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Introduction: education and the state

Parent to child after his first day at school: *How did you like school today?*
Child: *OK, but I'm not going any more.*
Parent: *Oh, yes you are!*

We tend to take for granted the fact that children go to school. Some take to it immediately; others are less easily persuaded of the benefits of spending six hours a day away from home. Schooling is perhaps the most important way in which the state intervenes in the life of the family and the individual. Education does not have to depend on the state: it can happen in independent schools, at home, between friends and for individuals working alone, but since the end of the nineteenth century the state has made education its business. In this book we look at the ways in which the state in Britain has provided opportunities for all to be educated while, at the same time, affecting people's lives with control and regulation. This chapter introduces ideas about the state and the politics of education which are then discussed as a series of topics in the following chapters. It gives a list of the key education legislation then a brief overview of recent policy, together with a brief description of the issues in each chapter. Finally there are some suggestions about policy critique in Education Studies.

The Role of the State

Education is politics. It is the means by which a nation defines itself and sustains its cultural existence, transmitting beliefs, ideas and knowledge from generation to generation. Of course, parents can do this by passing on knowledge and skills to their children. But parents can only transmit the knowledge and experiences which *they* hold. Brighouse (2006) points out that, if the child is to flourish as an individual, there needs to be intervention and 'discontinuity'

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between experiences in the home and the child's education. In this intervention the state and the family or community can come into conflict. In the 1970s, the religious Amish Community in Wisconsin wanted to keep their adolescent children away from the secular influences of state schooling and challenged compulsory education to the age of 16. The state ruled against the Amish parents on the grounds that it would limit the young people's human rights: their right to education. This is a particular case, but it illustrates the way the state takes control of the lives of individuals through education policy. Radical educationists reject the intervention of the state in education (Freire, 1972) and some educate their children at home (Hicks, 2004; Apple, 2006).

The Nation State

It is worth reflecting on what governments are about and what they do. Nation states have not always existed. The Roman Empire at the beginning of the first millennium was a powerful state which spread itself across the known world through imperial domination. However, the Middle Ages saw the fragmentation of political power in Europe with small dukedoms and serfdoms. It was the sixteenth-century Renaissance that brought the unification of nation states with the definition of national borders and the organisation of state-controlled armies. 'Modernity' in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment brought strong nation states which controlled people's lives through laws, law enforcement and taxation. The nineteenth century began with the Napoleonic Wars which heightened the need for powerful states. In Britain the First World War (1914–18) required a large trained army to fight overseas; the Second World War (1939–45) required the whole population to be on a war footing, and this marked the height of the nation state, unified in the single purpose of defeating Nazi Germany (Bottery, 2000). State education systems, which began in Europe in the nineteenth century, became a feature of the nation state and the means of establishing nationalism and a commitment by the whole of society to the state.

We need to make a distinction between a 'nation' and a 'state'. A nation is a collection of people who identify themselves as a social community with language and culture; they might live in a particular geographical location, but for historical reasons they might be scattered across different countries, like Jewish or African peoples, in a 'diaspora'. A state is a political organisation that claims power or sovereignty over people; it exercises its powers through a legal system, a civil service, a police force and an army, and assumes the right to ensure that its children are educated. Ideally its power comes through the agreement of the people in a democracy: the majority of the people vote for a government which holds the power of the state, they are loyal to the state and it becomes 'legitimate'. A Marxist view is that the state protects the interests of powerful producers and holders of capital. Weber (1994) points out that the state claims a monopoly on the use of force; it is a bureaucracy designed to support the production of capital and wealth, but also to offset its negative effects:

... (i) to support the process of capital accumulation (*e.g.* by providing transport systems, business subsidies etc.); and (ii) to legitimate this role by maintaining electoral support and endeavouring to enhance the value of labour (for example, through education and training policies) and to ameliorate the social costs of private accumulation (for example, through welfare policies, environmental protection policies etc.). (Offie, 1984, cited in Codd et al., 1997: 254)

In a nation state the power of the state and its people come together. However, the democratic state is not necessarily geographically fixed. It might also use its powers in other countries as a colonial state; as we see in Chapter 9, Britain was a colonial power in a number of countries, particularly India and in Africa. The colonies have gone, but the British state still assumes power over the countries in the United Kingdom: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, each of which has its own historically defined cultures and language. And not everyone is happy with it: nationalist movements in the constituent countries – the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru in Wales – see themselves as separate ‘nations’ and would prefer not to be controlled by the British state in Westminster. While a majority in a democracy can create an elected government, there will be tensions and differences of view, and one area of difference is education policy. For example, we will see that in Wales there are differences in the National Curriculum and inspection arrangements. In 1998 in Britain there was some ‘devolution’ of power from the Westminster government with the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Irish Assembly.

Over the centuries, states have become stronger and better organised through taxation, with the strongest states being the former Soviet Communist nations. But the latter part of the twentieth century saw a decline of the power of the nation states through globalisation and the strengthening of multinational commercial corporations in the global economy (Green, 1997). Here we have seen education become the instrument of commercial success through the marketisation of schooling and the development of education as consumerism to feed the requirements of the global marketplace. While the strong state is a feature of the Enlightenment and modernity, post-modernity sees the ‘hollowing out’ and weakening of the nation state. Attempts to control education more strongly through a National Curriculum and through definitions and control of childhood are the vestiges of modernity. Prout (2004) suggests that governments try to keep control of education because they can no longer control economic activity in global markets.

The term ‘statutory’ comes from ‘state’, meaning that it is a law made by the state to apply to everyone in the state. So the National Curriculum is statutory because it is created by state legislation: the 1988 Education Act. In the UK the state has overall control through the government in Westminster, but it shares that power with local communities. As well as the devolution to the constituent nations of the kingdom, power is also delegated to local councils each of which has an administrative organisation, the local authority (LA). Councils are chosen through local elections and they may be controlled by different parties from

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the national government. Councils can make by-laws and regulations, but they do not have the same status as statutory legislation.

Education has been one of the services controlled by local councils; differences in education policy are a source of conflict between councils and government and we will see changes in the balance of power between the government and the local authorities.

Reader tasks

- How much should parents have a say in the education of their children?
- Are there any grounds for children deciding on their schooling?

The centralised government control of education in the 1988 Education Act has led to a proliferation of quangos (quasi non-government organisations) designed to monitor and control different aspects of education. They began in 1988 with the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the School Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC), which were later merged into the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The regulation of teacher training was through the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), later the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). From 2006 the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) regulated developments in the wider children's services. Local authorities, schools and all childcare settings are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). All are powerful bureaucracies employing large numbers of officials, some with little background in education.

UK Politics and Education

There are different political views about the role of the state. The Labour Party was formed at the beginning of the twentieth century to represent working people. It is known as a 'left-wing' political party: the term comes from the French Revolution when the radical reformers sat on the left-hand side in political assemblies. The Labour Party sees the state as creating social justice, making more equal distribution of resources and taxing the wealthy. Conservatives are a right-wing party that believes in conserving the status quo. Its members believe that unequal distribution of wealth is inevitable, and necessary to promote competition and achievement. Conservative governments are committed to low taxation, leaving as much as possible for individuals to spend as they wish. Traditionally, the difference is that, where Labour is committed to equality, Conservatives are committed to individual 'freedom'. Labour believes in 'big government', high taxation and a strong welfare state to improve people's lives; Conservatives believe in 'small government', low taxation and a minimal role for the state. The third party in British politics, the Liberal Democrats, comes between Labour and Conservative,

favouring social justice and a welfare state, but with minimum state intervention in the lives of individuals.

Traditional education policies saw Conservatives retaining traditional values with the maintenance of elitist, selective grammar schools, while Labour tried to bring equality through comprehensive schools. Conservatives support independent fee-paying schools for the wealthy and minimum spending on state education. Labour policy has been to increase the resources for state education, with some left-wing members of the party arguing for the abolition of independent schools. However, this is a simple description of the basic traditional policies of the parties. In the forthcoming chapters we see that recent years have seen changes of policy and the refining of the traditional values, with the two major parties moving towards the 'centre ground' of educational politics.



Reader tasks

- Margaret Thatcher's policy was to reduce the role of government in people's lives. Do you agree with her?
- Think about your own political views. Which party will you vote for in the next election, and why?

Key Education Legislation

Until 1870 schooling was provided either privately or, for the poor, by Church foundations. The Forster Education Act of 1870 introduced elementary schools for children aged 5–10 with Board Schools in areas not served by church schools and the state paying the fees for poor children. The 1880 Education Act made schooling compulsory for 5–10 year olds. The period from 1870 saw strong state intervention as the government sought to make schools and teachers accountable for the new investment of state money in the new compulsory schooling system. Under the Revised Code of 1862 grants were distributed to schools on the basis of pupils' success in tests of reading, writing and arithmetic conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and teachers were rewarded on the 'payment by results' system.

The Balfour Education Act of 1902 abolished the School Boards and handed control of education to the local education authorities (LEAs). This created an education system which became known as 'a state system, locally administered'. It took central government out of direct involvement with the delivery and monitoring of education, leaving the curriculum and teaching to the professions in combination with advisers and officers in the local education authorities. For most of the rest of the twentieth century, until 1988, state involvement was mainly to dictate to LEAs the outline requirements of provision, including the statutory leaving age. The 1918 'Fisher' Education Act raised the school leaving age to 14 and introduced nursery education and medical inspections for children.

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The next significant legislation came in 1944 at the end of the Second World War and provided free secondary education to all children from 11 to 15. Secondary education was in a tripartite system with selective grammar and technical schools for those who passed 11-plus examination, and secondary modern schools for those who failed. The government's priority was about types of school and access to education. There was no prescription for teaching or the curriculum. The one exception was that Religious Education should be compulsory, reflecting the continuing commitment of governments to the Christian Church.

In 1965 the Labour government attempted to demolish the selective secondary system with universal comprehensive schools. This was not done through legislation, but by sending Circular 10/65 to the LEAs requesting change. The fact that some Conservative-controlled authorities simply ignored the request is a symptom of the power of the local councils and the weakness of central government's regulation of education during the twentieth century. In 1972 the school leaving age was raised to 16 and the 1981 Education Act made requirements for children with special educational needs.

It was only with the 1988 Education Act that the Conservative government began to remove control of education from the local authorities with the National Curriculum and national testing. The Act also introduced the local management of schools, designed to introduce free-market competition. There followed an avalanche of government directives and legislation, filling the chasm of the previous 86 years. The 1992 Education Act set up the arrangements for the Ofsted inspection of all schools every four years. In the same year the Further and Higher Education Act took polytechnics out of local authority control and made them into universities. The 1993 Education Act required local authorities and schools to comply with a code of practice for pupils with special needs. The 1994 Education Act set up the Teacher Training Agency to regulate and control teacher training.

While the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major had revolutionised education during the 1990s, Tony Blair's New Labour government from 1997 was even more eager to legislate with plans to drive up standards. New Labour policy was for the state to eradicate deficit and disadvantage in society; giving children and families skills and knowledge through schooling was seen as the solution. The policy was linked to New Labour's ambitious plans to remove child poverty by 2020. New Labour operated not just through the legislation with education acts, but through 'initiatives' and directives. Within three months of taking office a White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) announced that education would be 'at the heart of government' and contained the commitment to improve standards, as well as to introduce nursery places for all four year olds. The following year saw the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, followed by the Numeracy Strategy, to control primary schools' practice of teaching. The same year 1998 also brought the National Childcare Strategy to make coordinated provision for young children across the education, health and social services.

The year 2000 brought revisions to the curriculum to include Citizenship as a subject and the two-part AS and A level examinations system. The 2002 Education Act introduced city academies. The 2004 Higher Education Act introduced variable top-up fees for university students. The 2005 Education Act amended the regulations for school inspection, giving the Welsh Assembly the powers to amend the framework for inspection in Wales. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act developed more choice for parents and pupils and set out statutory admissions procedures.

New Labour recognised the importance of early years education and care. In 2001 the *Sure Start* Programme was designed to give from birth education, health and childcare, targeted at children and families in socially deprived areas. Children's centres gave professional support for the whole child and family members, including advice on parenting. The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) qualification in 2007 injected graduates with early years knowledge and practice into private nurseries and early years settings. The Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (HMSO, 2003) and the subsequent storm of publicity about child abuse and neglect stimulated the *Every Child Matters* initiative (DfES, 2003). It brought attention, not just to the education of children, but to their broader health, economic and social 'well-being'. *The Children Act* (DfES, 2004) required local authorities to make coordinated education, health and social services for children. In 2007 *The Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007) set out an ambitious vision for the education and well-being of children and young people. The division in 2007 of the DfES into the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) was a sign that the government intended to move closer to the lives of children and their families.

Reader task

Look on the websites of the three main political parties in the UK and decide what you think about them and their education policies:

Labour: <http://www.labour.org.uk/schools> (accessed 3 July 2008)

Conservative: <http://www.conservatives.com/> (accessed 3 July 2008)

Liberal Democrats: <http://www.libdems.org.uk/> (accessed 3 July 2008)

Consult the important education websites to get an overview of the latest initiatives in education policy:

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF): <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/> (accessed 3 July 2008)

Sure Start: <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/> (accessed 3 July 2008)

Every Child Matters: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

The Children's Plan: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf (accessed 3 July 2008)

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Current Issues in Education Policy

This final section introduces the contentious issues addressed in each chapter of the book. One of the political controversies about state education has been the level of funding. An OECD (2008) report shows that across the world governments are spending more and more on education. From 1997, ten years of Labour government coincided with a period of strong economic growth; 'big government' ambitions could be realised with substantial resources injected into education. In 1997 spending on education was some £30 bn, rising in 2008 to £61 bn. It funded higher salaries for teachers, more support staff, better resources and school buildings with a programme to rebuild all secondary schools by 2016. However, state spending is not the only story. Margaret Thatcher's approach through the 1988 Education Act was to introduce free-market competition to education, making schooling a 'commodity' which is bought and sold. In Chapter 2 the political and economic theory underlying this is explained: parental choice of schools drives up standards, in the same way that private schools and the whole of private industry works.

The issue of equality and social justice runs through political debates about education. The view of the Conservative Party was that the education system should promote the highest attainment and allow individuals the freedom to excel through high quality grammar schools or independent schools. The traditional Labour Party view was that a government should promote equality in society by educating the poor and by eliminating educational advantage through wealth and social class. Chapter 3 analyses the debates about selective schools and the comprehensive system, explaining the details of changing government policies in school systems. In Chapter 4 we see New Labour abandoning the universal comprehensive school as the means to social equality with the introduction of specialist schools and of academies as state-funded independent schools. New Labour seemed to have left behind its commitment to universal state provision, espousing the traditional Conservative values of privatisation and individual excellence.

Marketisation in 1988 and the increased financial investment from 1997 brought a return to the accountability mechanisms of the nineteenth century with control of the curriculum and teachers' professional practice, high-stakes assessment, performance-related pay for teachers and, of course, Ofsted inspection. Chapter 5 describes the political manoeuvring behind the emergence of the National Curriculum and shows both Labour and Conservative governments' vision of education as preparing pupils for work in industry and the economy. International comparisons of children's achievements and worries about Britain's role as a competitor in the global knowledge economy created government policy. While Conservatives controlled the curriculum, from 1997 New Labour intervened even more strongly, using the national teaching strategies to regulate teachers' practice and methods. OECD (2008) describes Britain's as the most tested school population in the developed world and criticises the government for the ways in which testing detracts from children's learning. Chapter 6 discusses the effects which such controls

have had on the teaching profession and gives a critique of 'high-stakes' national assessment.

The government's challenge to the autonomy of professionals and academics has been strongest in taking the teacher training curriculum from the universities to create a highly regulated national system. Chapter 7 shows how Conservative and Labour governments have controlled teacher training through a set of requirements, standards and a high level of inspection. One of the issues for the teaching profession is the extent to which it should simply be trained as a 'workforce' to deliver the National Curriculum. The chapter concludes by showing the way that academics have created Education Studies as a university subject to enable future professionals to be educated in critical and creative ideas about education and schooling.

While Chapter 3 examines inequalities created by the school system, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 look at the way education policies address the inequalities inherent in society: gender, race and social class. Chapter 8 traces policy responses to the disadvantaged position of women and girls in the education system and the underachievement of boys. The National Curriculum has benefited girls in providing an equal curriculum, and they have succeeded in levels of educational achievement, but women are still disadvantaged in the job market. The social inequality borne of racism in society and schools is discussed in Chapter 9, showing how the education system has adapted to the changes of ethnicity in the population with postwar immigration. Labour governments have attempted to address inequality and racism, but New Labour's commitment to diversity in the education system has strengthened faith schools. The chapter concludes by examining whether faith schools contribute to a cohesive society, or make it more divisive.

The New Labour government of 1997 attempted to use the education system to bring about a range of political ambitions: to skill the nation for the global knowledge economy and to bring social justice and equality to society through economic 'well-being'. Its underlying belief that education drives change, both in the economy and in society, became the rationale for the strongest state action in education and other social services. Labour policy has been to reduce class inequality and eliminate poverty in society, with the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020. Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) and the Children's Plan (DfES, 2007) attempted to make education much more than schooling in the curriculum: education policy became part of a wider approach to poverty and social inequality. The final Chapter 10 is an important one in that it summarises and evaluates recent New Labour policies and the relationships between class, poverty and education. We argue that, with a deficit model of working-class families and the culture of childrearing, the state now tries to control, not only the detailed content of schooling, but the way children are brought up and spend their leisure time. The sociologist Basil Bernstein (1971) suggested that 'education cannot compensate for society'; the New Labour government thought it could, making education policy a part of the solution to social inequality.

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Each chapter can be read in its own right as an introduction to government policy on a topic. This makes for some overlap between chapters, and we have signalled links and connections with 'see Chapter ...'. The book does not attempt to cover every aspect of government policy, in particular there is not space to address further and higher education. But the issues are the ones that we find of interest when teaching Education Studies students.

Education Studies and Policy Critique

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) defines the content and quality of university degrees in the UK with a list of the requirements which it calls a 'benchmark' for each subject. In Education Studies (QAA, 2007) students should engage in 'a critique of education policy and processes'. A 'critique' of education policy doesn't mean simply criticism (Ward, 2008): it is easy for discussions of education policy simply to be complaints about politicians and the government. Instead, 'critique' means to know about policy: its history and the political assumptions that underlie it. It means being able to consider alternatives that have been proposed by different authors and commentators, perhaps from other countries.

A critique should ask questions:

- What is the role of the state in education?
- What are the political assumptions underlying policy?
- What historical factors have determined the policy?
- Which thinkers and ideas have affected decision-makers?
- Who has the power to make policy decisions: government, local authorities, parents?
- Who benefits and who loses from policy and changes in policy?
- How does education policy relate to other aspects of government policy, such as health, the economy, social policy and foreign policy?
- How are policies interpreted and contested?

A critique also involves having your own ideas and values about the many political and contestable ideas in education. We present a good deal of facts in the book, but you will notice the underlying values and opinions in the ways we have interpreted them. We hope that you will find our ideas both provocative and convincing. But you might draw different conclusions based on your values and you should be able to make a case to justify your point of view.

Conclusion

Education is *about* change and is *for* change. But keeping up with change in government policy from week to week in the early twenty-first century is bewildering, and a book on education policy is bound to be out of date before it is published. At the time of writing (late 2008) the assumptions about market

forces, capitalism and the global economy were rocked by the 'credit crunch' and the threats to the global economy, which required last-minute rewriting of Chapter 2. We went to press before the publication of the government's 'root and branch' review of primary education in 2009 mentioned in the Children's Plan. By the time you are reading the book, there may well be a different government in power and the Children's Plan shredded. We ask your forgiveness for not being completely up to date, but hope that the book will have offered you the principles to understand government policy so that, when the latest initiative comes along, you will have your own informed critique.

Recommended reading

For a general introduction to most of the topics in the book, see:

Bartlett, S. and Burton, D. (2007) *Introduction to Education Studies*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.

There are a number of general sources for education policy which are worth consulting regularly to keep up to date. The DCSF website is updated daily with the latest government documents:

DCSF (2008) Recent publications. London: DCSF. Online at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/> (accessed 31 July 2008).

The TES and the THE are weekly publications which keep you up to date with the latest political news and events:

The Times Education Supplement: <http://www.tes.co.uk> (accessed 31 July 2008).

Times Higher Education: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/> (accessed 31 July 2008).

See also newspapers:

The Guardian (on Tuesdays): <http://www.guardian.co.uk> (accessed 31 July 2008).

The Independent: <http://www.independent.co.uk> (accessed 31 July 2008).

Other sources:

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Bottery, M. (2000) *Education Policy and Ethics*. London: Continuum. Gives a good theoretical analysis of policy.

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