Education in a post-welfare society

SALLY TOMLINSON

Open University Press
Buckingham • Philadelphia
Contents

List of boxes xi
Series editor’s foreword xii
Acknowledgements xiv
List of abbreviations xv

Introduction 1
Themes of the book 2
Human capital in a post-welfare society 4
Plan of the book 5
Notes 7
Further reading 8

1 Social democratic consensus? Education 1945–79 9
   Equalizing opportunity 1945–60 11
   Comprehensive struggles 14
   Demons of the 1960s 16
   The 1970s 19
   Ruskin and after 21
   Ideology in the 1970s 22
   Note 23
   Further reading 23

2 Market forces gather: education 1980–87 24
   Education Secretaries of State 26
   Shadow Education Secretaries 26
   Regressive vision 27
   Selection and privatization 28
   Special selection 31


viii  Education in a post-welfare society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School governance</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralizing control</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher control</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum control</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards serious reform</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further reading</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3  Creating competition: education 1988-94

Education Secretaries of State  
Shadow Education Secretaries  
Education Reform Act 1988  
Choice and diversity  
Chaos and perversion  
Legislation for inspection  
The longest Education Act ever  
Curriculum control  
Curriculum critiques  
Higher education  
Teachers and their training  
Labour education policies in the early 1990s  
Notes  
Further reading

4  The consequences of competition: education 1994-97

Education Secretary of State (from July 1995 Secretary of State for Education and Employment)  
Shadow Education Secretary  
Legislation 1995-96  
The final Tory Act  
The effects of market forces  
Failing schools  
Special educational needs  
Curriculum issues  
Ages 14-19 and the academic-vocational divide  
Labour policies  
Notes  
Further reading

5  New Labour and education: 1997-2000

Secretary of State for Education and Employment  
Shadow Education and Employment Secretaries
Contents

School policies 89
School Standards and Framework Act 1998 94
Selection and specialization 96
Tackling exclusion 99
Centralizing governance 104
Notes 110
Further reading 111

6 Centralizing lifelong learning 112
Lifelong learning 114
Learning to succeed 116
Learning and Skills Bill 119
Higher education 121
Policies and qualifications 14–19 122
Continuity and change 1997–2000 124
Notes 126
Further reading 126

7 Education and the middle classes 127
Changing class structures 128
Meritocracy and attainment 130
School effectiveness 132
Middle class needs 132
Private advantage 135
Choice and advantage 136
Avoidance of the vocational 137
Avoiding the poor 138
Class and the common good 140
Notes 140
Further reading 141

8 Equity issues: race and gender 142
Race and ethnicity 142
Gender 148
Girls’ achievements 150
Boys’ ‘underachievement’ 151
Notes 152
Further reading 153

9 Education and the economy 154
Recent history 155
The labour market in the 1990s 157
Jobs and education 158
A new economy? 159
Education in a post-welfare society

The global economy and education 160
Prospects for the poor 162
Notes 164
Further reading 164

Conclusion: education in a post-welfare society 166
Positive aspects 167
Negative aspects 168
The future 170
Notes 171

References 172
Index 191
Welcome to the second volume in the Introducing Social Policy series. The series itself is designed to provide a range of well-informed texts on a wide variety of topics that fall within the ambit of Social Policy Studies. Although primarily designed with undergraduate Social Policy students in mind, it is hoped that the series – and individual titles within it – will have a wider appeal to students in other Social Science disciplines and to those engaged on professional and post-qualifying courses in health care, education and social welfare.

The aim throughout the planning of the series has been to produce a series of texts that both reflect and contribute to contemporary thinking and scholarship, and which present their discussion in a readable and easily accessible format.

‘Education, education, education’ was a central theme of Labour’s election campaign in the UK in 1997. Not surprisingly, therefore, Sally Tomlinson’s contribution to the series sets out the policy initiatives of New Labour’s period in office. These she locates within the context of educational reform and change over the period of the past fifty years: a period that began with the 1944 Education Act, one of the centrepieces of the social legislation that created Britain’s ‘classic’ welfare state. Her narrative provides a clear and concise introduction to the policy changes and the influences that have shaped them between the vision of equality of educational opportunity enshrined in the 1944 Act and the increasingly diverse system of schooling that prevailed at the beginning of the new millennium.

Over that same period as Tomlinson points out, more people have been educated to a higher level, yet media headlines continually portray a schooling system that is failing and in crisis. Meanwhile, in that time, the objectives and purposes of schooling have also undergone considerable change. From being a means and strategy directed towards social change and social
inclusion, over the past twenty years educational policies have increasingly been directed towards maximizing individual opportunity – by preparing people for maximum economic productivity throughout their lives – and national output by enhancing the quality of the workforce and, therefore, economic growth and productivity.

All these – and many other themes – Sally Tomlinson discusses with vigour, scholarship and personal commitment. In the process she provides an acute analysis of the past and the present and raises important questions about the future of education in a more competitive, globalized and post-welfare society.

David Gladstone, University of Bristol
Introduction

The major purpose of this book is to provide a critical overview of educational policy over the past fifty years, a period during which government in the UK moved from creating a welfare state, to promoting a post-welfare society dominated by private enterprise and competitive markets. Over the period there has been a shift from a relatively decentralized education system to a centralized system in which funding, teaching and curriculum are centrally controlled, and the subjection of schools to market forces has increased social and academic divisions. Education was central to post-war social reconstruction, and the Education Act (1944), along with the National Insurance Act (1946) and the National Health Service Act (1948), was regarded as one of the three pillars of the welfare state. In the post-welfare society there has been a fragmentation of social welfare programmes via the introduction of market principles. By 2000, education, subject to these principles, had become a competitive enterprise and a commodity, rather than a preparation for a democratic society. Despite a plethora of reforms the education system did not appear to serve either the needs of the society or the needs of individuals satisfactorily. It could not be regarded as a pillar of a post-welfare society.

The justification for yet another book on education policy is that many people, teachers, students and parents in particular, remain confused by the welter of legislation – the Acts, circulars, regulations, the consultation and curriculum documents, and the ‘initiatives’ which have emanated from government, especially since the late 1970s. There is also confusion about the political focus and ideological purposes behind educational change. This is partly due to a rhetoric that the state has given more freedom to individuals, while in reality central control has tightened. Before the 1992 general election, a group of university professors, supported by Fred Jarvis, former General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT),
declared in a letter to the Guardian that a modern society could not prosper with a narrow education base and socially divisive hierarchies of schools, that government should treat education as a public service and not as a commodity to be traded in the marketplace, and that high quality education should not be reserved for some children in some schools. The professors, and countless others with an interest in education, were disappointed when a Conservative government, elected for a fourth successive term since 1979, moved even further to subject schools to the operation of market forces and centralize control of all aspects of the education service. There was even more disappointment and much disillusionment when a Labour government, elected in 1997, continued to pursue Conservative market policies, effectively negating some of its more ameliorative policies which were intended to return a measure of social justice to an education system becoming increasingly divisive and divided.

Themes of the book

The storylines in this book will be familiar to those with an interest in education. Since the late 1940s more people have been educated to higher levels than ever before, but education is constantly portrayed, especially by some sections of the media, as failing or in crisis. There has been continued antagonism to equity in education – elitists arguing for selection for superior and better resourced kinds of education, usually described as academic, for a minority, others to be offered a practical or vocational education. Those committed to equality continued to argue for a meritocracy based on equality of opportunity, which presumed an equal start, unencumbered by well-documented social class inequalities. The middle classes, who historically have always claimed more than their fair share of superior forms of education, discovered or were offered new ways to do this. Governments around the world, who were turning their welfare states into post-welfare societies, were rediscovering human capital theory, with individuals told to invest in themselves in a lifelong process of learning and re-skilling in order to get or retain any kind of job. Teachers were being gradually stripped of their professionalism and policed by new inspection regimes. Schools, teachers and local education authorities were increasingly held responsible not only for failing individuals, but also for failing to make the national economy competitive in global markets. The roles and responsibilities of local education authorities (LEAs) were increasingly diminished, and the role of private contractors and business entrepreneurs expanded. A language and practice of managerialism, of accountability, inspection, testing and targets, precluded debates about the purposes of education beyond preparation for the economy.

For those who remembered Britain pre-1939, when 88 per cent of young
people left school by 14, and those who grew up in the post-war period benefiting from the Education Act 1944 and free secondary education for all, the period 1945 to 1979 was an optimistic one. Education policy was largely based on a social democratic consensus that governments should regulate and resource education to achieve redistributive justice, and provide equal opportunity. Although it soon became apparent that the educational opportunities offered by the 1944 Act largely benefited middle class children, along with a small number of selected working class children, and that the rich and influential did not attend state-maintained schools, the optimistic feeling persisted. It was encouraged by an expanding economy and relatively full and secure employment. It seemed that, for the first time in the history of public education, there was a real intention to educate the mass of young people to far higher levels than ever before. The development of comprehensive education from the 1960s appeared to signal an end to education as a vehicle for the perpetuation of social class divisions and raised the hope that the talents of the whole population could be put to new social and economic use.

From 1979, however, the radical restructuring of public welfare provision in the UK began to take shape. Reforms of the health and education services, and of housing, social and legal services, were undertaken by the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and continued under the New Labour government of Tony Blair. The introduction of market forces and competition, the licence given to people to pursue personal and familial profit, and a diminished emphasis on redistribution, equity and social justice resulted, by the 1990s, in a dramatic increase in social and economic inequalities and enhanced disadvantages for particular groups (Hutton 1995; Smith and Noble 1995; Pantazis and Gordon 2000). By the later 1990s the 'social exclusion' of groups and individuals from full participation in society had become a worrying legacy of an ideological commitment to the workings of market forces, and a focus for intense political attention (Blair 1997b). From the 1960s, western governments had focused on the disadvantaged, later the underclass, and then the socially excluded, as victims of economic exclusion and poverty. In the 1990s social exclusion became a metaphor for anxieties over crime, antisocial behaviour and welfare fraud. In education, people became fearful of their children attending schools with those bearing the hallmarks of exclusion.

By the 1990s optimistic feelings about education had been replaced by anxiety and uncertainty among a growing number of parents and educators. Post-war welfare state policies based on the notion of partnership between central and local government and teachers had disappeared, and education had moved from being largely decentralized to decision-making located almost entirely in the central political arena. Enhanced central control and regulation encompassed the teaching profession. Almost every aspect of the education system had been reformed and restructured, and the belief that educational resources would be shared more fairly had shrivelled back to the
Education in a post-welfare society

pre-war belief that a good education was a prize to be competitively sought, not a democratic right.

Human capital in a post-welfare society

Postindustrial governments, notably in the USA and UK, had by the 1990s put the work ethic and competition in the labour market at the policy centre (Jordan 1998). Policy-makers were aware that the needs of global capitalist economies were a major influence on local and national economies and assigned education a major role in improving national economies. Institutions and individuals were required to ‘learn to compete’ (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 1996a) as never before. Governments of varying political persuasions around the world rediscovered human capital theory (Vaizey 1958; Becker 1964), a theory which suggested that improving people's skills and capabilities makes them act in new productive ways, and assumed that investment in education will improve the quality of the workforce, which will in turn improve economic growth and productivity. By the 1990s government was firmly committed to the belief that only greater investment in human capital would enable the country to compete in the new global economy. As the DfEE pamphlet put it, ‘Investment in learning in the 21st Century is the equivalent of investment in the machinery and technical innovation that was essential to the first industrial revolution. Then it was capital, now it is human capital’ (DfEE 1996a: 15).

There was certainly an argument to be made for regarding young people as human capital and persuading them that continuous education, reskilling and lifelong learning were in their own best interest, as evidence mounted that the educational and vocational qualifications of young British people were lower than in countries considered as economic competitors (Green and Steedman 1997). Although Robinson (1997, 1999) consistently pointed out that there was little evidence on the actual relationships between school performance, credentials and national economic competitiveness, the notion that educating and training all young people to higher levels might help them to face an uncertain globalized future, slowly became more acceptable in Britain.

The New Labour government, elected in 1997, made education, training and work central to its search for a ‘Third Way’ in politics, attempting to unite individual liberalism with a measure of social justice, and with partnerships between state, private and voluntary sectors. Prime Minister Blair declared in 1998 that “The Third Way approach to the challenge of modern employment is about extending welfare to work . . . and investing in the skills people need in a more insecure and demanding labour market” (Blair 1998b: 9). In a modernized Britain the young human capital was to regard education as a preparation for the economy and not much else.
However, no government up to the turn of the century came near to resolving the contradictions involved in greater investment in education and training for all, in a society that still regarded educating the working class and socially excluded with ambivalence and had not yet managed to come to terms with the moderate success of welfare state education. The status division between academic and vocational education persisted. Expanded secondary and tertiary education which allowed more people to acquire credentials created anxiety among the middle classes, who feared increased competition and manoeuvred for the positional advantage described by Hirsch (1977). Disadvantaged groups found raised hurdles and moved goalposts in the struggle to acquire qualifications. The increasingly competitive nature of education meant further control of the reluctant, the disaffected and those ‘special needs’ groups who were unlikely to join the economy at any but the lowest levels, but whose presence might interfere with the prescribed education for the majority. As Ellison delicately commented: ‘The stress is on individual achievement underscored by a state whose enabling role masks a certain coercive dimension’ (Ellison 1997: 55).

**Plan of the book**

The first six chapters of the book offer a descriptive review of Acts, reports and events in education between 1945 and 2000. As an aide-memoire to readers, these are summarized in a list near the beginning of each chapter, and the main sections of major Acts are summarized in boxes. Finch (1984), examining education as social policy in the thirty-five-year period 1944 to 1979, summarized major events in a table that contained only three Education Acts, one of these being an Act by which Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education, removed the entitlement of free school milk for all children – a move which earned her the label ‘Mrs Thatcher, milk snatcher’. During the twenty-year period 1980 to 2000, over thirty Education Acts were passed, with hundreds of accompanying circulars, regulations and statutory instruments. After the Education Reform Act 1988, described by one journalist as a gothic monstrosity of legislation, literally thousands of curriculum documents, working group reports and other documents were produced. The New Labour government promised that ‘Education, Education, Education’ would be a major focus of government, and continued the pace of reform and the avalanche of documentation. No one book can do justice to all this activity, and the review of events is necessarily selective.

Chapter 1 briefly overviews education as central to the creation of a welfare state attempting to redistribute social goods and resources more equitably, charting the development of comprehensive education and the persistence of opposition to non-selective schooling. The chapter notes that the 1960s, actually a period of considerable educational advance and...
innovation, have been consistently demonized by right-wing politicians and sections of the media as a period of liberal anarchism, and an important aim of the Thatcher governments in the 1980s was to reverse the democratic and egalitarian education policies of the 1960s.

Chapter 2 overviews the education policies of the incoming Conservative government from 1979 to 1987, the period when liberal individualism, moral authoritarianism and nostalgic imperialism translated into a partial dismantling of a democratically controlled education system and its eventual replacement by schools with centrally controlled funding and curricula. The chapter notes policies on selection and privatization, special educational needs, ethnic minorities, school governance, teachers and curriculum. Chapter 3 documents the period 1988 to 1994, a period when one or more Education Acts were passed each year and those working in education began to be overwhelmed by the reforming zeal of the Conservative government. Long-term strategies to change the whole system of education from nursery to higher education became apparent during this period. The chapter reviews the Education Reform Act 1988 and the 1992 White Paper which extolled ‘choice and diversity’ in schooling and decided that schools as well as individuals could be labelled as ‘failures’. The Education Act 1993 (the longest Act ever), legislation for new inspection regimes and higher education reform, including teacher training, are described. This chapter and the following one conclude with a comment on Labour policies being developed in opposition.

Chapter 4 covers the period 1994 to 1997, describing the attempts to recreate a selective system of schooling via grant-maintained (GM) schools and a three-track route for pupils from 14 into academic, vocational or work-oriented courses. The increasing educational divide along social class lines, exacerbated by ‘choice’ and the publication of league tables of examination results, is noted. The chapter covers the consolidating Acts passed on the recommendation of the Law Commission to clarify the spate of legislation, and the final legislation by the Conservatives, some of which was repealed by the incoming Labour government, the effects of market forces, especially on failing schools and those with special needs and disabilities, and the political convergence of plans to boost literacy and numeracy and education 14–19.

Chapter 5 covers New Labour’s policies for schools between 1997 and 2000, which exhibited considerable continuity with Conservative policies. In particular it notes the retention of market principles of ‘choice’ and competition between schools fuelled by league tables, the policing of schools by Ofsted, an emphasis on standards of basic literacy and numeracy, and a relabeling of existing schools. This together with the creation of specialist schools ensured the continuation of a divided and divisive school system. The chapter covers the 1997 White Paper and the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, policies for the poor, the disaffected and those with
special educational needs, and policies directed towards ‘modernizing’ LEAs – particularly by privatizing services – the teaching force and the curriculum. Chapter 6 documents post-16 and higher education policies 1997 to 2000, noting again the continuities from the previous government, with investment in human capital and the subordination of education and training to the needs of the economy being dominant themes. The chapter covers policies on lifelong learning and the White Paper preceding the Learning and Skills Act 2000, higher education and 14–19 policies. The chapter concludes with a comment on New Labour’s spending on education to 2000.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 briefly review the effects of education policy changes and reforms in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender, and consider links between education and the economy. There is a very large literature in all these areas and the chapters are intended to provide an overview and guide to further reading. Chapter 7 discusses changing class structures and the effect of reforms on the middle classes. The advantages conferred on middle class and aspirant groups by choice policies and policies which enable an avoidance of the poor are noted. Chapter 8 reviews the partially successful efforts to eliminate racial and gender inequities in education since the 1940s, the negative effects of choice policies on minorities generally, and the 1990s moral panic over the achievements of working class boys. Chapter 9 reviews links between education and the economy as work has become more knowledge ‘intensive’, and affected by global economic factors, and looks at the prospects for the poor in an increasingly socially divided society.

The book concludes with a brief assessment of the positive and negative impacts of educational policies since the late 1940s and the effects of the short- and long-term educational agenda in the UK up to and beyond the end of the twentieth century. It suggests that in the longer term there will be a reaction against a centrally imposed curriculum, never-ending assessment and inspections, control of educational institutions and a narrow economic view of the purpose of education. An overall conclusion is that education has moved from being a key pillar of the welfare state to being a prop for a global market economy.

Notes

1 The Guardian letter was followed up by the publication by the fourteen professors of Education: A Different Vision (1993) edited by Ted Wragg and Fred Jarvis.

2 There were a number of other Education Acts between 1945 and 1979, mainly specifying the responsibilities of LEAs and schools, setting up middle schools, and establishing teacher negotiating procedures. An Employment and Training Act in 1947 established the Careers Service, a London Government Act created the Inner London Authority in 1963 and a Local Government Act in 1966 established the rate support grant and allocated funds for the education of New Commonwealth immigrant children.
8 Education in a post-welfare society

3 Statutory Instruments (SIs) are used to make orders of general application. They need not go before Parliament although Parliament can object to them. Regulations can be made and imposed by the Secretary of State. Circulars are documents circulated by government departments for information and comment. In this book legislation referring to England, Wales and Scotland is noted; Northern Ireland is not covered.

Further reading


