenin? - says somewhere that when many different views are presented on the same subject they quickly get worn down like stones in a river that become indistinguishable from one another. So at the launch last week by David Willetts of this latest collection of *Blue Skies* thinking edited by Louis Coiffait with contributions from Master of the New College of the Humanities AC (sic) Grayling, followed by the Campaign for the Public University, John Holmwood, NUS president Liam Burns was the only speaker to ruffle the quiet waters of the rarefied yet somehow stifling atmosphere of the House of Commons in which genuine disagreements and contradictions metamorphosed into gentle jokes and academically interesting point scoring.

Similarly, the Pearson Think Tank publisher of these collections presents itself as a centre for disinterested discussion but . like other mass market publishers, such as Longmans and News International . Pearson, which owns *The Financial Times* and examiners Edexcel, is a major player in today's edu-business. For instance, it sponsored the two-years BTEC degree, advocated here for delivery over a four term year by Roxanne Stockwell, MD of Pearson's HE Awards division. Willetts supported this independent award in FE that the Association of Colleges only just backed away from endorsing as the flagship qualification independent of HE that they are still looking for.

But now the dust is settling on the uncertainties of this year's applications with trebled fees alongside the free market in extra top AAB+ students allowed by government, though it will be a while before the overall figures by institution and subject become clear, it appears that overall, as UCAS has reported: One in twenty young people who would have been expected to apply on the basis of past trends, did not do so . about 15,000 people with latest acceptances down

by 30,000. Even allowing for the demographic dip that Willetts claims explains the reduction, this is a lot less than some . including this writer . had predicted. With the bubble bursting, particularly for the 20 per cent of undergraduates on business-related programmes, even Ken Starkey, Professor of Management at Nottingham Business School, implies in his chapter that these may come to be seen as sub-prime investments. On the other hand, as Martin Allen and I have also asked, what other option is there for many young people? There are, however, several oddities in the emerging picture.

One is that the anticipated swing towards attending local universities whilst living at home to save money has not materialised, leaving many Million+ institutions badly down . particularly in the hardest hit everywhere humanities, social sciences and modern languages. So it seems that one cost effect has been that if you are going to pay so much for a degree, you may as well go away to university for the full student experience. Where the cost savings are more substantial HE in FE degrees may have picked up.

Two is that AAB+ applicants were also down, perhaps because teachers over-predicted their grades to gain offers and/or because standards were raised . shades of GCSE! This left many of the Russell Group forced to go into clearing to make up their numbers. (In fact, my Greenwich colleague Ian McNay in a forthcoming paper distinguishes between the Real Russells who, as is their wont, continued reducing their undergraduate intake to increase demand and those outside the Magic Five who can no longer afford to do this.)

Blue skies up above

So what light does the latest *Blue Skies* throw upon this murky picture? The editor says that it aims to

present a positive picture for the future of higher education but few of the contributors, apart from David Willetts, would seem to agree with him. Even AC Grayling, whose heavily endowed £18,000 *p.a.* New College of the Humanities seems a front for the traditional education for its own sake popularised more widely by Stefan Collini at Cambridge, relies upon a liberal arts model against which Grayling concedes trends towards vocationalism and applied science / technology . . . appear to run in the opposite direction though not recognising that there are not enough jobs for all science and engineering graduates, let alone apprenticeships leading to employment.

Following in first-name alphabetic order, Andrew McGettigan, whose indefatigable blogging has exposed the financial investment behind Grayling's facade, bluntly states: 'What we will see will resemble what happened to English football after the formation of the Premier League in 1992 . . . but without relegation or promotion'. As a result, a minority of elite institutions will be protected, while the mass HE system will be disciplined by a new market in which they will be joined by newly designated institutions joining the fight for market share. 'With increasing examples of degree mills . . . and the advent of mass online HE provision there is a looming issue of quality'.

Carl Gilliard, of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), alludes to this issue in his report of £V fraud that the AGR aims to combat with an HE Achievement Report to reliably distinguish between vague and inconsistent degree classifications since recruiters often rely on the 2.1 cut off point. Usual suspect Carl Lygo, the grossly remunerated Chief Exec of private BPP Professional Education, sees a commercially minded private HEs simply providing quality education via iPads and iPhones! By contrast, Claire Callender from Birkbeck College of London University with David Wilkinson of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research are not self-interested in reminding us of largely forgotten part-time students. They genuinely believe that increasing by part-time study the percentage of the UK workforce qualified to level 4 or above from its current 31 per cent will improve the UK's competitiveness and economic strength with the proviso that the skills supposedly represented by this certification need to be used effectively.

David Willetts's contribution confirms *inter alia* that this is very unlikely to be the case under the present government of supply-side reregulating free-marketisers.

Graham Spittle, Chair of the Higher Education Commission's inquiry into the future of postgraduate education, moves the question of quality up the system to post-grad level but without providing any response to the free market that has existed there for some time beyond an implied concentration of provision to match leading institutions in competitor countries.

De Montfort University's Square Mile Project described by Dominic Shellard and John Craig demonstrates the university as a public good through engagement with its local community and this is broadened by John Holmwood to contest the reduction of *Education from a public value to a positional good* and education . . . to poorly resourced training. He sees the competition for top AAB+ students as a stopgap for the removal of the £9,000 cap after which fees will move further apart inflating a social with an intellectual elite and reinforcing social privilege over time. Yet while he indicates the complicity in this process of elite HE by diverting their income towards maximising their performance in international rankings the Campaign . . . which exists mainly as a website . . . does not campaign instead to improve the quality of undergraduate education nor to *Making our higher education system accessible to all* as John Widdowson urges on behalf of the mixed economy of F&HE colleges.

'Thick HE'

This raises, as Liam Burns does, *The idea of a tertiary education system*, looking to Scotland to challenge educational categories and path dependencies that we have become locked into . . . to stop seeing progression as linear, only ever moving up the scale of educational levels combining F&HE in what Ruth Silver called 'Thick HE'. These are ideas that are familiar to readers of PSE and that have been around for a long time but without being developed beyond schemes of Credit Accumulation and Transfer to think how to reorganise the local, regional and national provision of education and training that has been fragmented and then centralised by the new market-state. NUS once proposed a Think Tank for the Student Movement that needs to be reconvened to meet this challenge.

Involving students and teachers together in reflecting upon and critiquing their educational experiences is the only way to combat the corrosion of learning at all levels. This corrosion is a consequence of education's commodification in measurable packages for quantifiable assessment of both teachers and taught. Unconnected to possibilities for practice, displaying knowledge for evaluation has replaced learning with test-taking, turning education into social control. Broken down for the performance of behavioural competence at one end while cramming for traditional exams at the other, this simulacrum of learning disguises the decline in achievement all teachers recognise but which goes unmentioned in this otherwise comprehensive collection.

(For reasons of space and to avoid an even more wooden review, it has not been possible to include all the contributors to this pamphlet; read it for yourself at pearsonblueskies.com.)

‘Sustaining Alternative Universities’

The UK Free University Network announces its collaborative research conference, to be held on 1-2 December in Oxford

Following from an inaugural meeting held in early 2012, the UK Free University Network is calling out to members of free/alternative university projects who wish to participate in a conference with a more focused objective.

In recent years, we have witnessed the accelerated neoliberal capitalist colonisation of the university. In the UK and far beyond, many students are now priced out of higher education and academics find themselves subservient to the logic and interests of capital. In response to this intolerable reality, many groups of scholars, students and others are coming together to create other types of free universities.

The Sustaining Alternative Universities conference, as a space for coordinating research and sharing knowledge and experience, seeks to support these projects in building a national movement of individuals and organisations dedicated to the creation and development of democratic, critical and ultimately sustainable higher education communities.

The successes of this movement hinge on its sustainability. How can we build, develop and maintain truly sustainable educational communities outside the existing educational frameworks? Is the question upon which our collective investigations and discussions should be founded. Therefore, our collective task is to conceptualise, research, imagine and, ultimately, cultivate a sustainable movement based on a network of locally-based, sustainable, free universities. We believe that this conference can help us undertake this task through a three-step process.

Step one: history. An intrinsic part of building sustainability today is to learn from the history of projects of popular, democratic and radical education in the UK and beyond. We invite representatives of each free university to conduct and present research into the history of these traditions in their specific locality, drawing on their own particular influences. Researchers should keep in mind the practical purpose driving this research and consider issues such as: Who participated in these efforts? How were they structured,

organised and sustained? What was the significance of their historical and spatial context? What lessons can be derived from these efforts for our own endeavours today? We hope that this shared research effort will allow us to contribute to mapping the history of such work, trace the roots of our own network, and identify ways it can inform current projects.

Step two: dialogue. The next step is to engage in dialogue with one another, and with our histories. We need to both imagine our ideals and talk freely and openly about the challenges and obstacles that impede our ambitions and objectives today. We need to name the material, social and subjective conditions that constrain the actualisation of our imagination and hopes. At the conference, we aim to draw on our collective experiences in democratic education to create a supportive, democratic space in which participants feel able to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas in these areas.

Step three: practice. Finally, we need to take the lessons and ideas derived from our historical research and dialogue and put them into practice. The conference will culminate in a session in which we all make plans for practical action to take things forward on a local and national level.

We are interested in collaborating and co-operating with others engaged in this general project. Beyond the Free University Network itself, we particularly welcome:

É Academics defending and campaigning for the public university. We have not forsaken the mainstream university, and many of our members are not only academics or students, but also active in defending the public university. We recognise the rich traditions of critical pedagogy within the university and the enduring possibilities of its democratic promise. We welcome contributions from all university-based and committed academics.

É Members of the Co-operative Movement. Clearly, the co-operative model of organisation offers much for free universities today to draw on, and at

least one in the UK is explicitly organised upon co-operative principles. We welcome members of the Co-operative Movement who might contribute to our historical and contemporary understanding of co-operative education, and/or who would like to build bridges between these two movements.

É University workers who are not academics. All too often, non-academic staff working in universities are marginalised within or excluded from these discussions. Their contributions, knowledges, experiences and possibilities are overlooked. We seek to redress this situation and invite all those making invaluable contributions to higher education in ways that are not specifically academic to participate in this conference.

É Students and anyone desiring to learn. Critical pedagogy aspires to break down hierarchical boundaries between students and teachers, and to expand the right of learning to everyone whether they occupy the role of student or not. In the democratic universities we envisage, students shape their own learning experiences. We welcome contributions from students, past, present and future.

É Members of Occupy Research and other research collectives.

É Anyone who is active in creating alternative institutions in other areas of social life, particularly in education. There is much we can learn from each other.

This is a critical pedagogical and political project, which is open to the validity, truth, importance and insight in a diversity of methods and ways of expressing knowledge. We believe that narrative . telling stories . is a particularly important means for reaching the personal and social heart of the obstacles and challenges that confront us in our ambitions to create democratic and sustainable learning communities.

The conference will be held on the weekend of 1-2 December 2012.

In the spirit of the Occupy movement, we have decided to host this conference on higher education in Oxford. It will be hosted at a fully-accessible and family-friendly community centre.

We recognise the high cost of transport and accommodation and ask those in a position to offer financial and in-kind contributions to help unwaged participants to attend. A system will be created to make this transparent and possible. Please check the website for further details.

If you are interested in participating in the conference and/or in its planning and preparation, please write to us at freeuniversitynetwork@gmail.com.

For more information and to register, please visit the website at <http://sustainingalternatives.wordpress.com/>.

Opposing the crisis in higher education

We reprint here the text of a petition posted by Kirsten Forkert on the UCU activists e-group on 18/9/12, and later sent as a letter to the Daily Mirror.

We are approaching the first term under a new regime in UK Higher Education, which represents a seismic shift in the nature of public provision, marked by the removal of the cap on tuition fees. As academic staff we wish to declare our continued opposition to a system which will increasingly exclude working class students and others from non-traditional backgrounds and promote higher education as a privilege. The irony is that while students are paying hugely inflated fees (albeit as loans), universities are making cuts in academic, professional and support jobs which will seriously affect the extent and quality of educational provision. The scapegoating of London Metropolitan University as part of a government publicity stunt to bolster its immigration policies, at the same time as university support services are to be contracted out, exemplifies the political nature of the attack on Higher Education. The entry of Pearson Education into the market demonstrates the developing privatisation of Higher Education and, as in health and social care, the prospect of large multi-nationals becoming key providers.

We are concerned that education is being shaped by a narrow neoliberal business agenda and that critical education, particularly within the humanities, arts and social sciences, is being marginalised. The assault on Higher Education is accompanied by an attack on funding for trade union, adult and community education. The current crisis should (and is) leading educationalists, students, parents, academics and trade unionists to consider alternatives to this exclusive and increasingly class-based system.

Should we be trying to build 'popular universities'?

Colin Waugh

The most significant aspect of Gramsci's thought is his thought about education. This in turn is the single most important body of thinking about education - and maybe also about how politics should develop - that is available to us now, but it consists more of questions and hypotheses than of achieved formulations. It centres on the political and general education of adults from working-class and other non-ruling-class backgrounds.

Gramsci's approach to this has two main aspects, each linked to a real-life form of provision.

The first aspect is the process by which thinkers, organisers and teachers could be produced. This is linked to the way the editorial board of the weekly magazine *L'Ordine Nuovo* operated in 1919-1920. In this, a group of traditional intellectuals who were socialists and a group of industrial workers who were both union activists and autodidacts collaborated on producing this publication, which was aimed mainly (and up to a point successfully) at industrial workers in Turin. In the process, these two groups engaged in both reciprocal education (ie the workers taught the traditional intellectuals about industry, and the traditional intellectuals taught the workers about the reasoning processes normally monopolised by people like themselves) and in mutual education (ie they worked together to learn things that neither group knew about at the outset). In short, the thinkers, organisers and teachers produced themselves by their own collective efforts, but not in isolation from either the dominant culture or the concerns of most people.

The second aspect is how broader layers of the then Italian population (ie including peasants, artisans, intellectuals and managers as well as working-class people) could be validly educated. This is linked to points made by Gramsci about the Popular University in Turin.

The first popular universities were set up in France in the late 1890s, against the background of the Dreyfus case, by a coalition which included the anarchist Georges Deherme and influential liberals. They spread rapidly across Catholic countries with large peasant populations, especially Spain and Italy. Ideologically they were linked to the positivist tradition that goes back through Comte to Saint-

Simon. Between 1901 and 1918 the popular universities in Italy, of which the first was in Mantua, were linked by the publication *L'Università Popolare*, edited by the anarchist Luigi Molinari. Although they initially attracted working-class students, by 1910, especially in urban areas, a majority of students were middle class. In this respect, then, they developed in a similar fashion to the university extension movement in England.

Gramsci made the following main points about the Popular University in Turin. First, there was a powerful appetite amongst workers and other less well-off people for the education that it purported to provide. But, secondly, what it actually provided was a fragmentary and sub-standard version of a conventional university curriculum. This was because, thirdly, it was dominated by positivist approaches to knowledge. Fourthly, this in turn reflected the fact that the main philosophical movement in Italy, referred to by Gramsci as immanentism and revolving round the idealist philosophers Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile (both of whom had originally been students of the most prominent Italian Marxist, Antonio Labriola), refused to involve itself in such initiatives.

It was in the context of the Popular University in Turin that Gramsci made his two most important statements about how education for adults beyond the circle of existing activists should be organised. Translations of these statements can be found on pp 64-67 and pp 327-335 of *A Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935*, edited by David Forgacs. Both passages, and the second one in particular, contain complex and extremely far-reaching arguments about what Gramsci thought valid popular universities would need to be like, and why socialists should put a lot of effort into organising them.

To sum up: Gramsci thought in terms of two inter-related phases: a phase in which activists educate one another (as in the *Ordine Nuovo* Editorial board) and a phase in which they educate wider circles (as in popular universities if conducted properly).

It is worth considering whether this model is applicable now, and - if so - what we could do to start implementing it.

How can we take this project forward?

We print here the text of a talk given by Colin Waugh at a meeting on independent working-class education held in London on 12/5/12 plus a draft short course outline (comments welcome).

My aim in this talk is to identify some organisational measures that I feel we ought to consider in the reasonably near future, for example between now and a year from now.

I assume that we are trying to expand to some extent the circle of people who take part in the IWCE project and also that the broad aim of that circle is to offer to a still broader set of other people forms of education in such areas as labour and working-class history, including at the level of ideas.

I personally think that the people to whom we should be aiming to provide this are mainly those who find themselves being drawn into the position of shop stewards or the like in a variety of workplaces, and people not in employment who are drawn into analogous roles in community campaigns, struggles over housing, welfare rights and the like. For a start, then, we need something like a leaflet aimed at attracting the attention and awakening a desire to be involved on the part of people like that.

At the same time, we would have to produce another leaflet that complements the first one. This second leaflet would need to be addressed to people who have been involved in (especially union) activity for a longer time and hold branch, regional or even national positions which allow them to act as gatekeepers with regard to what stewards can and cannot undertake. (For example, they can decide who goes on an official TUC or union course.)

The first of these leaflets at least needs to be extremely succinct - at the very most two sides of A4, and preferably less. And an initial version of it needs to be produced soon - for example within a month or so. But despite this it needs to be written very carefully, and so not just by one individual but by a group which includes people with different perspectives who can correct one another; in short, by a working party.

Once written, the leaflet needs to be distributed. That implies a set of people who will give it out - or ensure that it is given out - in the right places to the right people. But then there has to be some sort of collective decision about where, when and to whom to give it out. It seems likely that the list of distribution points would include union branch meetings and perhaps annual conferences, but there must be quite

a lot of other possible outlets. So there also need to be people who take responsibility for this and who make sure that, at least in an experimental way, it is done, and that feedback comes in about which distributions are successful.

Someone who takes and reads such a leaflet will hopefully want to know more, so the leaflet must include something about where to find out more. Or at least there must be either a phone number and/or, more likely, a website that people can go to. This in turn requires, then that we have a person or group of people that can set up and maintain this website, or at least answer questions on the phone - otherwise the whole leaflet thing would be largely pointless.

But what will the website say? In essence, presumably, it will have to offer some sort of provision of education that we can make, for example an event or course that people who inquire can attend.

From this it appears to me, then, that at the same time as producing such a leaflet we would have to be working out a course or day-school or even just a specimen session that we could offer or invite people to. And that would mean, not a meeting of the type we have had up to now, which have been mainly for people who have already thought about this sort of thing, and/or have themselves actually provided it in the past. It would, rather, have to give people like fairly new shop stewards or similar an experience of the kind of education we want them to undertake. This experience would have to be a realistic and truthful one - ie it would not present a false picture aimed at selling IWCE and luring people in - and also one which would genuinely motivate them to want more. Such a leaflet then, would need to be carefully and honestly designed, and there would have to be people who were willing and able to provide them at quite short notice and in a flexible fashion.

Alternatively, and this is something we might want to discuss now, we could try to set up such sessions and then publicise them. That is, rather than having a general leaflet as suggested so far, the first leaflet we put out could be an advert aimed at attracting people to a session already laid on.

But, again, whether we choose one of these options or try both, such a leaflet would necessarily have to

offer not just an experience - of discussion, talk or whatever - that was enjoyable, intriguing etc in itself, but also the prospect of a structured sequence of some kind, with a defined outcome or goal which would be weighty enough for people who are already both doing a job and grassroots union activity, to commit themselves to - and which a reasonable proportion of those starting out would stick to.

This seems to mean that, at the same time as designing the leaflet, providing the website or helpline and setting up the tasters we would have to work out to a threshold level at least one, and perhaps two or three, sustainable course structures. Such courses could be quite short - for example three sessions, or a weekend - but would have to be longer than single-session tasters. And there would have to be something

which assured a student who completed one that he or she had done so.

All this presumes also that we could mobilise the resources and facilities - for example, somewhere for the taster or course to take place, one or more people to conduct it, reprography and so on - and that we have some means of paying for anything required that has to be paid for.

Assuming that these things could be done, even if only in one or two areas, it would be necessary for the people who take part in organising them to come together and review how they had gone, and then feed this into planning for further ones and into attempts to conduct them in more areas and/or with different people.

IWCE Project: proposed short course for activists

Overall title: Democracy in Our Organisations

Intended students: people who have recently become shop stewards or taken on similar roles

Overall aim: to help activists think and act democratically

Time: three one-and-a-half hour sessions

Session 1: Is democracy a luxury?

Aim: to get people to think about democracy and how organisations are run

Activities:

- short talk on approaches to democracy in socialist and trade union history
- questionnaire based on frequently made statements about democracy
- list examples of real and fake democracy
- define criteria for real democracy

Session 2: How do I make a proposal?

Aim: to help people judge others' proposals (eg motions) and put forward their own

Activities:

- short talk on demagogy and democracy
- look at arguments on either side of an issue
- brainstorm likes and dislikes about how people speak in meetings
- review dos and don'ts when drawing up a proposal
- review dos and don'ts when preparing and making a speech

Session 3: Is the chairperson being fair?

Aim: to help people judge whether meetings are democratic and intervene from the floor

Activities:

- short talk on good practice in handling proposals and making decisions in our organisations
- review rules, terms and underlying principles used in labour movement-type meetings
- discuss examples of chairs' decisions
- investigation: what can ordinary members do to make meetings more democratic?

FHE professionalism and the IWCE tradition

Colin Waugh

There have traditionally been two main elements in FE, one deriving ultimately from statutory schooling . the day continuation model . and the other from mechanics institutes and the FHE that developed out of them . the technical college model. (More recently an element deriving from adult education, especially ESOL-related, has been added.) The technical college model has been undermined by the de-industrialisation (actually a much more complex set of changes) that began under Thatcher. For example, when I started my first full time lecturing job at Tottenham College in 1970 there were in the Engineering section where I was based three lecturers who, having started out as apprentices, had progressed through evening study etc to become chartered engineers, which would be uncommon now, despite the vastly expanded number of FE lecturers with degrees.

FE lecturers now are not professionals in any clear sense, but it is still vital for UCU members to work out a valid model of professionalism for themselves. The starting point for doing this should be William Morris's document 'Useful Work Versus Useless Toil'. We, like all other workers, have . and should assert . a right to do socially necessary and personally fulfilling work. For this purpose we should put to one side traditional HE (ie the field where research is the main thing and teaching is, rightly, ancillary to that) and focus instead on FE, including ESOL and Access, and vocational HE.

In vocational FHE, lecturers work with students to co-produce the latter as bearers of enlarged and/or enhanced labour power. Whatever else is done, it is this act of production which drives the system. This implies lecturers who possess some combination of knowledge, skills and understanding that workers and/or potential workers want to acquire and which (within limits) employers want them to acquire.

It also implies lecturers who are ready, willing and able at any given moment to work with students in that co-production process. By participating in this process of production . ie of changing the world . these lecturers necessarily and unavoidably change themselves. That is, as well as helping to produce knowledge in students, they also produce knowledge (but not necessarily the same knowledge) within themselves.

At the same time that the workers who are lecturers have a right to seek fulfilling work, the workers and would-be workers who are students have a right to seek and receive valid education. This includes . but is not limited to . training, and must be distinguished from mis-education. Education is valid (ie is education properly so-called) to the extent that it tries to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth (of course at a level of complexity within reach of the student) about the world. What Dan Taubman (in the UCU discussion document on professionalism), rightly, calls 'managerialism's, in FHE at least, largely a drive to destroy valid education in that field in the interests, as he rightly maintains, of privatisation. Obviously UCU members collectively will resist this. And to do so effectively they will need positively to demand and organise for valid education based on lecturers possessing . and being in a position to extend . relevant knowledge, understanding and skill, and on students, so far as possible freely, seeking to acquire this, ie to work with those lecturers to produce themselves as bearers of these capacities. FHE is necessarily post-compulsory and publicly-provided (ie to the extent that it ceases to be either of those things it starts to weaken its link to the mechanics institute tradition and becomes something other than FHE, for example schooling or training.)

All this requires that there must be a threshold level of control by lecturers over the FHE production

process. That is what any struggle for professionalism will be really about. Managerialism is organised to deny, take away or at least minimise this control, whereas UCU, if it is not to become a company union, must try to maximise it.

The tradition of independent working-class education (IWCE) is crucial to this effort because in the end two forces confront one another: on the one hand, maximally commodified mis-education (ie privatised training plus indoctrination), and, on the other, working-class collective self-education (ie workers educating . or arranging for the education of . one another; in short, mutual and/or reciprocal education increasingly under their control). Validly understood, the IWCE tradition includes the quest by workers for scientific, technological and general enlightenment (as in mechanics institutes and the like). We (ie UCU) must defend access on the part of the majority of working-class people (ie waged workers and their dependents) to scientific and technological knowledge (ie information), understanding (ie concepts) and skills (ie techniques and/or procedures), of course integrated with valid general education. Ultimately, doing this would entail a from-below movement of grassroots union members and potential members which reaches out to the whole of the working class (ie including migrant workers and migrants who are potential workers, hence the need to defend . and to develop a valid conception of . ESOL).

All this also implies the freedom of lecturers, not only to control what they are already doing, but also themselves to develop, extend and innovate within this. For example, they must be able (and have time) to keep their own knowledge up to date, devise materials, assessment instruments and teaching/ learning strategies, attend relevant outside events (for example, participate in awarding body design of qualifications), meet employers and shop stewards from the employment fields for which students are being prepared, and decide who can and cannot go (or stay) on a given course or level of course. Management can only authorise, encourage and support lecturers in doing these things. It cannot manage them in the sense of deciding, and still less of enforcing, what is to be done. The more pervasively it attempts to do so, the more it strips out from lecturers the qualities of initiative and the like that it purports to demand from them, and which it demands that they produce in students.

It follows from this that lecturers cannot and should not be used to do tasks for which admin support staff should be employed, as for example form filling, data entry, checking one another's form filling and so on, and any struggle to reassert the professionalism of lecturers must address this.

New website seeks practitioners' insights

The evolution of the post-compulsory sector in England has been the focus of a recent research study entitled: 'The reputation of English further education . understanding the evolution of the sector (1944-1996)' funded by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation, run by Professor William Richardson and Dr Anne Parfitt and hosted at the University of Exeter. This involved studying the legacy of further education in five chosen communities as well as collecting national and local policy documents and memorabilia.

Many of our key findings are presented on a new website www.fe-histories.org.uk which sets policy contexts alongside the personal recollections of former staff, managers, governors and students in order to capture a full account of past lives in the post-compulsory education sector. We feel that assembling the information in this way is an important step towards reporting the development of the sector in an accessible format. Many scholars have noted that when compared with universities and schools the legacy of PCET is poorly understood and we aim to address this through this new interactive resource.

To date, feedback on the website has been very positive from teacher trainees carrying out their own studies. Also, we have been delighted to find that users with many years of experience gained through working in the sector have asked for the opportunity to pass on their own recollections. In response to their requests we have started a collection of stories from readers. We would be very happy to receive more contributions. Only by building up an extensive data bank from people with diverse experiences can the rich legacy of PCET be put on the record for future generations of practitioners and students.

Anyone who wishes to contribute a story recounting their times in the sector and be part of this resource can write to Anne Parfitt (A.M.Parfitt@Exeter.ac.uk) or visit www.fe-histories.org.uk.

How the Press Complaints Commission works

Robert Peel

Readers of the *PSE* may recall how the *Guardian* libelled former teachers of Harlow College by publishing lies told by the principal, Colin Hindmarch, that they shouted and swore at him and that teachers had dismissed the abilities of Harlow students because of their social origins. The principal also lied when he claimed that his attempt to impose a 56-hour working week on teachers was not true. This occurred in January 2011 in a *Guardian* story entitled 'College saviour defies his critics' and the former teachers have not ceased in their attempts to put the record straight.

After the *Guardian* rudely dismissed the claims of injustice following copious complaints, it was exposed that both the editor, Alan Rusbridger, and the readers' editor, Chris Elliott (a post which is supposed to give voice to readers) had attended Harlow College to train to be journalists! Despite multiple press releases, no newspaper was interested in hearing the truth behind this story, but this is hardly surprising given the breathtaking number of journalists who have association with Harlow College and seek to protect its name. For example, Harlow College employed Phil Hall, former editor of the *News of the World*, as a PR consultant. Apparently he was responsible for arranging the infamous *Guardian* interview with Mr Hindmarch. Phil Hall also attended Harlow College to study journalism, as have many who worked for the Murdoch press. If one reads Alan Rusbridger's testimony to the Leveson inquiry, the scale of hypocrisy is astounding in the context of how the *Guardian* produced this highly offensive article.

Because of the phone hacking scandal and countless other offences that were exposed last summer, the former teachers decided to take the case to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). This at least forced the *Guardian's* managing editor, Elizabeth Ribbans, to take this complaint seriously (whereas Chris Elliott, the readers' editor, ignored the teachers and only acted as a spokesperson for the college). In the process of corresponding with the *Guardian* via the PCC, numerous extraordinary claims and factual errors were exposed.

Among the most startling was that the *Guardian* had not even bothered to read the complaints and thought that claims concerning the college being placed in special measures were being challenged. The teachers never disputed this but pointed out that

Colin Hindmarch was the principal who forced the college into this crisis, bringing about these special measures in the first place. This was why calling him the college saviour was totally inappropriate. The *Guardian* did not wish to address this point any more as it was clear that the managing editor herself was misled by the *Guardian's* article and honestly failed to notice this glaring mistake.

However, worse was to come. On the point that teachers shouted and swore at the principal, the *Guardian* asserted that teachers had to prove that none of their colleagues committed this offence. Guilty until proven innocent seems to be the privilege enjoyed by the press. The best that Mr Hindmarch could provide to support his claims was that someone had called him to attend a consultation meeting with UCU. Also, his secretary had claimed that she heard swearing and abuse from their office (after the principal had sacked 40 teachers) but did not bother to look out of the window to identify them. There were actually many students and parents appalled at what had happened but the Hindmarch regime simply assumed the culprits were teachers.

Weak though this evidence is, it is extraordinary that none of it was put before the public employment tribunal which Mr Hindmarch was brought before in 2009. This would have been very important in a case examining unfair dismissal and discrimination on the grounds of being trade unionists. But what happens in law and under oath has been demonstrated to be utterly unimportant to the press. This tribunal exposed the most appalling bullying by Harlow College management and provided evidence of Mr Hindmarch actually being rude and shouting at teachers. But the *Guardian* has never been interested in this, even though this evidence was not challenged.

On the point of the 56-hour week, the *Guardian* honestly thought they were on to a winner. However, letters were produced where UCU had asked Mr Hindmarch to justify this clause, to which Mr Hindmarch replied that he understood teachers worked copious extra hours anyway, so there was nothing wrong with having this as a formal part of the contract. The *Guardian* then insisted on seeing the actual contract and were confounded to discover that it did indeed say that teachers may be expected to work ten hours every weekday and six hours on Saturdays.

After much head scratching and counting of fingers, the *Guardian* concluded that this was indeed 56 hours. Mr Hindmarch's claim in the *Guardian* that he didn't even know where this idea of a 56 hour week came from, let alone not being in the contract, was comprehensively exposed as an utter lie.

The *Guardian*'s concession was to place a tiny clarification to the original article which you can see at the bottom of this web page: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jan/25/college-leader-succeeds-against-odds>.

Again the *Guardian* acted as spokesperson for the college principal saying that it would be highly unlikely that the 56 hour week (with no differentiation between teaching and non-teaching hours) would ever be enforced. Well that's alright then because the principal is such a reasonable boss and can be trusted. It would be highly unlikely that the college would play on its reputation for making teachers too frightened to enforce their rights, especially as UCU betrayed the teachers by failing to seek an injunction against what was clearly an illegal and punitive contract.

But what of the PCC in all of this? Basically a PCC official, Sean Goldstein, reviewed (not studied) the evidence after long delays between communications from the *Guardian* to the complainants. Procrastination was certainly the order of the day as the case was originally lodged with the PCC in August 2011. It should be pointed out that the PCC insists that matters put before them must not be shared with any other institution or individual when it is under examination. Aware that the deadline for submissions to the Leveson Inquiry was 31st January 2012, the PCC eventually produced its verdict rather conveniently on 3rd February. It completely supported the *Guardian* in every respect and even criticised the complainants. The whitewash was dazzling in its snowy hue.

What was truly extraordinary is that the PCC failed to even understand much of the content of the complaints. Despite painstaking efforts to point out how the college was abusing statistics to make it appear that they were far more successful than they actually were, the PCC was confused on almost every aspect. There was no way that the full committee of the PCC considered this case as they could not have collectively made the same mistakes. No minutes were ever produced of this decision and it is clear that Sean Goldstein produced this verdict himself. Questions were put to Mr Goldstein which he continually refused to answer. The email exchanges resembled Jeremy Paxman's legendary interview of Michael Howard. Then a complaint was lodged about his conduct in April. The PCC has yet to conclude on this, perhaps prevaricating towards another deadline. *Guardian* readers should be vigilant for any articles written by people who will shortly be made redundant by the doomed PCC as little else can account for such

a breach of fair play and justice. Even in its dying days, the PCC has made no effort whatsoever to achieve any integrity.

There is so much about this sorry affair which shows just how naked and vulnerable teachers are. When it came to the accusation of dismissing students' abilities on the grounds of them coming from socially inferior stock, Mr Hindmarch produced a handwritten note apparently by [or reporting on] attitudes expressed by one of the complainants. Again this note was never produced in tribunal and both the college and the *Guardian* refused to provide a copy, despite clear rights being breached in terms of Freedom of Information and Data Protection. Instead they chose to tell the PCC to disregard this evidence.

Even UCU refused to assist in helping the complainant see a copy of this clandestine note. This is no surprise coming from a union which did everything it could to obstruct the pursuit of justice sought by former teachers at Harlow College, partly because Mr Hindmarch seemed to be holding the remaining teachers as hostage, threatening their dismissal if the college faced excessive legal costs, but it was also alleged that they were conspiring to remove the regional official in charge of Harlow because she was an Asian female who didn't fit in with the prevailing culture at UCU. This matter was also taken to public tribunal and the press were alerted to it. However, it was witnessed at this tribunal that when the press did turn up, UCU officials took them to one side, and, following much heated whispering, the press promptly left and the case was never reported. How is it that some are able to exercise such influence on our free press and others cannot even have lies and libels redressed?

Apart from making it even more difficult to take industrial bullies like Mr Hindmarch to court, the Government is doing so much to whittle away the rights of teachers. Michael Gove's defence of press freedom at the Leveson Inquiry acts as a gross obstruction to genuine freedoms; this man, who is our collective and ultimate boss, was a former employee of the Murdoch press and seeks to protect the privileges of the media above all else. He wants them to continue to control the dissemination of information and he will protect their vested interests in monopolising such power and being immune from the due process of law. This case against the *Guardian* provides manifest evidence that the printed media conspires to suppress rather than enhance free speech, especially when their own interests and ideologies are at stake.

Every angle to seek justice and fair play has been tried by the maligned teachers of Harlow College. Members of parliament have been contacted but they refuse to intervene in what they see as a private dispute. They will not contact the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and simply suggest the

teachers put this ugly affair behind them. But why should they? Why allow this intolerable vulnerability to continue? How can it be fair to just passively accept bullying from every direction? We all know that if bullies are allowed to get away with their offences then they will keep on doing it. It seems our politicians are afraid of representing us when it involves the media.

The power of the press is absolute and yet it is neither mandated nor constitutional in any sense. Leveson cannot stop this and politicians know it; the Murdoch empire will survive by sacrificing a few senior lackeys, and their conflict with the *Guardian* is only theatre: they share freelancers (such as Janet Murray, the author of the *College saviourpiece* who has worked for both sides), and they share common interests to protect. They even have a common network of alumni from Harlow College that must make the Freemasons and Illuminati look on with envy. Even the union has been clearly and repeatedly witnessed as acting against the interests of their own members.

What can teachers do?

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

- ◆ campaigns against the decline in standards
- ◆ defends individuals against victimisation
- ◆ gives moral support and legal advice
- ◆ investigates malpractice and publishes findings
- ◆ seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations.

For further information, contact the Secretary:

**Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields,
DUNSTABLE, Beds LU6 3NS;
john.hewitt22@virgin.net**

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

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