THE BUCKINGHAM JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

2021
Volume 2(1)

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Volume 2(1)

The Legacy of Michael Gove

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Max Coates

This second edition, of the well-received, Buckingham Journal of Education, gathers a series of articles around the educational legacy of the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP. This eclectic range of articles seeks to explore some of the facets of his influence, intention and policy from the period of 2010 through to 2014 when he was the Secretary of State for Education in the Conservative / Liberal Coalition.

The political landscape in the UK is never homogenous. Within the UK parliamentary power is apportioned through majority representation. However, at the regional level the political shade could be synchronous or asynchronous with that of central government. The optimistic view is that this creates a tension of checks and balances. The more pessimistic viewpoint is that local government of a different hue from that of central government presents obstacles and hinderance their policies and their execution. At the time of writing this editorial, this has been graphically illustrated by the 'Mexican standoff' between the conservative Prime Minister, Boris Johnson and the labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham. This was over financial provision for Manchester in the face of Tier 3 restrictions relating to COVID19 and the potential increase in poverty in the city.

The 'Great Education Debate' initiated by the Prime Minister James Callaghan in 1976 was predicated on a desire to increase the control of central government. This was to receive its major genesis with the 1988 Educational Reform Act. Many of the milestones of that legislation will be familiar; devolvement of finance to schools, centralised inspection and the National Curriculum. The implementation of the legislation defined education at the local level. The tension described above was largely suppressed, with limited opportunity for dialogue.

What is fascinating is that whatever political party subsequently held sway there was a war of attrition waged against local authorities. I was a secondary headteacher from 1990 through to 2001. In the early part of that period school leaders wrestled with the practicalities of dealing with devolved budgets. The monies came to the local authority and were then controlled at the school level minus a 'top slice' which they retained to run their services. There was through this period an on-going debate as to the size of this retained money. The situation became more complex when central government instituted competitive tendering for established, local authority provided, services to include other potential providers. This included; payroll, catering, HR, legal services and grounds maintenance. The local authorities even found themselves bidding to carry out Ofsted inspections in their 'own' schools.

Of course, every time a contract moved outside of the provision made by the local authority staffing cuts followed. A tipping point was reached when many of their services could no longer be maintained at economic levels.

The 'golden ticket' for this process of centralising education control was the separation of schools from their local authority. This included directly funding schools, such as academies, and offering some illusions of freedom in relation to teachers' contracts and removing them from the requirements of the National Curriculum. Overall, control was maintained by the coercive regime of school inspection.

Aside from trying to resolve the central and localised government tensions, the process of making schools quasi autonomous had considerable appeal to Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative parties. All three had embraced some level of neo-liberalism. This political philosophy placed an emphasis on a reductionist state, allied to a belief that the 'market' could shape improvement. Ball and Bailey (2015:128), in an article exploring the developing educational policy under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government (2010–2015) suggested;

> *The marketisation and privatisation of education was ratcheted up by the coalition with the further mobilisation of new actors and agencies in the policy process – begun by New Labour – and there was a continuing move to open up service delivery to new providers and to offer some schools greater freedom and autonomy in order that they may innovate, diversify and 'drive up standards', and offer greater choice to parents and students as consumers.*

If we backtrack to the early attempts to create state funded schools which were detached from local authority control it becomes apparent that it had a somewhat erratic genesis. In 1986 Kenneth Baker, the then Secretary of State for Education, announced the development of City Technology Colleges (CTCs). The following year the CTC Trust was established with Cyril Taylor as the chair. The intention was to partner – fund, with industry some 200 of these schools. They were 'parachuted' into areas without reference to the numbers on roll in nearby schools. They also disapplied established national contracts relating to the working conditions of teachers which included; hours of employment and pay and conditions.

From 1994 to 2010 there was an evolution from these very specific CTCs to the options of other schools bidding for specialist status with a focus on subject areas such as science, computing and languages. In 2002 Charles Clarke succeeded Estelle Morris as the Secretary of State for Education and removed an existing financial cap to encourage more schools to assume this status. The CTC Trust changed its name to the Specialist Schools Trust (SST) in 2003 with 2500 schools affiliating by the following year, though the overwhelming majority of these

schools remained within the local authority orbit. A further name change took place in 2005 to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). They had a central role under the Labour government in developing the government's academies programme.

In 2010, after an indecisive election result, the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition was formed. The differential funding of these specialist schools came to an end along with the designation of specialisms. In 2012 it was announced that the SSAT was going into administration. Following a management buyout, parts of the trust were bought and the SSAT (The Schools Network) still continues to operate as a company delivering education improvement services.

Despite all of these initiatives to promote academies or academy type schools, when the Coalition took office in 2010, together with Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education, the number of academy schools stood at 203. In 2015 the year after Gove left that office the number had risen to 4,722 (DfE 2016). Additionally, by 2015 the numbers of community or organisationally sponsored open free schools had now risen to 252 (DfE 2016). This is an extremely rapid increase in numbers with some schools converting and others being forced into the fold. In 2015 the then Prime Minister, David Cameron confirmed the continuation of this policy direction;

> *Over 4,000 schools are already benefitting from academy status, giving them more power over discipline and budgets. And nearly 800 of the worst-performing primary schools have been taken over by experienced academy sponsors with a proven track record of success. This is improving education for our children. So, we will continue to expand academies, free schools, studio schools and University Technical Colleges. Over the next parliament, we will open at least 500 new free schools, resulting in 270,000 new school places. And we will introduce new powers to force coasting schools to accept new leadership.* (Conservative Party, 2015)

The pace of academisation had accelerated and Gove was a significant driver of this change.

May I suggest that you try a simple experiment. Take a piece of paper and list ten past holders of the office of Secretary of State for Education. Then note down beside their name any key policy initiatives with which they were associated. I would suggest that it is unlikely that you would have any of the following; on your list; Justine Greening, Ruth Kelly, John Patten, Fred Mulley and Mark Carlisle. You may well have the following; Nicky Morgan, Alan Johnson, Damian Hinds and the current post holder Gavin Williamson but you are probably less certain about policy initiatives associated with them.

Almost certainly, Michael Gove would be on be on most of these lists. Further, that you will remember many of the initiatives and events linked with him; allowing schools rated by Ofsted as Outstanding to become academies, initiating 'Free Schools', terminating the Building Schools for the Future started by the previous Labour administration, famously apologising for getting the list of affected schools incorrect, reorganising his department, reforming A-Level and GCSE qualifications, the EBacc, abolishing modular units and coursework in many subjects in favour of final examinations and handling the Birmingham based Trojan Horse Scandal. In 2013 The National Association of Headteachers, The Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the National Union of Teachers and the NASUWT all passed motions of no confidence in his policies.

One is left feeling that if any commercial organisation had sponsored his tenure in education it would have to have been Marmite. However, my view remains that Michael Gove is one of the most influential Secretaries of State for Education in the last fifty years. It perhaps fitting that the biography by Bennett (2019) was entitled *Michael Gove, A Man in a Hurry*. A fitting summary?

It is hoped that the articles that follow reveal the complexity of the man. His journey from working class roots to politician has garnered some almost contradictory influences en route. I would suggest the following, though the list is not exhaustive:

1. The advocate of neoliberalism. This is probably the least surprising of the tenets held by Gove. With its roots in the thinking of the German sociologist, Alexander Rustow, neoliberalism had free market trade as its hallmark. It is plays down the role of the state and places a high level of faith in 'the markets. The Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition was 'guided by a vision of the weak state. Thus, what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad' (Apple, 2000, p 59). Neoliberalism was embedded through the UK political stick of rock from Thatcher through New Labour and on into the coalition. There is an inherent appeal to taking complex problems, like education and adopting an almost Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' approach. Schools are placed in the hands of private providers and the effective come to dominate and those providers found wanting become extinct. Neoliberalism is a self-evident springboard to academisation and the creation of free schools.

2. Gove has held an ambivalent attitude towards teachers. As he left The Robert Gordon School to go to Oxford, he was to write this in a poem published in the school magazine:

    'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
    Appear in learning or in teaching ill;

> It seems to be that the teacher's twin offence
> To tire our patience and mislead our sense.
> Some few teach well, but they err in this,
> They censure wrong and are in wit amiss.
>
> <div align="right">(in Bennett 2019:18)</div>

Gove continued to lecture teachers, but the basis of his judgement seemed to reside with a personal archetype. This apparent disdain was ultimately to lead to the cascade of motions of no confidence passed by the teaching unions towards the tenure of his ministerial post.

3. The Romantic. Gove was an inveterate reader as a teenager and beyond. He certainly developed a passion for English writers such as; Austen, Waugh, Orwell, Eliot and Powell. His historical perspective was more down the 'Empire' end of the spectrum. His passion for literature and a particular perception created a scotoma with his predilections moving from personal advocacy to becoming educational core.

> *At the moment, access to the best that has been thought and said is restricted to a fortunate few. Because of the dumbing-down of both our exams and school curricula under Labour, children can go through school never having read a novel written before the 20th century, never having read or seen an entire Shakespeare play, never having learned a poem by heart, never having had the chance to appreciate, or play, classical music, never having the chance to learn about the achievements of the greatest scientists and engineers, never having had the chance to play in the competitive sports in which England has long excelled, never being encouraged to engage with anything which is not immediately "relevant" to their lives.*
>
> <div align="right">(Gove 2013:2)</div>

Gove was to propose a content rich curriculum, his distinctive views being enhanced by the stance of Hirsch. In a response to The Sunday Times (2014), the chair of the National Association for the Teaching of English, Bethan Marshall, argued: 'It's a syllabus out of the 1940s and rumour has it, Michael Gove, who read literature, designed it himself. Schools will be incredibly depressed when they see it.' (2014). He failed to grasp that conviction will not necessarily secure compliance.

4. Revolutionary. Despite a brief brush with being a member of The Labour Party in his youth, Michael Gove remains a staunch conservative. However, that

political epithet does not always sit comfortably as a mantle. There is always something of the maverick, the radical about him. He has repeatedly stood up for social underdog both in his role as the Secretary of State for Education and subsequently as the Secretary of State for Justice. At one stage, he opposed the expansion of grammar schools and also held the 11plus to be a retrograde step. Famously, he had a picture of Lenin in his office at the Department for Education. Some have even questioned his credentials as a conservative. Young writing in The Spector describing him as 'the best leader of the labour party that never had' (2013). At various stages he has been closely associated with Dominic Cummings. Bennett quotes a friend of Gove, unattributed, who concluded:

> *What they have in common is an almost Leninist belief – almost Trotskyite belief perhaps – that you have to permanently revolutionise. Institutions have this incredibly strong drag effect and unless you are zealously fighting to push through your reforms they will die.*

(2019:163)

Perhaps at the heart of Michael Gove's political style is a driven restlessness that is satiated by maintaining an agitated momentum.

I contacted the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP to ask him to contribute to the journal. Characteristically courteous, he declined but wished us well. I have copied his letter after this editorial. The journal would, of course, be willing to allow him the right of reply to anything that we have published.

This journal is very much an activity of collaboration. Many thanks to all those who have contributed articles that engage with topics as varied as policy to phonics. Our intention is to maintain an eclectic mix of articles which present a variety of viewpoints. However, the inclusion of an article in the journal should not be taken as reflecting either the views of the editorial team or the University of Buckingham.

Again, my thanks to our Dean of Education, Professor Barnaby Lenon CBE for his continuing support and encouragement, our review panel for their advice. On the publishing side, thanks are due to Jonathan Reuvid MA, Editor in Chief, University of Buckingham Press and at Legend Press; Christian Müller, and Tom Chalmers the publisher of UBP and managing director of the Legend Times Group. Finally, and by no mean least Mark Deacon, our assistant editor, for his advice and unflagging suggestions of potential contributors.

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3rd   September 2020

Dr Max,

Thank you for your letter of 29 July thoughtfully inviting me to contribute to The Buckingham Journal of Education.

I cherish the time I spent as the Secretary of State for Education and am heartened that you would like to include my take on what was achieved at that time. As we make the most of the opportunities available at the end of the transition period and continue to restore our way of life after the pandemic, there are - as I am sure you can imagine - significant pressures on my diary. It is with regret, therefore, that I have to decline your offer at this time.

I wish you the best of luck with your ongoing research and look forward to reading your Journal when it is completed.

With every good wish,

Yours,

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office

ARTICLES

MICHAEL GOVE'S HERITAGE:
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE REFORM

Richard Riddell[*]

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the nature and effects of the radical reforms to English school governance since 2010, the year in which a Coalition Government, led by the Conservative Party, came to power in the UK, and Michael Gove was appointed Secretary of State for Education for England, a post he occupied for four formative years of Education reform. These governance reforms were part of a much wider programme of change, arguably fundamental in the sense that they have affected the classroom experiences of students directly. This programme encompassed changes to the curriculum, the assessment of children (and, by proxy, teachers and schools), the initial training and assessment of teachers and, eventually, school inspection, with the most recent revised Ofsted Inspection Framework governing inspections in use from September 2019 (Ofsted 2019).

Nevertheless, governance changes provide the framework through which all educational change in the future can be conceived, considered, interpreted, implemented and realised with students. So although all the above changes are identified with Gove, the changes to governance, often still badged as 'academisation', may be argued to be the most fundamental and the basis for considering future change and, indeed, Gove's heritage. No one policy maker controls the complete process of change and its development, of course, one of the features of 'complexity', and it is argued here that the methods of realising governance reform in England have severely constrained future choices of direction.

ORIGINS OF 'ACADEMISATION':
THE ARGUMENT MADE HERE

'Academisation' itself was not invented in 2010 – it was first mooted in 2000 (Blunkett, 2000) and became a legal status in 2002 – but its policy use and access were expanded dramatically from that date. Fundamentally it became the chosen instrument for changing the *educational polity* more generally – the wider organ-

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isational arrangements within which schools operate and develop. It literally transformed the physical landscape of schooling (Simkins, 2015). As academisation accelerated, it engendered new organisations from its own structural logic – Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) – drawing on, but changing in the process, previous forms of school *alliance*, informal and formal, such as soft and hard federations, trusts and then academy chains (Riddell, 2016). By the same structural logic, MAT development was accompanied by the deliberate, planned and structural decline of local authorities' (LAs') Education role: stated intentions to change were repeatedly unfulfilled, and ambitions to remove school improvement powers (DfE, 2016) left incomplete. At the same time, there were unrepentant and unremitting strategic reductions to government grant to LAs administered by the Department of Communities and Local Government as it was then (Riddell, 2019), compounded by the budget reductions from 'losing' academies. There were 49.1% in real terms between 2010–11 and 2017–18 (NAO, 2018), with no more than a third of this capable of being recouped through Council Tax.

The engineered declining capabilities of LAs and MAT development together necessitated new bureaucracies at regional level – it was not possible to supervise the rapidly increasing numbers of academies and MATs from London. So regional DfE offices accumulated more powers, though largely advisory to the Secretary of State, and took on roles previously exercised nationally. This in turn necessitated the appointment of new senior officials to lead this work, termed, appropriately enough in public market terminology, 'Regional Schools Commissioners'. They did the commissioning work for a time too.

This overall policy *assemblage* is therefore dynamic as it is still developing and changing under its own logic. In terms of numbers of schools, there were some 9,000 academies at the beginning of the current Covid pandemic, far more than the third identified by the National Audit Office in 2018, but academisation was strategically complete at secondary level before then (Riddell, 2016; 2019). These schools were now 'run' (but see below) by about 1500 MATs of varying sizes (Carter with McInerney, 2020). And a further 214 (LA-) 'maintained' schools 'converted' during 2020/21 as the pandemic raged (Whitaker, 2020).

But this assemblage is also unstable, in classic fashion in many contemporary forms of governance – 'neoliberal' if you will – as illustrated by Ball and Junemann (2012). The instability in the schools polity derives from what has become the now central importance of the powers and remit of the regional DfE Offices to making local school ecosystems work, especially where support for schools 'at risk' is being considered, the implementation of some intervention being planned and MAT development and expansion is being considered. Because these powers derived from a highly centralised authority – with key officials responsible to a national

minister (not always elected) – their nature, balance and local implementation can also be changed centrally and abruptly.

This is just what the Secretary of State did in 2018 (Riddell, 2019; Carter with McInerney, 2020), with consequences for the articulation of local school polities. The strategic importance of local polities for continuing improvement has been known for some time (Fullan, 1993; 2019). Briefly, there has to be some process around schools for identifying weakness and aiding and sustaining improvement if national ambitions for standards continue, and the 'ratchet' on schools moves up a notch on a regular basis (as occurred after the 2019 revised Ofsted inspection framework). But this also applies to 'outstanding' schools that have achieved national benchmarks, but wish to develop particular aspects of their teaching, sometimes requiring some expertise available elsewhere. These schools can only go to the market for this advice and consultancy if one exists, and post-LA this market capacity in local polities remains very uneven. The author's most recent interview evidence (for Riddell, 2019) suggests there is little capacity anywhere for secondary schools.

The instability will most likely continue in the 'mixed economy' of schools, which will be with us for some time. To add to complexity, the English schools polity includes other organisations besides RSCs/DfE and MATs with separate and different accountability structures and priorities: not the least elected Councils, some led by politicians of the same party as current ministers, Ofsted with its own strong regional offices, and of course the churches and faith groups.

As this instability is structural, governance also will remain fluid for the conceivable future as English governments continue to govern on a highly centralised basis, making for possible further shifts in the future and continuing uncertainty for school leaders, irrespective of the stability of their own trajectories. Furthermore, although rooted in notions of school standards, tinged with historic distrust of local authorities, the national schools polity in England leaves many questions not only unanswered, but unrecognised and now structurally incapable of being addressed, irrespective of how important citizens might consider them to be. The very nature of the organisations that have developed through the process of governance change severely restrains the nature of the response.

HOW THE CURRENT SCHOOLS' POLITY UNFOLDED

For a full understanding, it is important to understand the detail of how the current state of play arrived. No policy maker at any level begins with a *tabula rasa* for the realisation of policy ambitions, of course (eg Gale, 2003). As both Michael Gove and David Cameron, as respectively shadow education secretary and leader of the opposition, engaged politically before the 2010 election with (certainly) parent and (probably) school leader groups they had the legal framework of academies in

mind for potential applications for the new Free Schools, and granting greater autonomy to schools and their leaders. The Academies Act 2010 accordingly changed the means of access to the status by which bodies, though the approval process would remain the centralised responsibility of the Secretary of State.

The original (City) Academies, open from 2002 onwards, and sponsored to begin with by various local organisations including business, were part of an highly centralised strategy to tackle school 'failure', especially in urban areas because of an increasing government disenchantment with the capabilities of LAs doing so. Failure was measured then as now by an 'Inadequate' Ofsted judgment, requiring 'special measures' and poor student outcome data. Academies were funded through an agreement made directly with the Secretary of State, for which they are (after a series of changes) now held accountable by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (Riddell, 2009; 2016), an 'executive agency sponsored by the Department for Education' (GOV.UK).

The perceived advantages of such a centralised arrangement to Government was that the DfE had direct control over the process of improvement in the school, without having to spend time dealing with intermediaries such as local authority officers, advisers and inspectors who were considered by Gove as part of the 'Blob' (Young, 2014), along with university academics and others. The Department could send in its own staff chosen by itself. These oversight functions, as part of the national and now regional school improvement strategies, continue though are now supervised more locally (since 2014) by the nine RSCs (Riddell, 2016; Carter with McInerney, 2020).

The changes enacted in 2010 did allow groups of parents, teachers and community groups to make proposals directly to the Secretary of State (now via RSCs) for new schools that better met their expressed needs or approaches than that provided by the LA – to set up their own 'Free Schools'. This were intended to diversify and disrupt local schools markets, providing challenge for the schools that remained (DfE, 2010). Many of them, from the author's own experience are quite outstanding – others less so.

Much more significant in terms of numbers, the governing body of any (LA-) maintained school, as they routinely began to be termed, with an 'outstanding' verdict could decide by a simple majority to apply to the Secretary of State for academy status. Many did, without any rigorous local process of consultation, thus becoming 'convertor' academies as opposed to the original 'sponsored' ones arising out of some sort of intervention. This also had significant funding advantages for a time, including for capital works, and many applications were made for pragmatic reasons, as LAs declined, rather than a desire to shake free (Riddell, 2016).

But these changes also represented a politically directed and accelerating *movement* away from former LA 'control' of schools in England – once the Labour

Government lost its trust in LAs to change stubborn under-performance, it has not returned to governments since of any political colour. A complete status change for all schools was stated explicitly as a political objective in 2015 (Cameron, 2015), with the completion date of 2022 set the following year (DfE, 2016), but this target was abandoned shortly afterwards. This is why the 'mixed economy' of schools is likely to remain.

Cameron's speech to the Conservative Party conference that year was explicitly framed in very anti-local authority terms, envisaging a future where no schools would be responsible to LAs at all. Even though the target was abandoned, for many practical reasons, there is no doubt that this distrust remains with both ministers and their officials, from the author's most recent interviews. This will certainly colour any future changes to the polity.

Academically, the development of academisation has been much studied at various stages of the process, for example: Academies Commission (2013), Boyask (2013), Coldron *et al* (2014), Courtney at al (2020), Cousin (2018), Greany (2014, 2015, 2018), Lord *et al* (2016), Simkins (2015), and many more, from a variety of standpoints. Many of these studies have been relatively small scale, comprising a few schools or handful of local authorities, but more recently, the outcomes were published of a national Nuffield-funded project (Greany and Higham, 2018), using 47 school case studies across four localities, with a particular focus on the Self-Improving Schools System (SISS) – the stated objective of Government policy according to them - and how these stated policy aspirations have shaped and formed the current polity. It was accompanied by a detailed data analysis (Bernadetti *et al*, 2018).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MATS AND THE NATURE OF THE ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE EMERGED

The (policy) 'arguments for' academisation process have varied, with different arguments deployed on different occasions, which might be expected. Originally rooted in national school improvement policies, behind the backs of LAs, the process clearly changed when schools voluntarily became convertor academies: they were already achieving above national expectations in terms of student data and Ofsted inspection. They had already (been) improved, consensually or not (Riddell, 2016; Simon *et al*, 2020). The argument made originally was that status change would allow better intervention, but significantly also allow school leaders just to get on with it themselves, with the help of other 'people like them'. In any case, the standards argument became more and more difficult to sustain as the number of convertors began to vastly outnumber the number of sponsored academies (Connelly *et al*, 2014). This argument by itself is rarely aired now in policy

terms, reflecting the almost complete academisation of secondary schools and the routinisation of attending one as a student becomes eleven.

Now the 'argument' – where indeed there even is one – has shifted to what (only) academisation can make possible, or indeed is *required* after a *direction* to convert in response to an RSC review. As noted, MATs developed from previous informal and formal governance arrangements and are legally based on the model for school Trusts set up by 2006 Education Act. 'Pairing schools', often a higher performing school with a lower performing one, became more and more of a feature from the early 2000s, many originally 'brokered' by LAs and supported by funding and LA staff maintained to discharge their responsibilities towards standards. More and more, these staff were brought in on a time limited nature from other successful schools. The idea behind 'brokering' in simple terms is that the leader(s) of the more successful school, supported by others, would spend time working in the other to help develop its own improvement trajectory, passing on directly some of their more successful experience.

With the academisation process accelerated by Gove and his officials after 2010, many of these 'other' successful schools providing support and challenge to their less fortunate peers were by now academies. They looked directly to the DfE for their own support and direction – naturally enough when time and attention are inevitably limited. So a national scheme for accrediting these outstanding leaders, quality assuring their involvement in other schools, developed piecemeal before 2010 now blossomed into the current array of National, Local, and Specialist Leaders of Education (and of governance).

Carter and McInerney (2020) in their account set out the problems very clearly with the earlier informal arrangements, and the nature of federations before MATs. With more than one governing body involved and different community aspirations and composition, the time of accredited, outstanding school leaders, even with a centrally allocated budget, could be unnecessarily spent on gaining agreement before actually doing anything to enable a weaker school to improve. Their own time might also be limited because of the restricted budget for their support work and the fact that their own schools wanted them back, not unreasonably.

For schools requiring improvement – limited for now to those with unsatisfactory data and inspection outcomes (all schools can arguably always do some things better) – the solution was obvious: more permanent arrangements. The more successful school (a convertor) would themselves sponsor their fellow schools where asked, and would set up funded, formal organisations with the staff, time and resources to work permanently with poor performing schools. This policy idea provided the genesis for the development of MATs as the *one accepted form* for this work, often termed 'chains' in the early days.

Beginning as voluntary associations in the early years after the 2010 reform,

as the new circumstances were adjusted to, primary schools – hitherto largely 'loyal' to LAs – also began to associate and convert in larger numbers, joining or opening MATs as LAs were forced to offer less and less by way of effective services or support. A third of primaries had converted by the start of the pandemic (Greany, 2020). However, the phase of voluntary association and MAT consolidation and expansion is largely over.

This then was the multi-fold impeccable structural logic that compelled first, academisation, then setting up or joining MATs to pool resources and give central MAT staff more sustained time for better collaboration, support and development. Thus MATs have become the central organisational feature of the English schools polity, and the ones that must be studied (Simon *et al*, 2020) to understand how the system now articulates. But these developments have by no means guaranteed success (Greany and Higham, 2018) and the construction of local polities that may seem less than desirable.

Currently, MATs vary in size and reach from the very local to the national – another feature of organisational instability. The largest number of MATs still have two to five schools, enabling extra but limited support capacity, though many *single* free-standing academies remain (SATs as they are now referred to) as a result of decisions made earlier in the 2010s. As Simkins (2015) remarked, they are a prominent feature of the current system. Their free standing nature makes their continued development more risky unless outside organisations (such as the DfE) are able to fund development time for them. New proposals for SATs no longer receive approval through the RSC process and RSCs interviewed by the author have the objective of persuading them, even when there isn't a problem, to join larger MATs.

DfE staff known as 'Education Advisors' and 'Delivery Teams' were gradually repurposed for the continuing conversion and development work, the former sometimes on a consultancy basis, and assigned pragmatically to the developing regional offices. The Regional School Commissioners (RSCs), drawing on reports by these staff, are now *advised* about the development of new MATs and academy conversions by headteacher boards (HTBs), three quarters of whom are elected every four years from existing academy heads who, as Coldron *et al* (2014) are 'well-positioned' in the developing polity. As Greany and Higham (2018) point out, these school leaders, of originally individual high performing schools, are among the greatest beneficiaries of the governance arrangements as they have developed since 2010. They are key to making local polities work, which have become more and more hierarchical.

But the organisational form of MATs – school trusts - needs to be understood to understand both their strengths and limitations. MATs are non-profit companies registered at Companies House, with a small number of founding 'members' akin

to shareholders in a private company. They appoint the Board of Trustees, which then determines governance relationships with individual schools, which may have local governing bodies (LGBs) with varying powers, or none (all DfE, 2019). The nature of the LGB, whatever their powers, is largely that of a committee of the board, whose prime responsibility, depending on the MAT, is to hold their own leadership team to account and maintain relations with parents and, sometimes, the local community. The Board makes decisions behind closed doors and is not obliged to publish or circulate its minutes. Most do not – 'secrecy' has been a common word used by CEOs and others interviewed by the author over the past few years. With some MATs responsible for over 60 schools, inevitably their holding to account of the MAT's senior leadership team centres on bottom line figures and trajectories of student outcomes, a focus made easier by the minority of educationalists on most Boards.

The CEO and leadership team of the MAT line and performance manage the headteachers of its individual schools. The LGB, where it exists, may have an input to this process, but the author uncovered one headteacher who felt she had had little involvement in setting her own objectives (Riddell, 2019). One of the original goals of 2010 was to increase the autonomy of school leaders (DfE, 2011), but accumulating evidence belies this (Greany and Higham, 2018; Riddell, 2019) and to an extent this has changed the traditional view of the headteacher being wholly responsible to a governing body for a school's 'curriculum and conduct' (Lord *et al*, 2017). Leaving aside the issue of managing its leaders, MATs occupy varying places on the centralisation spectrum with regards to both the curriculum (some MATs have introduced detailed, week by week curricula from Key Stage 1–4) and teaching, with some MATs requiring lessons to be 'delivered' (literally) in specific ways, with prescribed techniques and approaches.

THE POLITY AS A WHOLE

The importance of the *local* schools polity to sustain school development and improvement – traditionally the LA in England, but single-focus district school boards in the US and elsewhere – was rehearsed earlier. Understanding how the practice of teachers with their students could best be supported and developed has been ongoing for many years (see eg Riddell, 2003). What emerged during the 2000s was the need for timetabled joint work between teachers in each other's classrooms, not just their leaders, and where possible from different schools. Hargreaves (2012) termed this 'Joint Practice Development' (JPD) that could be sustained between funded schools partnerships and at best, outside accountability structures, with teachers not being instructed to improve. Taking this as a starting

point in a complex argument, the question for governance is then what form of local polity can best provide it. MATs, which are hierarchical and not partnerships at all (Greany and Higham, 2018), do not do this, although Greany and Higham did observe some JPD during their research.

Broadly speaking, MATs are not accountable in the same way public services traditionally are. Ofsted have undertaken a number of 'evaluations' since 2017 – whether they could be inspected or not was eventually ruled out by ministers. Their outcome data, including inspections, is desk top reviewed at least annually by both the RSCs and geographically focused 'delivery teams' and all the LAs the author has visited over the last eight years. If these data are not showing particular risks, then the MAT's accountability is confined to (sometimes) annual meetings behind closed doors of their Board Chair and CEO with the RSC and staff. If individual schools are identified as at risk from desk top reviews, then the RSC will contact the CEO, not the headteacher.

RSCs were until recently informed about particular MATs through unpublished visit reports – often not seen by the MATs concerned and considered time-consuming 'parallel inspection' – and were given advice behind closed doors by their headteacher advisory boards. The announcements made by the Secretary of State referred to earlier (Hinds, 2018) dramatically changed this and with it the balances of power in local polities. Under party political pressure, he restricted the use of the advisers which in turn led to a rethink of RSC roles (Riddell, 2019), re-emphasising the importance of brokering support (usually from MATs), not primarily commissioning it or sending in their own staff, and working to 'develop the wider school improvement system' with LAs, The Teaching Schools Council (which has assumed new significance) and Dioceses where needed. In a review of how school improvement strategies would be developed and implemented regionally (TSC, 2018), it was frankly stated that RSCs themselves could no longer carry out or oversee school improvement work.

Accordingly, school improvement work was to be undertaken by a range of participants, including MAT staff, supported by TSC officials. The agreement and allocation of time and support would be take place through a new network of regional, sub-regional and local authority level boards (TSC, *ibid*), building on both previously established committees to oversee the agreement and implementation of the 'Strategic School Improvement Fund' (another time limited central allocated development budget) and the school partnerships investigated by Hatcher (2014), Riddell (2019) and Greany (2020). These LA level boards are all largely professional-dominated, include all the above listed organisations, MAT CEOs as well as maintained headteachers, and again meet behind closed doors. Some LAs still did not have them in 2019 (Riddell, *ibid*), despite pressure from

RSCs. This could form the sort of 'glue' role for LAs described in Greany (2020) in the future, beyond the scope of this article.

In summary, as has been argued, the centralised legitimacy of power over the collection of local schools polities in each RSC region, with the potential for future rebalancing of function and role by the Secretary State, entail stability for only so long as he or she wishes it. And what happens in individual schools in a MAT will similarly remain stable as long as there are not risky school data and the Board is kept happy. But the continuing uneven development of MATs, with differing geographical spreads by size and phase that have remained a focus of RSCs since *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016), taken with the variety of approaches taken to their own governance and therefore the nature of their schools, mean there will be no arrival point or fixed state for an academised school structure.

Given also the historic variety in the way that LAs have seen their role in the past (Simkins *et al*, 2015) and what seems to be a recent widespread reconsideration of their roles as they are considered important partners of government once again, the English schools 'system' will remain variegated, as perhaps it has always been, with any nationally driven change having different results locally. This makes it extremely difficult to be clear about national directions for school governance and organisation in the longer term, or at least reliably so, and the to-be-settled roles of RSCs, CEOs, headteachers and LA. Instability will remain a key characteristic; the paradox of this opaque centralised system, created by Michael Gove, is diversity.

A footnote on free schools

Although free schools have continued to be proposed and opened, advised and supported by the arm's length charitable organisation, the New Schools Network, it is difficult to argue that they have played a strategic role in the developing schools polity nationally or locally. In their 'pure' original form, intended to be local schools market disruptors, they have always remained in small numbers, though the extremely high quality of some of these new schools, very often in areas of high deprivation, should not be overlooked (Riddell, 2016). But the free school proposal mechanism, with much stricter and more detailed requirements than in the early days of the reform, is now the *only* way to open a new school. With the need to respond to increasing pupil numbers, the number of 'ordinary' mainstream schools, mostly proposed by MATs, that are in fact free ones has far overtaken the 'disruptors'.

HAS ANY OF THE GOVERNANCE REFORM ACTUALLY WORKED?

To conclude briefly, one of the aspects of the different approach taken to schooling from 2010 was the 'recentring' of schools (Simon, 2010) in Government-driven attempts to not only improve student outcomes, but achieve wider policy outcomes such as widening social mobility. By that is meant before 2010 the Labour Government viewed school reform as part of a range of wider policy interventions on health, economic well-being and poverty as these also impact on not only what students are able to achieve in school but how they progress and hence wider societal effects. The basic approach to improving social mobility under the Coalition government (Cabinet Office, 2011) was centred on attainment in education.

The wider societal results have been in fact, not to over-analyse them, disappointing. Social Mobility is now going backwards and has been for a number of years (Social Mobility Commission, 2020, and many earlier reports). Poverty by all accounts is increasing (Bourquin *et al*, 2019) in an unstable labour market. A further related long standing aspiration of 'closing the gap' in attainment between disadvantaged students (usually measured by entitlement to free school meals and more recently for Pupil Premium funding) has been disappointed: this gap at age 16 has been increasing year on year since 2014 and, after early gains, is now doing the same at age 11 (Hutchison *et al*, 2020).

On measuring attainment itself, it is arguably quite difficult to compare outcomes at 16 before and after the introduction over two years a new grade structure at GCSE: the old minimum standards grade of C is now spread over two grades, the new 4 and 5. This leads to presentation of results by MAT Boards as Basic 9-5 and Basic 9-5, where 'basic' refers to English and Maths. Further, expectations of school outcome are now expressed predominantly in terms of 'progress' as measured from entry to the particular school. This is the 'Progress 8' (in eight subjects) measure for secondary schools. A P8 score relates to a statistically derived single number score in comparison with the average score of all schools. Above average is represented as more than zero; less than average a negative number. These scores are comparatively recent, but now form the basis for school targets and intervention in response to at risk data. The measure did not exist before 2010.

One final point. The stated purpose of the local school polities in RSC regions is now absolutely confined to school improvement, just as MATs are – better outcomes. One CEO interviewed for Riddell (2019) stated that this was what 'it was all about'. But schools are not, and have never been, single purpose monofocal organisations focusing on the bottom line: they need to meet and provide effectively for students with a wide range of special educational and other needs,

including giftedness, which might very well prove significant barriers to both their happiness and their progression to the next stages of their lives. They need to introduce, celebrate enrol their students in the cultural and heritages of the populations they cater for. They need to play a part with other organisations, public and private, in realising the economic health, wellbeing and happiness of their various communities, and contribute to local and national prosperity. This is a long list: schools are not merely organisations devoted to finding technical solutions to a narrow range of measurable student outcomes.

But the governance arrangements outlined here allow of no public discussion whatsoever of how any of these things are done, leaving aside any input to any public (or indeed behind closed doors) decisions about change for the better. In this sense, schools *have* become both depoliticised (Wilkins, 2016) and mono-focal in the public eye. One of the most striking findings from the author's most recently published research (Riddell, 2019) was that there is no open public forum, as part of any pubic body, where improvements can be discussed and acted on to provision for the most needy children, for example, address school transfer and admissions problems, consider the shape of new schools or now, most important, how post-pandemic reconstruction should take place after the compounding of disadvantage during the lockdown implemented during the pandemic (eg Andrew *et al*, 2021). English schooling has ceased to be part of any recognisable democracy and why, certainly, at least upper secondary education – probably more – has now stagnated (Rogers and Spours, 2020) without much prospect of renewal.

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RATIONALISM, RISK AND RIDICULE – EXPERTS, SCEPTICS AND THE MARK OF THE 'BLOB'

Richard Davies*

ABSTRACT

This article offers a perspective on the debate about experts and their value. It considers why expert claims for attention are often regarded as suspect. It does so by reflecting on the work of Arendt, Oakeshott, and Scruton. It notes that decision makers can easily find themselves in a bind - sometimes railing against experts, like those presumed to inhabit an education 'Blob' in the UK - and at other times seemingly becoming dependent upon them, as in 'the Science' and public health. It draws attention to the character of the distaste for scepticism about experts within education, and to the intellectual origin of that scepticism itself. It highlights the alleged contradictions in the minds of sceptics especially where they want to conserve or draw strength from inherited social norms, and yet at the same time regard them as a dehumanising trap. It suggests that the contradiction can be overcome by distinguishing between their concerns about the dangers of rationalism, and their rooted attachment to reason and reasonableness. It invites practitioners to take a principled interest in risk and in its resistance to elimination. It suggests that ridicule can be healthy in so far as it deftly challenges complacency amongst *experts and practitioners alike.*

EXPERTS, STATUS, AND POWER

Dismissing experts without discriminating judgment, and regardless of their quality, is plainly as misguided as according them some special standing without rigorous scrutiny. Yet keeping a sense of proportion about their worth is often hard. This is especially so when they are either demonised as politically inspired propagandists, or alternatively used as weapons against the darker versions of denier populism – whether actual or merely claimed. This isn't easy for either practitioners or publics. The balanced position is desirably sceptical – neither wilfully suspicious, nor readily awed, and always searching. It will be unafraid of teasing good humour. Whilst sceptics will oppose rationalist attachments, they will always look to calibrate the value of particular experts, and their evidence,

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forensically. They will be reluctant to adopt generalised conclusions and will not be disposed to put reason and reasonableness at risk. They will not allow their scepticism to become so promiscuous as to slip into treating bad arguments just as though they might be good.

Anyhow, here are a few questions, the answers to which will lead us to the important work of Arendt, Oakeshott, and Scruton. First, why do some practitioners fulminate against criticism of experts by politicians like Michael Gove in the first place? In part, it is because it is assumed that the public treats the title of expert as automatically worthy of attention and respect. An expert *knows what counts when others don't*; *shows what to do, and what not to do*; and *has the capacity to resolve tough problems*. It is assumed that the expert will invariably affect the inexpert or untutored positively – thus gaining sufficient superiority to command power, reputational dignity, and remunerative acclamation. To disparage experts is then held to be dangerously irrational, and populist too where the term is applied to *everything of which I disapprove; whose origins I am unwilling to confront; and whose human concerns I refuse to understand or tackle.*

Most people prefer to feel respected, whether in reality they are or not. Where educators persuade themselves that they are not heard, or are somehow undervalued, or not trusted, or otherwise deserve some special advantage, they join a scramble for verbal tags like 'expert' to bolster their status against that of others. They do so whether there is evidence that its achievement would have any beneficial consequence for learners or not. They treat the epithet 'expert' or 'researcher' as a tradeable commodity – a form of frantic credentialism deployed in a struggle for public profile and resource advantage. People who want to be heard are often not listening.

Any sceptical critic, who is nonetheless sympathetic to the practice of teaching, will regard the title 'expert' as a tricky term to which the unnecessarily underconfident aspire. It is imperious in outlook – unlike the more modest terms 'specialist', or 'exemplar of a craft' like acting or leadership. It has the potential to farm value whether justified or not. Yet a profession does not alone make the practitioner an expert. In so far as educators seek to give the impression that they are all possessed of expert capabilities, and in the same degree, they do themselves, and those they serve, no credit. Their position is merely self-regarding. In an open society, providers cannot reasonably dictate the grant of social kudos. Wanting the respect presumed of other professions is no basis for developing your own.

PRACTICE AND PRIVILEGE

Second, why do some react adversely to any challenge to experts in communities of practice? They do so, again in part, because they sense that sceptics see these

communities as protective opinion networks. In this they are not wrong. If you claim to be expert you enter into communion with colleagues in a self-sustaining bubble designed for mutual reputational gain – an elite that has the strength to exclude as well as to influence 'ordinary' minds. Joining such a collective offers the prospect of adding lustre to a practitioner's own standing simply by association. It makes it easier to live in comfort with your own prejudices, opinions, and beliefs. It carries the risk of becoming less inclined to reflect, think and be subject to credible evidential review. Those 'others' outside the defensive carapace may be treated as ignorant, stupid or deplorable. Their tastes offend and agonise the elite.

None of this is surprising given the prevailing cultural preference (at least in the West) for incontinent emotionalism; divisive identity-mongering; witless 'passion'; and greedy self-realisation, as opposed to public duty. Overall, the sceptic will always be on the alert for the temper of easy comfort in an expert – the sort that is regressive, complacent, slovenly, and very far from radical. As always, self-pride and personal passion risk walking with privilege in ways wholly removed from the humble, dispassionate, and respectful.

If the title of expert is claimed, then it surely must be earned. It must have demonstrable effect and be free of any post-modernist disinclination to take truth seriously. The title cannot simply be appropriated as something justifying permanent attribution. It isn't gained just because a practitioner works hard, spends time and effort in a particular field, and feels entitled to recognition. Sharing a disposition derived from mutually reinforcing exchanges untroubled by rigorous scrutiny is common, but not the mark of genuine expertise. The expert must expect to be tested and to face contradiction – or otherwise risk redundancy.

The collisions of experts and sceptics arise from other directions too. Thus, educators and decision-makers in the UK often view one another with profound perplexity. Many educators can seem resistant to proposals for change unless they conform to '*what teachers want*', as though that were readily identifiable, professionally motivated (as opposed to Union or employment driven), and capable of cutting through to public consciousness. From this optic, change and improvement face a professional mind-set that appears wedded to operational overcomplication and risk aversion. It is easy to dismiss.

It does not help when practitioners give little or no credit for the very considerable increases in taxpayer funding devoted to education whatever the colour of the central government administration over at least two decades. However, for their part, and in their own version of a private world, policy makers can appear to give scant consideration to the distinctive motivators amongst practitioners in schools, FE and Universities; to the physically and intellectually demanding character of their roles; to the complexity of the environments in which they operate; and to the rigours of development within, and for, professional lives.

Where social deference has all but evaporated; society has become greatly more open and diverse; and the (un)social media rule, public expectations of educators and education increase exponentially – and it becomes ever harder to meet them. Actually, the same difficulty confronts elected politicians. Policy ambitions collide so that, for example, the scope for de-centralising decisions about resource allocation and use on the one hand, cannot be reconciled with vehement opposition to any 'postcode lottery' on the other.

PERCEPTION, RESEARCH, POLICY, AND 'THE BLOB'

In so fluid a context, it would be useful if research, and the associated experts, were in good standing. So, do the products of 'expert' educational research command attention and respect? HE offers much that is distinguished. UK education departments mine data from the OECD, inspectorates, and awarding bodies extensively. Practitioner leadership is increasing. Yet sadly, and in general, the record is mixed. The absence of educational institutions like the Royal Colleges in medicine enfeebles liaison between research, policy, and practitioner. Results are often presented in drearily inaccessible language, ideologically disconnected from political reality. They feature matters of no evident relevance to learners or otherwise offer insights too late to affect policy at all. Efforts are repeatedly made to tackle this, but facing adverse perception squarely is at least a stimulus to raising the game.

That also means recognising that policy-makers may perceive the tone of educational research as statist or welfarist – keener on paralysing distractions than on seeking solutions to tough problems, and resistant to numerical analysis too. In parallel, sceptics will always deprecate research suggestive of profound insight which merely promotes a cosy mood of lofty cynicism. They will reject pathways to 'fair' outcomes from positions which ignore conflicting interpretations of what counts as fair, or contradictions in other concepts implicit in notions of social justice. Too often research gives the impression that social good can only be achieved by a monoculture of central and local government. Too often social mobility is cast as solely for the academically competent – a form of 'fairness' that kicks away the ladder to recognition, dignity and advancement for those with different attributes.

For critical sceptics, educational initiatives or outcomes can never be wholly equitable – whether by reference to systems, organisations or some abstract ideal standard. For them, equitable outcomes can only be achieved by suppressing innovation, individuality, opportunity, and diversity of institutional provision. So, sceptics disparage any tendency amongst educators to bewail intrusions into what teachers teach, and how they teach, as though there were no professional or public

interest in how learning or best practice is promoted and different merits recognised. Practitioners and researchers may argue that the history of post-war education policy in the UK exhibits a preference for raw market ideology and a denial of social welfare and well-being. However, for the sceptic, the argument is simply unsustainable: alternative policy prescriptions are either absent, biased to the academic, inchoate, or electorally untenable.

In any event, public policy towards education in the UK has featured a clear direction of travel over three decades and the results have been far from unfruitful. Teachers are not yet required to indoctrinate or to tell learners precisely what to think. The public expect that they will act on a vocational commitment to help young people to learn and live well whatever the circumstances they face. All UK governments want practitioners to improve the value generated from taxpayer funding in the interests of the economy, society, and individuals. Certainly, sceptics would not accept that the solution to all the ills facing educators – whether real or imagined; whether relating to the condition of capitalism; to COVID; to the 'supremacist patriarchy'; or species extinction – can be dealt with by holistic transformation, or anything which elevates educational priorities ahead of any others.

Sceptics will always emphasise that the fragility implicit in the social construction of expert educational research inevitably risks a negative mind set – at the extreme, that of a turgid 'Blob'. And this is what famously exercised Michael Gove, and attendant Special Advisers (Montrose42 Blog 2013). He applied the label to a group of 100 academics as 'enemies of promise' – a term used by Cyril Connolly (1948). A natural sceptic, Gove saw the sociology of much educational research as fuelling disappointment, and resistant to change and challenge.

More broadly sceptics point up that where people feel especially threatened, by nuclear or climate annihilation, pandemic or economic collapse or anything else, they cry out for certainties. They seek complete safety or protection from risk, and expect that experts will deliver. Treating experts this way typically concedes ground to powerful institutional and personal authority. In turbulent times, the outsider, critic, or troublesome sceptic will always face hostility, a clamour for national safety, and for urgent expedients (regardless of unintended results). Yet their voices are critical to preserving the very openness of mind, trade and society that offers the best prospect of innovating and confronting significant threats successfully. That is so, providing that the balance between winners and losers is not lost in the transition (something instinctive liberals can easily overlook).

Moreover, a longing for certainty and timid deference to the expert walks hand in hand with casual derision for those who have to grapple with risk, confusion and despair. Sceptics will reserve special disapprobation for those who never risk themselves at the ballot box, yet who are determined to assert that leading

politicians of whatever party are anti-teacher. Whatever else they do; politicians do not court the disapproval of whole professions.

In fact, activist Ministers like Kenneth Baker under Margaret Thatcher in the late 80s, David Blunkett under Tony Blair in the late 90s, and Michael Gove under David Cameron in the early 20s have all sought to extend the reach of educators and enable them to promote higher standards and learners' personal fulfilment. So too have the overwhelming majority of education Ministers and regulators in central and devolved government – and politicians in local government too. It may be that for some, these achievements can never be regarded as well-founded or worth having because ideologically unsound. But that is largely meretricious and tendentious posturing – a propaganda of evasion and contempt.

The record of respect for educators can be read in long lists. Here is one: the entitlements created for learners through the national curriculum; the associated and serious attention given to assessment; the efforts to provide school leaders with greater autonomy over policy and budgets; the use of targets to raise expectations; the ramping up of funding per pupil; the major increase in teacher numbers; the efforts to reduce class sizes; the great increase in teacher pay; the expansion of the academies programme and the introduction of free schools (in England); the efforts to broaden options to recognise and to equip learners to navigate an uncertain world; the determination to achieve greater rigour in examination and qualification design; and the willingness to promote teaching as a regulated profession.

This is not the whole story, and not everything has been an immediate success – or ever could have been. However, from the perspectives of many policy makers, and politicians of both left and right, every effort to improve and reform has been met by resistance from apparently 'expert' educators. In acrimony, practitioners cry, '*Get off my back, but tell me precisely what to do*'. Thus, Michael Gove's use of the 'Blob' label gave expression to the frustrations of policy makers about the perceived inclinations of some teaching Unions, local authorities, academics, and some educators to act as a drag on constructive improvement. He wasn't the originator of the term, and those who use it consider it to be wholly undeserving of outrage. That said, it is worth responding to ridicule by explaining why it is unjustified, in so far as it may be, in ways that are compelling and command general public respect. Unfortunately, or fortunately, no such response has so far been especially audible.

EXPERTS, INDEPENDENCE, POLICY MAKING, AND MYTH

Next, is there a credible and substantial challenge to scepticism – something that goes beyond the observation that criticism of the expert can be taken just too far, and even to indiscriminate stereotyping or the lunacies of conspiracy mania? This

line might well have some justified traction given the evidence for dysfunctional relationships between researchers, experts, specialists and decision makers within the UK governmental system.

Aside from Michael Gove's (2020) recent remarks on the performance of the British civil service, anyone who has the patience to read the reports of the National Audit Office (and the parallel organisations for the devolved governments) cannot but be overwhelmed by the post-war litany of disasters in public policy-making within the UK (King and Crew 2013). They feature incompetent change and project management; insouciance about risk management; woefully inadequate procurement practice; and waste on an epic scale. They do not encourage confidence that tax will be well used, whether governments raise more or less.

From the misuse of intelligence prior to the invasion of Iraq under Blair; to the treatment of immigration from EU accession states early in the millennium; to failed financial regulation under Brown; to the confusions over policy towards the EU under Cameron and May; to the struggle to achieve a coherent response to COVID-19 under Johnson, the truly troubling factor has lain not only in the weakness of expert advice, but in the inability of professional specialists and decision makers to achieve reliable judgment, purpose, and action.

So, a concern about scepticism towards experts might be justified if it gets in the way of responding to the immense pressures for timely decision in massively contested public landscapes where the chances of mis-step carry the highest of stakes. Experts, practitioners, and decision makers share responsibility for public policy outcomes. The character of that relationship would be transformed if its features were more thoroughly transparent and the lessons of failure more determinedly learned. Following O'Neill (2017), experts and decision makers alike might reflect that it would be useful to overcome mutual incomprehension and suspicion by working on their relationships. That would entail a shift from a simplistic demand to be accorded trust, to the mutual and disciplined cultivation of trustworthiness.

Yet it is not at all obvious that the relationship can improve without the sharpness of scorn that draws attention to the differences of perspective in the first place. Indeed, it is hard to withhold ridicule from one particular line of argument. This comes from those who consider that an expert generally has a claim to reliability. Distrusting democracy, they will often argue that the very quality of expertise makes the case for detaching problems of public policy from politics altogether. It is often said that educational practice and policy would best be carried out 'independently' of government (whether central, local, or devolved) on terms mimicking arrangements that currently apply for the health service in England or the Bank of England – in so far as they are likely to last, which can hardly be assumed.

Thus, it is claimed that teachers of history are assessors <u>of</u> events not historians <u>for</u> government; that all educational experts should practise in the same mould; and that the institutions of government should preserve the distinction. At the same time, it is implied that if decision-makers were all expert educators, public benefit would be guaranteed. The suggestion glides easily into arguments in favour of bringing practitioners into policy-making roles within government departments, or likewise experienced specialists capable of working on particular problems or techniques without preconceptions. These are usually valid, and generally useful initiatives. They do not give rise to the same issues as those attaching to presumptions about experts and expertise. Nor do they address the besetting disconnection between policy making and practical implementation in the UK.

The policy problems confronting democratic government are rarely, if ever, patient of treatment from one professional perspective alone. Trade-offs abound. Someone may command respect as an expert in one field and people may assume it to be reliable for others. But this is usually a mistake - a form of transference when the public pressure for solutions and certainty is overwhelming. Moreover, the skills needed in educational settings and related research are not the same as those needed in government. It is not that they cannot be transferred in either direction it is simply that the capability differences, and the difficulties of adapting them to unfamiliar contexts, need to be recognised frankly.

Moreover, attempts to claim that policy is led by 'the Science' in the COVID-19 pandemic have again exposed the awkward reality that experts frequently and profoundly disagree. They did so about what could be said to be known about the virus and what not; about transmission dosage; immunity; treatment, and protection. More substantially, although lockdown was ultimately preferred to herd immunity in March 2020, judgments about the implications of operational damage to the NHS, and to the wider economy, could not be made in isolation from one another. Even where experts agree, it does not follow that the public will regard their judgments as legitimate or even tolerable. Ultimately, multiple and conflicting pressures are inescapably for governmental decision even though this should desirably be achieved on terms that are non-binary as between expert and politician.

'The Science' is not an institution capable of achieving legitimate and effective governmental decision. It merely refers to contributors to decision making. Civil servants are no longer the sole conduits for advice to Ministers. Rather they ensure that Ministers are fully advised and can take account the competing voices clamouring for attention – expert or not. Indeed, in the UK, no state or devolved education department exists to protect the interests of educators and education where circumstances and priorities determine otherwise. An independent cadre of expert educationalists would never command legitimacy for acutely difficult

decisions which ultimately demand balanced judgments of practical as well as political risk. To assert otherwise is to indulge disingenuity and myth.

Moreover, decision by unelected experts is no more defensible than decision by unelected bureaucrats. Claiming the right to steer decision on the basis of some expertise or other without being troubled by plural voices; getting it wrong; grandstanding for personal reputational effect; and then sneering at politicians when they take the tough decisions, is hardly defensible either. This is emphatically not to say that experts or specialists have no role in policy formation, only that they cannot claim to exclude diverse voices and needs, or that their assessments are absolute and invariably reliable. Experts cannot monopolise judgment. Sceptical detachment and pragmatism are the only sound bases for government.

EXPERTS, TRUST, AND THE LAW

By way of further illustration consider the GCSE and A Level grade awards for in 2020. Every relevant ministry in the UK (Conservative; SNP in Scotland; Labour/ LibDem in Wales; DUP/SF in Northern Ireland, and associated qualification regulators) adopted arrangements for balancing teacher assessment with moderation prior to August 2020, and then abandoned them within hours. One reading of what happened (only one) is that the expert regulators were reluctant to drop an established preference for socially distanced examinations at the moment when the concerns of teachers and parents made them unsustainable.

The regulators also failed to devise an award and appeal process that might be saleable for whole cohorts but could never command public credibility at the level of some individual schools or students. The wholesale abandonment apparently occurred regardless of the risks for higher education, grade inflation, employer decisions, and also for successor learners in 2021. Given that this sort of interpretation of events has gained traction, and quickly, the public can hardly be expected to trust education experts without equivocation.

In any event, pure professional autonomy simply does not exist – not even for judicial activists. It is always bounded. Whether education is publicly funded, directly or indirectly, or privately financed, it has necessarily to be moderated by disciplines of accountability that are intrinsic to professional effectiveness and legitimacy. The claim, *trust me I'm a teacher and an expert whose marking can relied upon*, will ultimately cut no ice with governments and the public (whatever assessment arrangements are determined for 2021 and beyond) when teachers' commitments to their learners leave them fundamentally conflicted. Few would tolerate a lawyer to be judge and jury in a client's own cause. Only the wilfully obtuse would be content with a static marking system permitting neither upward

pressure on examination and assessment standards over time, nor any policy towards grade inflation.

Furthermore, much suspicion of 'expert' opinion arises because it is often generated not by experts at all, but by individuals working in organisations funded by special interests determined to muster political pressure for particular results. Very obviously, competing, and often lurid, expert claims marked the referendum campaigns on Scottish independence and departure from the EU. Creating narratives aimed at changing attitudes in mass populations, coupled with activities designed to spark sympathy for related goal achievement, is their stock in trade. It is assisted by lazy journalism. They may simply be 'sock puppets' serving unaccountable money focused on policy positioning and media management. They may be charitable bodies cynically disinclined to let public paranoia go to waste and using it as a fundraising lever. They may be client entities masquerading as independent, yet supporting government policy in exchange for public funding. They are evident where political systems are emergent, or under strain. Following Gove (2017), these are perhaps the kind of experts of which the public might have had 'enough'.

Whilst it is claimed that policy should be evidence 'based' or 'informed', this may covertly disregard problems of origin, cogency and quality. Indeed, the pressure for 'impact' in academia or think-tanks may itself act as a distraction from evidential frailty. Thus, COVID epidemiological modelling was not early subject to full multi-disciplinary review. 'Publish or perish' may favour media profile over rigorous research or scholarship. Notwithstanding the disparate mechanisms designed to promote good practice, there is no one Academy of Experts for education as for some Court experts; no advance training; no relevant duty in Teachers Standards (DfE England 2017); no performance monitoring; and no disclosure requirements. So, expert claims can evade review. This matters. Much educational research uses interpretivist method which, in the hands of the incautious, and despite its strengths, is vulnerable to misplaced inference, evasive treatment of correlation, and inflated conclusions.

In the UK, the law (1975; 2012) distinguishes between ordinary witnesses who often find it difficult to distinguish fact from inference, and an expert having the specialist knowledge to give an informed opinion on evidence put before the Court. Experts have power. Accordingly, the Courts are bound to test the depth and quality of the knowledge claimed; its relevance; its reliability; and whether it is fair to admit that opinion. The function – indeed the duty - of the expert before the Courts is to present information that is likely to be outside the experience of judge or jury. It must be evidence which helps the Court to reach its own independent conclusions. Governments, parliaments, and publics have an analogous need.

Neither Government nor Court is bound by expert evidence. The fact that an expert has impressive qualifications does not automatically make his or her opinion any more helpful than that of judge or jurors themselves: although, in the caustic observation of one authority, there is a danger that the expert may think it does. Expert evidence may be ruled inadmissible where it is neither objective nor impartial. Experts have a duty to be unbiased. There must be a reliable body of knowledge to underpin the evidence they give and they must not testify beyond their expertise. They must not overstate their knowledge, make improper inferences, misstate uncertainty, or misrepresent the methods by which 'expert' information was obtained, and so mislead the Court. They must not evade proper disclosure of sources. They must not use loose language, nor indulge in speculative opinion.

These are high bars for conduct in the political domain. However, the frequency with which they are not met, and the limited penalties for failure, make it inevitable that scepticism about expert claims will inevitably arise. Its strength will depend on just how far experts fall short of the Courts' standards and those expected in public life. No one would expect every expert should be under some absolute or statutory obligation to assist the government to come to conclusions on any matter. But nor should they be protected from assessment against the Seven Principles of Public Life (the 'Nolan' Principles) if they do, or do not.

These principles have been current since 1995; Selflessness; Honesty; Objectivity; Accountability; Leadership; Integrity; and Openness and should be evident in every educational researcher's practice. They are also integral to defining the educator's function to sustain the public interest. That includes putting the needs of learners first; maintaining standards and quality; and upholding professional reputation. All these principles are critical to any claim to be professional, and to evaluating expert opinion in education or anything else. Politicians and the wider public will use them, and it is to be expected that their application should, and will, reveal practice that is less than satisfactory and undeserving of respect.

LANGUAGE, RATIONALISM, AND PERFECTION

Some words do seem to act as cat nip for some commentators and practitioners. That is perhaps to be expected given that education policy occupies heavily contested political territory. For example, some express a loathing for Margaret Thatcher's remark that there is 'no such thing as society'. This is regardless of the words she actually used (1987) which stressed the importance of personal human agency and social engagement. Others detest the term 'Blob' as applied to some 'expert' educationalists without thinking of its nuanced substance. It is always worth pausing to assess why these kinds of words excite attention.

One way of doing this is by considering the work of Hannah Arendt, Michael Oakeshott, and Roger Scruton. All three would resist conventional labels of left or right. They might better be called penetrating contrarians, but that is not adequate either. All three had firm attachments to the notion of society and community whilst simultaneously being critical of their flaws. All three drew attention to the progenitors of violence, especially when confronting the horrors of anti-Semitism, Nazism and Communism. Their careers took them variously to Princeton, LSE, Birkbeck, and Buckingham. They remind us that sceptical misgivings about group-think and confirmation bias have a lengthy pedigree.

Ideas of societal progress and perfectibility are ever with us. Caution about them always rankles with those who see their lives as being not just about contributing to social cohesion, but to actually achieving an ideal-type of social progress – demolishing social barriers to mobility and change in favour of communitarian objectives. From many standpoints those may have honourable and vivid features. However, their treatment in the political domain can readily become perverse and highly volatile – disregarding the complexities of rights, justice, and ethical judgment. Sceptics pay attention to this. They express reservations about our capacity to handle them peaceably in ways that are practical and politically adroit. They reject sentimental optimism as being inimical to the requirements of effectively functioning open, and democratic, political systems.

The roots of this caution lie in reactions to the enlightenment during the eighteenth century. When asked what he thought of the French Revolution, Mao Tse Tung may famously have remarked that it was too soon to say. It is hardly too soon now. Some of its features involved a violent attack on conventional tradition and religion and were linked to beliefs in the possibility of human perfectibility and in the achievement of an ideal society. Progress mattered above all, however defined. For Robespierre nothing could be allowed to get in the way of 'The Republic of Virtue'. The guillotine had a cleansing function, and a bloody one.

So, the 'enlightenment' certainly had its dark side. Himmelfarb (2008) gives a graphic analysis of the consequences. If terror was needed to get results, then so be it. Speaking of education and reflecting Rousseau's injunction to change human nature and transform each and every individual come what may, Robespierre commented of schools, '*I am convinced of the necessity of bringing about a complete regeneration, and, if I may express myself so, of creating a new people.*' The reign of virtue for Rousseau would make 'particular wills' conform to the 'general will' without making clear what this sublimation of the individual would actually entail, and what constraints would exist on its exercise. In this there is 'virtue signalling' on steroids – uncritical, unreflective, self-righteous, and ultimately brutal.

Rationalism of this kind – determined to bend the world to a tidy, consistent, uniformity – is a perversion of reason and reasonableness. It seeks to mimic the

eternity of a Kingdom of God on earth. As Cohn (1970) shows it is not something that can be wholly detached from the history of millennium cults of all forms that have erupted in the West from time to time before the eighteenth century – and, one might add, since.

In Britain, the reaction to the Revolution was complex, but ultimately a preference for adaptive evolution won out over radical dislocation, as Burke (2014) urged, it should. It was cemented culturally by various forms of religious revivalism and charitable benevolence. By contrast the American Revolution was marked by the collective intellectual effort of the Republic's Founders: they valued freedom above all partly because they had sought religious liberty by leaving Europe in the first place. The realities of power in all three settings were not unmarked by ugliness, but in broad terms, and in both Britain and America, there emerged a political culture preferring the empirical and practical over the deductive and dogmatic. Rationalism remains unconscionable for those who are not easily labelled left or right, but who are sceptics by temper and in judgment.

ARENDT, MOBILISATION, AND TERROR

For Arendt (1958) in particular, societies and communities of whatever sort are both an inevitable historical necessity and a potential trap. Humanity needs social engagement but can also be ensnared and perverted by it. She is especially fluent on the pathways to totalitarian tyranny, terror and autocracy that rest on the foundations of presumed virtue and an itch for rationalist social design. She claims that under conditions of extensive disruption and discontinuity '..*Society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and interest.*'

For her, times of profound change and dislocation threaten to liquidate humane public and private realms and to replace them with a specious equality – a conformity risk intrinsic to damaging any society. At the extreme it features disorientated mass mobilisation in which human agency falls into apathetic servitude to consumption, technology, or terror. It is a social construct that inveigles humanity to abandon the agency to create public and private spaces and their protections, including private property. It demands that they be replaced with forms of conduct and government that risk the extinction of all humane impulses. For her, socialised mankind risks that state of society where prosperity '…*feeds not on the abundance of material goods but on the process of production and consumption itself'*.

Those who claim to have answers to fearful uncertainty, and to command progress, set up a notion of society that tends to become devouring, all embracing, controlling, rule obsessed and exclusive. Left alone it has the capacity to suck

people into compliance; to dehumanise; to suppress truth and to mobilise poison and propaganda. The guardians of public safety make sure that their interests prevail: the rest experience a collective Stockholm Syndrome. Lest it be thought that Arendt's risk assessment was misplaced, consider the millions of deaths from the Long March in China; the holocaust of the Jews in Nazi Germany; the murder of tens of millions in Soviet Russia; the equally savage outcome of the invasion of China by Japan in the 1930s; the genocide in Rwanda – and more besides.

Yet at the heart of her thinking there remained a seeming contradiction. She was against personalising emotion and introspection. She asserted that human relationships become real only in action; in the exercise of freedom; and in the determination to create or preserve public space where reason and reasonableness can flourish. She didn't think that relationships grow naturally, but rather that they are constructed actively by individuals. On the one hand, she did not consider that a web of relationships could be challenged without the norms, customs, and standards that make a civilisation: on the other, she saw those same features as overwhelmingly threatening to human intervention and creativity.

Pitkin (1998) makes this contradiction explicit, and she is critical of it. It is she who first described Arendt's distaste for the risks of appropriation by the social as being analogous to absorption by 'the Blob'. She suggests that Arendt's asperity is larded with the language of science-fiction. The 'social' becomes ridiculed as an attacking entity from outer space like that featured in a 1950s film itself called '*The Blob*'. Pitkin's criticism rests on conflating Arendt's critique of rationalism with reason. She teases in ways that question the force of what Arendt had to say, whilst simultaneously respecting most of it. Gove simply follows Arendt.

Overall, sceptics see rationalism is the high-road to absolutism, responding to a craving for certainty (especially from experts). It aspires to total social re-formation, regardless of the implications for individual persons and those they love. However, it is through reason, reasonableness, and moderation in the public space, that what exists can be challenged. It is by applying them that *what is* can be reconciled with *what ought or might be*. Rationalism suppresses our capacity to make balanced judgment. Reason in action, by contrast, rejects a closed society that represses freedom, and cancels persons. It rejects the vilification of what is reasonably thought, written, and said, or of indifference to received opinion. McWhorter has recently written movingly of the dreadful alternatives (2020).

Still, perfectibility and rationalism remain in fashion, almost as echoes of 'divine right'. This is not just in the West: the Chinese Communist Party expresses the same repressive impulse – a denial of reason or the capacity to exercise reasonable decision for the endlessly variable circumstances of experience. It assumes that everything is always related to everything else; that no discontinuities exist or can occur; that no subtle discrimination of judgment is tolerable; that

attachments to abstract terms of sustainability, precaution; intersectionality, and proportionality will have no unintended consequences and carry no risk.

All this is prompted by one reading of Arendt. There are others. She resists easy interpretation. However, it seems safe to assert that for her the ultimate risk implicit in unyielding pre-occupations with 'society' involves sliding into a denial of reason and reasonableness to substitute totemic rationalism instead – into the risk of promoting perverted and horrific outcomes. It is necessarily authoritarian in enforcing cultural alignment. It insists on conformity with a transformative project animated by slogans and an impatience for truth. It is accompanied by active mobilisation of mobs. As Marcel as it, the person's ontological existence is removed from *being*, and is transferred to *being had* (1945).

OAKESHOTT, SCRUTON, HABIT, AND 'THE BLOB'

Oakeshott's work (1967) often appears in harmony with Arendt's own. Like her he walks the line between warning against treating society as an idol, whilst also pointing to the significance of informal, free, and even traditional commitments of human engagement. He stresses the value of our 'discovering' habits – like tolerance and enjoyment – rather than thrusting precepts at others. He treats rationalism as something imposed 'top-down', obsessed by preferences for dreams, for statute as opposed to common law, for regulations, and for adherence to powerful elite or expert opinion.

Like Arendt he would regard a passion for experts as simply naïve and egotistical. He implies that the voice that insists on only one judgement as to virtue is the voice of the fanatic that rejects the lessons of experience and inheritance. It treats the past as servant of the present. It requires standards of stewardship for the future that are detached from practical present realities. It is endlessly exhausting in pretending to be incontrovertible. It places no value on agile adaptability; resilience; integrity; or on diversity of thought, opinion, and belief for the management of risk. It dispenses with the very conditions of openness, reason, and orderly rules for decision-making that create the space for spontaneity, technological innovation, and creativity necessary to resolve practical problems.

For Oakeshott (1967), government needs to rest on habits of conduct and behaviour, rather than on personal or other attachments to abstract ideals. For him, adaptive rules of constitutional procedure mattered. He saw '…*politics as an activity in which a valuable set of tools is renovated from time to time and kept in trim rather than an opportunity for perpetual re-equipment.*' He remarked that '…*the intimations of government are to be found in ritual, not in religion or philosophy; in the enjoyment of ordinary peaceable behaviour, not in the search for truth or perfection.*' In so far as governments express utility by reference

exclusively to ideals and agendas of one sort or another, they give inadequate attention to the benefits of adaptive political culture and have rationalism lurking in potential.

Scruton (2003) comments on the tendency of group-think to curdle into repression are similarly firm. The mind-set he captures is as disturbing as any attacking 'Blob'. For him, fruitful relationships depend in large measure upon dispassionate good humour and robust, but temperate, ridicule. In consequence, his critique of the flaccid language and savagery of some continental ideologues like Bourdieu, Zizek and Habermas is witty, and devastating. *'The revolutionary spirit which searches for things to hate has found in Foucault a new literary formula. Look everywhere for power, he tells his readers, and you will find it. Where there is power there is oppression. And where there is oppression there is the right to destroy.'*

Incidentally, Foucault echoes Marcuse (1969) who saw tolerance as everywhere repressive, a bulwark for class dominance and always exclusive rather than inclusive. Neither Scruton nor Oakeshott would accept this simplicity. Neither think that societies can be organised according to a superior plan or goal, or that there is a direction to history, or that moral and spiritual progress has teleological reality. They urge us to check how far the views of experts and theoreticians (sceptics included) shift from analysis to little more than rhetoric.

Indeed, a sceptic would not suppose that even education must have a 'worthwhile' purpose defined by some expert authority. Both Scruton and Oakeshott follow Arendt in pressing the importance of what is neither useful nor necessary in education. Some things – like friendship and aesthetics – are valuable for their own sake and vital for personal engagement and public well-being. They would have no difficulty in agreeing that not everything that is measurable matters; in rejecting that only the measurable does; and in challenging elite meritocracy. Scruton simply stresses that people '…*reason towards a common goal only in times of emergency when there is a threat to be vanquished or a conquest to be achieved. Even then, they need organisation, hierarchy, and a structure of command if they are to pursue their goal effectively. Nevertheless, a form of collective rationality does emerge in these cases, and its popular name is war.'* The rationalist seeks identity in combat for a cause, and cannot resist deploying hate in doing so.

Scruton roundly rejects such viciousness. For him, as for Oakeshott, the obligation to pass on and adapt natural preferences, traditions, and habits is wholly honourable, because they are necessary for the peaceful and successful composition of both present and future. Losing confidence in them leads to impotence. Reinterpreting the past as proof of current iniquity is invariably corrupt. Faced with choosing whether to 'improve society bit by bit, or rub it out and start again' (in Scruton's language), sceptics invariably choose the former.

For public policy, the sceptic prefers the practical - building homes, curing the sick, sustaining security, protecting the vulnerable, combatting poverty, and promoting innovation and enterprise – to instilling 'acceptable' attitudes. Departures from some required outlook will ultimately be treated as heretical or blasphemous, demanding reparation, self-abnegation, apology, and ostracism. Where puzzlement exists in the UK about any disconnection between policy and implementation, the sceptic will point to the tendency of modern organisations to require compliance with corporate values to secure instrumental and reputational advantage alone. This is accompanied by the introduction of high-priced leadership, ostensibly to overcome silo-barriers to co-operative resolution of complex problems. However, it also elevates a fixation with attitudinal engineering over engaging with the demands of professional practice and operational delivery, thus making the work of breaking down the barriers to resolving 'wicked issues' more difficult.

The sceptic will assert that the more statist and corporate an outlook; the more preoccupied with social justice (especially where it excludes liberty); the more inclined to whole-systems thinking; the more obsessed with provider as opposed to learner interests; and the more attached to uniformity of structure and institution, the more likely will be disappointment, frustration, anger, and underperformance. The sceptical preference is for arrangements that promote accommodations between both people and principles – a state that enables diverse adjustments rather than being the sole provider or arbiter of social and other goods. It asserts that some things are more important than intemperate ambition for social change.

Rationalism for both Oakeshott and Scruton, finds its ultimate expression in socialism, fascism, communism and some forms of nationalism, just as Arendt found it in totalitarianism. Their common origins lie in an impulse to see some actual or predicted event as demanding a total transformation of attitude and action. None of them contend against reason or reasonableness. They do not regard society and culture as necessarily inimical to either – quite the reverse. But they see rationalism as something appropriated by a particular adjustment to culture and society. It is a suffocating embrace – typified as an imperative. It is a perversion of virtue. In language attributed to Gramsci, it demands *a long march of ideologies through the institutions*, the better to take them over – a 'Blob' which attacks and consumes. Gove calls this out.

For his part and in considering education, Scruton reflected on the principal features of indoctrination (Scruton, R., Ellis-Jones, A., and O'Keefe 1985). They may be taken as expressive of the rationalist mind, and of the flawed expert. Spot them, and the mark of the 'Blob' may reasonably be claimed and subjected to legitimate interrogation and disdain. Interpolating a little, they are as follows.

- *Conclusions are foregone* and not subject to any serious test. The signs for this may be multiple – loaded questions; loaded references; and loaded vocabulary

in assessment and publications. This is a recurrent problem in all bad 'interpretivist' research, and weak peer review.

- *The conclusions form part of a 'constellation'*, whose meaning is found in a 'hidden unity' based on emotional or political attitudes. In effect an inchoate personal or political disposition is elevated into a cause. It values manipulated perception, attitudinal 'narratives', and is hostile to reasoned challenge.
- *The conclusions are premises to action*, and form a fundamental starting point for a political 'programme' – ostensibly transformative, but actually threatening.
- *The conclusions are also a part of a closed system of mutually confirming dogmas* which serve to consolidate and validate the emotional unity from which it springs. The choir is permitted to sing but one song.
- *Those conclusions are not established by open discussion*, but by closing minds to alternative viewpoints, and by vilifying or denouncing opposition.

THE FUNCTIONS OF RIDICULE AND CHEERFULNESS

Ridicule and teasing in public life are functional and justifiable, where insulting intimidation and oppression are not. In broad terms, Arendt, Oakeshott and Scruton argue that the consensus, censoriousness and compliance of rationalism should never be permitted to supplant the contestability, civility and compromise implicit in reason and reasonableness. None of them would even remotely feed or favour conspiracy tropes; the denial of evident truth; or frantic cults of left or right. They would agree that peddling any claim of existential threat; of an urgent necessity for total transformation; and of ultimate expert authority, has only one end – and it is violent. It leads to the gulag, expropriation and immiseration. For them all, whatever the claims of ideology or virtue they must never be allowed to become a secular religion policed by threats indistinguishable from charges of heresy and blasphemy. Thus for Oakeshott, '*Into the heat of our engagements, into the passionate clash of beliefs, into our enthusiasm for saving the souls of our neighbours or all mankind, a government [of restraint] injects an ingredient…of the irony that is prepared to counteract one vice by another, of the raillery that deflates extravagance without itself pretending to wisdom, of the mockery that disperses tension, of inertia and of scepticism…. it is like the 'governor' which, by controlling the speed at which its parts move, keeps the engine from racketing itself to pieces.*'

Giving offence through acerbic imagery is not always illegitimate. In the theatre of open debate, it is a kind of stage direction. It is arresting. It can prompt people to assess an argument's credibility, and challenge the falsity and intemperateness of rationalism, in both public and private. The rituals of open

dialogue can be relied upon to self-correct and to moderate courteously if need be, when they are vigorously upheld in active engagement. By contrast a preference for 'safe space' and' no platforming' is invariably emblematic of the oppressor. It is inimical to handling risk in an inevitably uncertain world where people have always to face realities of potential failure, disappointment, personal harm, and discomfort.

Any profession worthy of the name needs to grapple with potential public misunderstanding about risk. It must be clear about how it is to be managed, and explained, on any relevant matter of public interest. It must accept the impossibility of its elimination. It must decide how best to communicate the practice of confronting multidimensional uncertainty with integrity and by sustaining openness (Popper 1945). Expert assessment is not necessarily proof against risk. It cannot be expected to be determinative when judgment anyway belongs to collective, political decision. Yet experts, and generalists are condemned to uneasy dialogue. It is sometimes incoherent and could certainly be improved: but haughty and spiky defensiveness about lively linguistic expression is usually no more than pompous.

At most and at best, ridicule has the capacity to puncture self-righteous pretentiousness and shift the focus to what is important. At the very least, it is the source of the kind of amusement which adds to general hilarity and cheerfulness in public life. There is nothing wrong with ridicule that reveals uncomfortable truths and when it is divorced from the motivation of the mob. The image of 'the Blob' did that – and does so still. The challenge may be irksome for some, but it deserves a good-humoured and careful response – something rather better than '*the rage of Caliban at seeing his own face in a glass*' (Wilde 1890 quoted from the 1992 Edn.).

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MICHAEL GOVE 2010–2014

Barnaby Lenon*

ABSTRACT

The article provides an overview of the extensive and fast-moving reforms initiated by Michael Gove as the Secretary of State for Education in the years 2010–2014. These include the rapid acceleration of the academisation programme and the development of free schools.

There is a more extensive exploration of the reform of the curriculum and the reformation of examination structures. This latter review is set in the context of university advice and against the backdrop of international performance.

Much of the focus of the article considers the implementation of the intentions of a minster who had been in waiting for three years before taking office. However, consideration is also given to the unexpected, yet significant, issues which intersect a politician's tenure of office. The Birmingham based 'Trojan Horse Schools' situation is considered both as an issue of accountability but also its implications for the nature of schooling, state funding and societal values.

INTRODUCTION

When Michael Gove became Secretary of State for Education in 2010 he had already been Shadow Secretary for three years and his plans were clear. His problem was that the Tories did not have a majority and the Lib-Dem partners in the coalition were notoriously interested in education. Gove wanted to move quickly to reform all aspects of school education and he needed a fixer who would manage the Lib-Dems. He chose a little-known man called Dominic Cummings.

In his infamous blogs Cummings describes the battles he had with civil servants and Lib-Dem ministers (including Nick Clegg), battles to which he brought an unusual element of ruthlessness. It was this behaviour which caused the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to describe him as 'a career psychopath'. But without Cummings the scale of educational reform, all in place within four years, would not have been achieved.

The General Election was held on 6 May 2010. Gove's White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, was published in November – Cummings had done well.

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There were two driving principles which lay behind the many plans outlined in the White Paper:

*as a country our educational standards were slipping behind other advanced countries, especially East Asia. This was going to be very damaging to us in the long run.

> *"In Massachusetts in the USA 16 year-olds are asked in their science exams to identify the shape of a carbon tetrabromide molecule as predicted by the valence-shell repulsion theory. In England sixteen year olds are asked in their science exams whether we sweat through our lungs or our skin." (Michael Gove speech, October 2010).*

*disadvantaged pupils were being let down by state schools. They could benefit from a more demanding, academic curriculum and social justice required that this should happen.

In 2010, the country was in the middle of a serious recession and he had to cut spending, not increase it.

Education policy is devolved in the UK and so Gove's policies only applied in England.

PLAN 1: ACADEMISATION

Academies are simply state comprehensive schools run by governors independent of local authorities. They began with the Education Reform Act 1988 under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher with Ken Baker as the Secretary of State. The basic belief was that local authorities, who had run schools since the war, were incompetent and in many cases left-leaning in their approach to education. The 1988 Act created ways for schools to opt out of local authority control: City Technology Colleges, Grant-Maintained schools and local management of schools (LMS). Financial control shifted from local authorities to the schools themselves, their funding being provided by central government.

After the election of Tony Blair in 1997 there was some rowing back on school autonomy, but in due course this was reversed after Andrew Adonis became a Minister in 2005. By dint of little more than a personal crusade he managed to find sponsors for 200 or so failing state schools to become Academies free from local authority control.

It was this policy that was given rocket-boosters by Gove. The Academies Act 2010 was one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the new government. It

made it possible for all state schools in England to become Academies, still publicly funded but with a vastly increased degree of autonomy in issues such as setting teachers' pay and diverging from the National Curriculum. All schools graded Outstanding by Ofqual would be fast-tracked to academy status if they wished.

Many did.

There are two types of Academy – *sponsored Academies* which had been doing badly and are handed-over to a government-approved sponsor – and *converter Academies* which are good schools that choose to convert to academy status.

By April 2011, the number of Academies had increased to 629. This year it stands at 9,200, 36% of primary schools and 78% of secondaries.

Over time, some Academies were more successful than others. The more successful were encouraged to take over other schools and work as Multi-Academy Trusts, which had the benefit of spreading good practice and achieving economies of scale.

The number of Academies grew so fast that central government soon realised that they could not manage them well. This fact led to the creation of a network of Regional Schools Commissioners, each responsible for the organisation and standards of schools in their patch.

Has academisation been a success?

Yes, in terms of the large number of schools who have opted for it.

Yes, for many of the weak sponsored Academies who improved after they gained autonomy.

Between August 2010 and March 2019 the proportion of pupils in England in schools graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted rose from 66% to 85%. In 2019 73% of sponsored Academies (ie schools which had been poor) were graded Good or Outstanding (Department for Education, 2019).

But on the other side of the argument, many of the remaining local-authority schools (called 'maintained schools') are doing just as well as the Academies.

And the autonomy that schools expected when they became Academies has been lost as they find themselves under a high degree of control by MATs.

PLAN 2: FREE SCHOOLS

The idea of free schools was based on similar systems in Sweden and the USA (in America they are called charter schools). Free schools are state comprehensive Academies, indistinguishable from other Academies except in the way they are set up. A free school is a new school set up by an individual, group or local authority who can prove to the Department for Education that they have a level of

educational expertise and that there is demand for their type of proposed school in the area concerned.

I helped set up one of the first free schools, the London Academy of Excellence in Newham, east London. We got the go-ahead in 2012. The school is a sixth-form college backed by six independent schools, each of which agreed to support one or more A-level subjects by providing experienced staff. Sometimes these staff were seconded to the school for a whole year, sometimes they simply visited the school every few weeks.

There are now over 500 free schools. Inevitably, some have been more successful than others. Some failed to attract pupils and closed. But on average their exam results have been better than other state schools and several have been outstanding. My school managed to find 200 pupils in the first year (quite something given that the school had no track record and the building was not finished). This year it had 4000 applicants for 250 places, the average A-level grade was A and 33 pupils went on to Oxford and Cambridge – more than most independent schools. This school helped transform the educational prospects for bright children in Newham.

Several free schools have generated worthwhile innovation, such as the behaviour and academic standards set by Michaela School in Wembley, or the focus on oracy of School 21 in Newham.

PLAN 3: EXAM REFORM

In order to raise the bar in terms of what pupils know the school exam system in England was reformed. There were several elements to this reform.

Curriculum

In primary schools the thing which matters most is teaching children to read. Michael Gove and Nick Gibb were convinced by evidence from good schools that the phonics method of teaching was by far the most effective but many primary schools were still not using it.

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read quickly and skilfully. They are taught how to recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes and identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make – such as 'sh' or 'oo', then blend these sounds together from left to right to make a word. Children can use this knowledge to 'de-code' new words they hear or see.

So in 2012 Gove introduced the Year 1 Phonics Check as a way of nudging schools to adopt phonics methods. By 2015 the proportion of 6-year-olds achieving the expected standard of reading had risen by 19 percentage points since 2012 to 77%, equivalent to 120,000 more children doing well.

Gove and his Schools' Minister Nick Gibb were much influenced by the work of E D Hirsch in America. E. D. Hirsch had discovered from his own teaching at the University of Virginia that students could only reach a high level of understanding and analytical thinking if they knew what might be called 'basic facts' about a topic. The notion that pupils could learn to think intelligently about a subject if they did know a lot about it was clearly nonsense. Having established this, Hirsch set about writing a core knowledge curriculum – a list of things which he believed all American children needed to know (Hirsch, 1987). This was the basis of the idea behind a knowledge-rich curriculum that many of the best schools in England now aspire to.

Gove and Gibb agreed that pupils could know much more than they do, including these 'facts' which necessarily which lie behind analytical thinking. You cannot think about a subject if you do not know a reasonable amount about it.

Step one was to reform the National Curriculum. Gove appointed Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research & Development at Cambridge Assessment, to lead this project in 2011. Oates simplified the National Curriculum for children aged 5–14 and raised the bar in several respects.

'The National Curriculum should embody rigour and high standards and create coherence in what is taught in schools, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to acquire a core of knowledge in the key subject disciplines.' (National Curriculum Review, 2011).

Step two was to write the syllabuses for each GCSE subject. Groups of subject-specialists, including many experienced teachers, were gathered for meetings in the Department for Education, each chaired by a civil servant. Over a period of months they thrashed out the basic GCSE content which was then translated by the exam boards into exam syllabuses.

In the case of GCSEs there was a general policy of raising standards but a specific policy of raising the level of required maths knowledge. It was in the subject of mathematics that England was particularly weak compared to East Asia. When I recruited Hong Kong boys into the sixth form at Harrow I found that they were generally two years ahead of their English counterparts. So it should be no surprise that mathematics GCSE was made significantly harder by Gove. Subjects such as geography, physics, chemistry, biology and design technology contain more maths.

Step three was to rewrite the core content for each A-level subject. This job was done by groups of university academics assisted by school teachers – the A-level Content Advisory Boards (ALCAB). These, too, were then translated into exam syllabuses by the exam boards. All A-level syllabuses were rewritten so that

they were a better preparation for university degree courses. Universities should no longer be able to complain that students came up to university unprepared. The modern linguists produced a syllabus which included more literature and more about the culture of the country whose language was being studied. In maths the syllabus was arranged so that all students took the same papers rather than choosing from options – something which had been a nuisance for universities.

The reform of the curriculum was made more difficult, more controversial, by Gove's own rather personal statements about what he believed should be taught. There were two areas of the curriculum where this was the case – secondary English and the entire history curriculum. In English he advocated teaching *"the great tradition of our literature – Dryden, Pope, Swift, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Austen, Dickens and Hardy – should be at the heart of school life."* (speech, October 2010).

In history the problem was his focus on the history of Britain alone and his insistence on a chronological approach to the subject, starting with the Stone Age and working slowly through to the twentieth century by Key Stage 3. There was a significant focus on facts, what Simon Schama called a 'ridiculous shopping list'.

The disputes which followed might have been avoided if Gove had left it to the expert groups of teachers that ultimately helped write the National Curriculum; by expressing his personal preferences he alienated teachers who rightly objected to a Secretary of State dictating what children should learn.

The EBacc and Progress 8

The Russell Group of 24 leading universities produced a guide for schools in which they stated that some A-level subjects are more useful than others if you want to keep your options open in terms of admission to Russell Group universities. These so-called facilitating subjects were maths, further maths, physics, chemistry, biology, modern and ancient languages, English literature, geography, history, philosophy and ethics.

Gove was concerned that increasing numbers of pupils were studying non-facilitating subjects and this was especially true of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to influence this, he created a new performance table measure called the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) which gives the proportion of a school's students passing GCSEs in English, maths, sciences, history or geography and a language.

In 2010, just 22% of state school pupils were entered for the EBacc subjects and only 15% achieved passed them all. GCSE results in 2016 showed those proportions had risen to 39.7% and 24.7% respectively. So this was a remarkable

Why Gove loves mathematics: speech given in March 2010

"The most influential language on earth is not English, or Mandarin but maths. Mathematics is the means by which we make sense not just of the natural world around us but also lay the ground for discoveries yet to come.

The Pythagorean revolution was prelude to the astonishing flowering of classical philosophy which laid the foundations of the Western world. Galileo recognised that it was through mastery of mathematics that the music of the spheres could be heard by man, and the shape of the earth made real. The thrilling breakthroughs he and his contemporaries made helped mankind move from an age of superstition to the rule of reason.

The Enlightenment, mankind's great period of intellectual flowering, the liberation from ignorance on which our current freedoms rest, was made possible by the work of mathematicians like Leibniz and Newton.

Gauss, the prince of mathematicians, called maths 'the queen of the sciences.' Why? Because of what Wigner famously called 'the unreasonable effectiveness of maths' – the miracle whereby pure maths can, sometimes centuries later, find practical applications never originally dreamed of, and the way in which a mathematical formulation of a physical principle leads to extraordinarily precise descriptions and predictions.

Our economic future depends on stimulating innovation, developing technological breakthroughs, making connections between scientific disciplines. And none of that is possible without ensuring more and more of our young people are mathematically literate and mathematically confident.

Mathematical understanding underpins science and engineering, and it is the foundation of technological and economic progress. As information technology, computer science, modelling and simulation become integral to an ever-increasing group of industries, the importance of maths grows and grows." (Gove speeches, 2010).

example of a performance table tweak having a huge effect on what was being taught in English schools.

A further measure, called Progress 8, was introduced for schools in 2016 based on students' progress between age 11 and 16 measured across eight subjects:

English; mathematics; three other EBacc subjects (chosen from sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects.

The EBacc was given extra punch when the floor standard (the standard a school had to reach if it was to avoid intervention by the Department for Education) was based on schools' results on the Progress 8 measure. The EBacc performance measure was a nudge. Progress 8 was really compulsion.

Exam structures

Ofqual (the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) was set up in 2010. In 2011 Gove and Ofqual announced their hostility to modules. Modules are independently graded exam papers which at that time were sat in January and June. If an A-level was divided into six modules, students could sit one or more modules in January of Year 12, and then sit them again in the in the summer of Year 12, January of Year 13 and summer of Year 13 – so four shots at it. This made A-levels easier and generated massive grade inflation.

Another problem was that it is impossible to grade fairly if there are many routes to one qualification through modules. In any one year exam boards were being asked to rank students some of whom had taken all the modules in one sitting, others of whom had spread them out over two years. So by the end of the course, some had taken a module once, others had taken it four times.

Gove also expressed his concern about coursework. Some was never moderated (ie checked by an independent person) including the crucial English GCSE speaking and listening module. When asked, teachers admitted to Ofqual that they had been under pressure to influence their pupils' results.

With exams you normally like to have a range of marks so that everyone doesn't get the same grade. But coursework marks were often bunched at the top end of the scale – which meant that the coursework did not contribute to the necessary range at all.

Further analysis by Ofqual revealed that much coursework didn't measure what it claimed to. For example, fieldwork in geography was supposed to measure the ability to collect and analyse data but in fact it measured little more than an ability to follow instructions given by the teacher. Coursework in GCSE mathematics and science was felt by most teachers to be of limited value and burdensome to administer.

At the same time employers and universities were complaining about the quality of their 18-year-old employees and undergraduates: their English and maths were poor, they lacked initiative and they appeared to have gained good exam results by spoon-feeding. Gove shared this concern about low standards, about the way in which pupils were stacking up marks by taking modules every six months over a two-year period, and the generally low level of some syllabuses.

There was another concern about A-levels: the content of modules taken in Year 12 was long forgotten by the time the students arrived at university. The modular system meant that at no point did students know the whole syllabus.

So between 2011 and 2015 a number of decisions were taken by Gove that amounted to a radical shake-up of the whole system:

1. He scrapped January exam sittings so halving the number of times a pupil could sit exams.
2. He scrapped modules. The AS-level exam was decoupled from the A-level so that the A-level was now linear – all A-level papers are sat in one go at the end of the course.
3. He told schools that the first sitting of a GCSE would be the only one which would count for performance table measures. This discouraged early and multiple sittings of an exam.

These three measures have together greatly reduced the burden of exams, something which is rarely acknowledged. The volume of exams has been reduced, as has the amount of time devoted to preparing for exams and actually sitting exams. Most teachers regard this as a good development.

4. In English GCSE the speaking and listening would no longer count towards the main grade (but it would be reported as a separate grade).
5. Coursework was scrapped in all public exams unless it measured something important that could not be measured by an exam. In A-level sciences the only element of practical work now assessed by the teacher is the student's ability to select the right equipment, use that equipment and log the results. At GCSE and A-level the results and meaning of the experiments are assessed in the written exam with questions worth 15% of the total marks.

	GCSE		A-level	
	Previous coursework weighting	Reformed weighting %	Previous coursework weighting	Reformed weighting %
English lit.	25	0	40	20
History	25	0	15–20	20
Physics	25	0	20–30	0
French	60	25	30–40	30
Drama	60	60	40–70	60

In 2011 I was sent by the Independent Schools Council to present Michael Gove with a list of our collective suggestions. It was pleasing to us that every one

of those ideas was implemented (not of course because of our wish-list). Only one policy change was made that we did not initially agree with – the decoupling of AS-levels – but even that, in retrospect, does not seem to have been a totally bad move.

Vocational qualifications

Gove was concerned that schools and colleges were encouraging pupils to take subjects which were of little value to universities or employees. The 2011 Wolf Report, written by Professor Alison Wolf from King's College London, found that thousands of vocational qualifications taken by young people were a 'negative qualification' – in other words they actually harmed a pupil's prospects of going to university or gaining a job.

In response to her findings the Gove removed funding from these courses and reduced the incentives which had encouraged schools to offer vocational alternatives to GCSEs: in government league tables there had been a raft of generous 'equivalences' where, for example, a vocational ICT course was worth the equivalent of four GCSEs. These equivalences were often far easier than the GCSEs they were supposed to be the equivalent of. They were reined back after the Wolf Report.

British values

Ministers sometimes have to deal with events. In late November 2013, a document that has since come to be known as the 'Trojan Horse' letter was received by Birmingham City Council. The letter was incomplete, with no addressee and no signature. It was supposedly written to an unnamed person in Bradford, describing a strategy to take over a number of schools in Birmingham and run them on strict Islamic principles. The letter states that: *'Operation Trojan Horse' has been very carefully thought through and is tried and tested within Birmingham'*.

In 2014 Peter Clarke, the former anti-terrorism officer, was appointed by Gove to investigate claims that a number of schools in Birmingham had indeed been taken over by a fundamentalist Islamic group.

His review found that one of the schools had been funding a madrassa from its own budget, while at another Muslim children had been taken on trips to Saudi Arabia. A third school regularly broadcast a call to Muslim prayer over the school's loudspeaker in the playground while another school taught in biology that "evolution is not what we believe" (Clarke, 2014).

Gove responded by announcing that from September 2014 all schools, independent schools, academies and free schools, and all local authority-run schools, were required "actively to promote fundamental British values". Gove also announced that teachers will be banned from the profession if they allow extremists into classrooms.

New clauses were added into funding agreements for academies, stating that the Secretary for Education could close schools whose governors do not comply with "fundamental British values." Guidance to schools defined these as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Teaching British values has had a mixed reception but there is surely little doubt that by swift action a potentially serious problem was nipped in the bud.

Cutting Building Schools for the Future

Gordon Brown had embarked on an expensive programme of school rebuilding. The financial crisis after 2018 made this unsustainable and Gove cut the programme as soon as he took office. Projects which had not achieved the status of 'financial close' would not proceed, meaning that 715 school revamps already signed up to the scheme did not go ahead.

Gove was criticised by a judicial review for his failure to consult before imposing the cuts, but the cuts went ahead all the same. It was a very unwelcome development for the many schools expecting a rebuild but an inevitable step at a time when all government departments were expected to find savings.

Cutting the City Challenge: a mistake

The London Challenge was a school improvement programme launched by the Labour Government in 2003 and designed to create a "step change" in the performance of London secondary schools. The scheme was later extended to primary schools.

In the London Challenge, managed by the Department for Education, the exam results of socially similar schools in London were compared and this made it possible to challenge underperformance on the compelling grounds that if other schools were doing much better with a similar intake of students, significant improvement was possible.

The use of data generated both optimism and urgency about the need for change. An important element was buy-in by schools, driven by a moral imperative to improve the results for disadvantaged pupils. Improvement work was to be done with them, not to them.

The focus was on training existing teachers to be more effective. This was done by external experts and by the best teachers in the area. The main COST was providing cover for the teachers to have time off to be trained or to train. The training happened in Teaching Schools. The host school teachers gave training to 15 or so teachers from the schools being supported. A teacher in each supported school was appointed the in-house mentor to help the trainee develop back in their own school. Each school is different and had an adviser to offer bespoke solutions for that school. The advisers were often former HMIs, senior educational consultants, former heads or directors of children's services. They were experts who knew how to fix a problem.

In the late 1990s London schools were the worst in the country. Today they outperform schools in the rest of England, achieving the highest proportion of students obtaining good GCSEs, the highest percentage of schools rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted and the highest GCSE attainment for pupils from poorer backgrounds.

In 2008 the London Challenge initiative also expanded it to include two new geographical areas – Greater Manchester and the Black Country. The programme was renamed for those areas as the City Challenge.

In 2012 the Department for Education published a review of the City Challenge (Hutchings et al, 2012) which had been commissioned by the previous government. They concluded that the programme had achieved most of its objectives.

> *"Perhaps the most effective aspect of City Challenge was that it recognised that people, and schools, tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. The ethos of the programme, in which successes were celebrated and it was recognised that if teachers are to inspire pupils they themselves need to be motivated and inspired, was a key factor in its success."* (Hutchings et al, 2012).

In 2010 Gove scrapped the London Challenge and the City Challenge. This was a mistake. The improvement in London schools had been dramatic and without great cost. It would surely have been right to see whether the methods used in the London Challenge could have been extended to other cities that badly needed to improve.

PISA results: a verdict on the Gove reforms?

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is funded by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The programme,

which started in 2000, tests pupil performance across OECD countries every three years. PISA is the most rigorous project ever undertaken to assess what makes schooling effective.

PISA tests are computer-based, administered to a sample of 15-year-olds in each country and cover reading, science and mathematics; 15-year-olds are chosen because at this age most children in most OECD countries are reaching the end of compulsory education. The tests are not directly linked to the school curriculum; additional questions are asked to discover more about the schools the pupils go to, their socio-economic background and their attitude to school.

In October 2010 Gove made a speech referencing the 2009 PISA results:

"One of the tragedies of the last ten years has been our failure to keep pace with the world's best education systems.
We've fallen behind;
From 4th to 14th for science
From 7th to 17th for literacy
From 8th to 24th for mathematics."

The Gove reforms should be judged to some degree by the PISA results, although it is too early to do this with complete confidence. The PISA ranks for the UK in 2018 show an improvement:

	UK RANK	
	2015	**2018**
Maths	27th	18th
Science	15	14
Reading	22	14

But of course, Gove's policies were only applied in England and England has shot ahead of other parts of the UK in maths; here are the actual maths scores:

	Maths	
	2015	**2018**
England	493	504
Wales	480	487
Scotland	490	489
N Ireland	493	492

Science was less impressive, although still stronger in England than other parts of the UK:

Science		
	2015	**2018**
England	512	507
Wales	485	488
Scotland	497	490
N Ireland	500	491

Reading has also improved in England:

Reading		
	2015	**2018**
England	500	505
Wales	471	483
Scotland	493	504
N Ireland	497	501

So – a bit early to judge, but as far as we can tell this looks like a very successful push up the rankings. England, following the Gove reforms, was doing well.

Michael Gove was moved from education in 2014 because it was felt that he had upset teachers to an unsustainable degree. He was replaced by Nicky Morgan who, as far as we can tell, was encouraged to avoid all further innovation.

But in four years Gove had reformed every aspect of the state school system in England. Although many serving teachers criticise the Gove reforms there are thousands of others who think he was the best Secretary of State since Ken Baker and that many millions of pupils have benefited, already, from his good work.

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THE "TROJAN HORSE" PLOT AND THE FEAR OF MUSLIM POWER IN BRITISH STATE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, an alleged "Trojan Horse" plot to Islamise education in a number of schools attended predominantly by diverse Muslim pupils in the inner-city wards of Birmingham raised considerable questions. Ofsted investigations of 21 schools explored these concerns at the behest of the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP. At the head of this so-called plot, a certain Tahir Alam, once a darling of New Labour's policies on British Muslim schools, faced the brunt of the media and political furore. Based on a series of face-to-face interviews with Alam in 2015 and 2016, this paper provides a detailed insight into the allegations, the context in which they emerged, and the implications raised for young Muslims in the education system. Ultimately, as part of the government's counter-terrorism policy the accusations of the "Islamisation" of education in these "Trojan Horse" schools foreshadowed the additional securitisation of all sectors of education. However, there was neither the evidence nor the legal justification to ratchet up anti-extremism education measures that eventually followed; namely the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The consequences of the negative attention heightened existing Islamophobia but, paradoxically, they also limited the opportunities for de-radicalisation through education.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP, prompted an investigation into a 'plot' to "Islamise" the local education of predominantly Muslim pupils in a number of state schools in the inner cities of Birmingham. Considerable fear and alarm in media and political circles emerged over this apparent crisis. The emphasis on the "Islamisation" of state schooling directly supported the dominant Islamophobic rhetoric among political and media actors quick to demonise conservative Islam. Such neo conservative sentiments operated within a framework that desired to shape political identities

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through a narrow spectrum of supposed British values. Both cultural and political notions were instrumentalised in this framework, with the defining parameters presented in exclusivist terms, which were: (a) those who did not espouse certain (cultural) values were somehow upholding extremist views and were (b) a threat to democracy (political values) and, as such, to the status quo (Robinson 2015).

This paper explores the impact of this recent social and political episode on British Muslims who already experience considerable Islamophobia (Allen 2010). The emphasis here is on the realm of education, and the ways in which the state presumed to act in response to protecting vulnerable children. Implications for educational leadership and the securitisation agenda also emerged. Based on a series of interviews with Tahir Alam, the supposed "ring-leader" of this "plot", this paper addresses the following concerns.

First, the dominant discourses that led to the charge of

- "Islamisation" in Birmingham schools.
- the nature of the accusations that were initially raised, including aspects of the various investigation reports.
- educational leadership and the counter-radicalisation agenda.
- how the "Trojan Horse" saga exposed the various fears of Muslim self-empowerment.

In conclusion, the "Trojan Horse" tale in Birmingham schools uncovered deeply entrenched anti-Muslim sentiments in British politics combined with ongoing patterns of racialisation and victimisation of British Muslim groups.

It also demonstrated further disregard of the actual lived experiences of communities and the social, cultural, economic and political realities they face (Ahmad and Sardar 2010). The government not only fell into the spell of anti-Muslim policy dogma but it also fuelled further mistrust between communities. There was some mismanagement afflicting certain schools, but the investigations failed to establish that there was any "plot" to "Islamise" schools or their mainly Muslim pupils. In an atmosphere of acute Islamophobia and political interference, the uncomfortable reality is that the victims of this episode were young Muslims who continue to face considerable barriers to success and social mobility because of limitations in the education system (Hoque 2015) and wider anxieties of structural and cultural racism. Leadership, often presented as a defining topic, was denied to those wanting to be Muslim and British, interconnected with the removal of opportunities for individual and group empowerment of a body of already beleaguered people whose futures remain precarious in a neoliberal, post-Brexit vote, environment (Shah 2015).

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

In 2014, in the fourth year of the coalition government of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, motivated by neoconservative ideology, aimed to identify and weed out the alleged "Islamisation" of state schools. For Gove, the substance of this alleged plot ranged from managing senior appointments, to revising teaching practices and enforcing certain Islamic principles in the classroom, namely gender segregation and limiting the teaching of evolution. It was also argued that "extremist preachers" were invited to speak to pupils in schools at the expense of taxpayers. Andrew Gilligan, hailed for exposing the "dodgy dossier" used by New Labour in 2003 to make a case for the war on Iraq, turned his attention to British Muslims. In 2014 and 2015, Gilligan wrote a series of damning articles in *The Telegraph* that catalogued the extent of the "Trojan Horse Plot", naming individuals and their interlinkages, including printing mobile phone text communications between significant actors (Gilligan 2014).

In his extensive scripting, Gilligan censured "Muslim apologists" for being in denial about the extent of Islamism in these schools. However, there was no precise evidence on the specifics of any so-called plot nor how it may have arisen in the light of numerous checks and balances at the local authority and central government levels. Only after the revelation of the now infamous "Trojan Horse letter", whose provenance remained inconclusive, Gove appointed Peter Clarke. A counter-terrorism officiator, formerly of Scotland Yard, Clarke's role was to explore whether there were any specific counter-terrorism implications raised by these schools Pidd and Dodd 2014). Gove believed that the Islamist threat was severe and deep, and that this "Trojan Horse Plot" was real and urgent to the extent that the Department of Education (DfE) ought to have a major role in thwarting it. For Gove, an emphasis on "British values", tantamount to "integration" in his eyes, was regarded as the principal concern, even though both terms are ambiguous at the best of times. In his prepared statement to Parliament, Gove reeled out a long list of so-called extremist instances in six Birmingham schools allegedly most affected by the so-called plot. However, he demonstrated acute difficulty with concepts such as "mujahedin" and "jihad". He also took "non-violent extremism" as being equal to "religious conservatism"—conflating these notions as suggestions of extremism *per se.*

The Peter Clarke publication (2014) stated that there was no "evidence of terrorism, radicalisation, or violent extremism" in the schools that were under investigation. However, he articulated that, "… there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and on governing bodies, who espouse, endorse, or fail to challenge extremist views". This

conspiratorial language was damaging enough. The Clarke investigation preceded a Birmingham City Council report, led by Ian Kershaw, an ex-headteacher (2014). Both reports resulted in the schools coming under the direct authority of the Education Secretary, with Ofsted subsequently granted powers to carry out their inspections separate from the DfE. In total, Ofsted inspected 21 schools in Birmingham, eventually submitting their report to the Education Funding Agency. All of these enquiries led to immense discussion and debate over their relative merits and the implications they raised for the schooling of British Muslim children. The reality was less about Islam in schools. It was more the concern of empowering parents, governors and local teaching staff, which is permitted under the mandate of the academies system, one that Gove encouraged from the outset. However, Gove's personal identity politics and political aspirations had their imprints all over this matter (Hasan 2014). These actions also affirmed existing narratives around the securitisation of multiculturalism, where the idea of faith was projected as a "moral panic" by various media and political discourses, reversing New Labour government policy that regarded faith as a catalyst for social cohesion. During this period, the policy moved "between 'soft community cohesion', in the form of pedagogical interventions, to 'hard community cohesion', in the form of coercive forms of surveillance, with alarming speed" Cowden and Singh 2014). Ultimately, "the Trojan Horse forgery in Birmingham not only reflected Islamophobic tropes, fantasies and simplicities which already existed but also acted as a gift horse for certain pre-existing agendas and interests" Richardson (2015).

Although there was no evidence of extremism in the 21 schools investigated, 5 schools were placed under special measures. Although the Ofsted reports highlighted management gaps, they also emphasized local knowledge and enhanced community engagement among staff as adding to the education of young children, all of which was ignored by the media and the political debate at the time (Mogra 2015). The Park View Trust held three of the schools under its umbrella. When the Trust realised their schools would be under special measures, their public statement revealed the extent of loss and betrayal sensed by many (Morris and Wintour 2014). It evoked the sadness they felt for young people endeavouring to obtain an education in some of the poorest areas of Birmingham. It offered sympathy to dedicated professionals who strived to break the link between "disadvantage, demographics and destination" in education. The government took a particularly hard-line on these schools because of existing fears around "Islamisation" in society, whether in the form of "sharia councils", the ever-growing demographic profile of visible Muslim communities in urban areas, and the concerns emanating from worries over violence and terrorism. In the post-9/11 climate, Islamophobia is exacerbated at times of terrorist incidences, which then feeds the rhetoric of the radicalisers.

No instances of extremism emerged in the schools, but the concentration on "ideology" was the dominant narrative. Here, there was a remarkable consistency among three investigative processes James 2015). However, the lack of clarity on what this ideology was supposed to be suggested more than just ambiguity. Rather, there was a premeditated conception that an undefined ideology spawned certain practices, including "massaging" appointments and the use of an "Islamised" curriculum. Linking them all was a common concern, conservative Islamism. The Ofsted reports alluded to teachers being "bullied" by governors and that the local authority had not properly scrutinised practices within these schools. This "non-violent extremism", as it would be later put, referred to religious practices such as collective worship or taking pupils to trips to Islamic holy sites in the Middle East, all within the law. Schools with over 95% Muslim populations have a right under the legislation to teach Arabic as an additional language, and to introduce voluntary religious worship. Most of the "Trojan Horse schools" had sought the necessary determination from the local authority, but in some instances they had not been reissued. The "plot" became the precursor to a range of wide-sweeping changes that went ahead, including random spot-checks from Ofsted or the promotion of "British values" in the national curriculum.

INSIDE THE "TROJAN HORSE" AFFAIR

This paper utilises data from an in-depth semi-structured interview process with Tahir Alam during three separate occasions in 2015 and 2016. I initially reached out to Alam in 2015, approximately six months from him resigning as chair of Park View schools, and after the DfE prohibition order preventing him from acting as a governor or working in any capacity in the education sector. Two of these interviews were in his home in Birmingham in 2015 and one in Istanbul in 2016. Interview questions conncetrated on the "Trojan Horse" "scandal", but they also focused on aspects of his perspectives on wider concerns relating to British Muslim education. The responses generated during these interactions formed a grounded theory approach based on an insider perspective on British Muslims in education with a specific spotlight on the "Trojan Horse" matter. I also had access to private correspondence between Alam and the investigators of the schools in the so-called plot. Objectivity was essential, particularly when both the researcher and the researched are of similar ethnicity, age, religious identity and neighbourhood backgrounds. Reflexivity ensured that the analysis was impartial and analytical, adhering to ethical and methodological guidelines in social science research to the fullest (Abbas 2010).

Tahir Alam was born in 1968 in Dadyal, in the district of Mirpur in Azad Kashmir. He came to Birmingham at the age of 10, and attended Nansen Primary

School and later Park View Secondary School, two of the three schools that were under the Park View Trust. During the late 1990s, I met with him on two occasions when I was working on my research on the education of Birmingham South Asians. The research I carried out identified teacher (mis)labelling, setting and streaming, and concerns relating to prejudice and stereotyping that restricted young Muslim children in schools (Abbas 2004). In exploring both successful selective schools and their inner city state school counterparts, the analysis that explained differences in outcomes fixated on social and cultural capital. Classed families had greater means of support for their children. By "playing the game" of selection they ensured their children entered stronger schools, leading to successful educational outcomes at one extreme. Families whose experience was inner city deprivation, unemployment and disadvantage were not able to take advantage of the more effective schools found in the outer areas due to restrictions to intake as well as the barriers to entry created by income or entrance tests. Ultimately, their locations meant that children were concentrated in predominantly weak or failing schools in disadvantaged areas, reproducing patterns of social immobility and inner city entrenchment, generation upon generation.

The prevailing post-war paradigm on education and social class has *a priori* identified the direct association between these two concepts to such an extent that they are inseparable in the minds of many Halsey, Heath and Ridge 1980). That is, education leads to class mobility, class mobility is achieved through education. Thus, in extending this argument, minority children underperform in education due to their ethnic and class characteristics. However, research has also identified that stronger schools can raise the average performance levels of pupils from weaker backgrounds, while weaker schools reduce the average performance of pupils from more classed backgrounds. The idea of *the school effect* (Smith and Tomlinson 1989) suggests that the school makes all the difference, and the view taken forward is that if there is improvement in weak schools, from the point of management, leadership and organisation, and a curriculum that enhances the pupil–teacher–school interaction, dramatic changes in outcome can be determined.

In the 1990s, the move to the New Right in education, supported under the New Labour government, furthered the process of marketisation in education. It provided parents and children with greater choice and therefore (supposed) greater opportunity (Tomlinson 2008). As a campaigner and activist in education, Alam became the Education Spokesman for the Muslim Council of Britain in 2003, a national Muslim umbrella organisation with considerable influence at the time. His aims were to ensure that British Muslim children were able to take advantage of this new regime, ensuring they too could benefit from the liberalisation of education. The role of school governors in steering the management and leadership of schools meant that parents and community members could play a greater part

in the running of the schools. The process also ensured that too much power did not rest in the hands of head-teachers or local authority policy makers whose perspectives might have become outmoded in the light of new challenges facing schools. These changes met the needs and demands of a more competitive education system that allowed for greater independence at the school level.

In September 2015, I interviewed Alam at his home, and over the next few months, further interviews and email exchanges permitted the completion of the data gathering process in Istanbul in early 2016. The following is the essence of this extended 18-month long conversation.

OPPORTUNITY OR DESIGN?

Since his role with the MCB, Alam gradually gained momentum with his work with like-minded others in his local area to help turn around the dramatic under-performance of young Muslim children in the inner city areas of Birmingham. He diligently followed the guidelines and rules set out by Ofsted, allowing parent governors to have a critical role in appointing head-teachers. I asked him if he saw this as an opportunity.

I did not accept the idea that these children were destined to fail and that there was no alternative to their predicament. I saw the consequences of educational failure first hand in the local community: unemployment, crime and disillusioned youngsters … In Park View School, for example, when I become a governor in 1997, the results were just 4% (5+ GCSE A-C). This was a school that I went to myself as a pupil and I decided to get involved.

In elaborating further on the question of how he directed his interests towards becoming actively involved in shaping the educational processes, he said,

The participation from parents in school life from the local community was almost negligible. The vast majority of parents did not feel they had the confidence to be involved in an active manner at the decision-making layer of the school. In trying to address this chasm, I tried to encourage people to be involved in schools by attending parent's evenings for their children, supporting their children at home and by trying to become a parent governor if they have the time and were waiting to have a go at it. I opened tuition classes also.

I wanted to get a sense of how he believed his role as a governor had made a difference and how he managed to maintain a fine balance between ensuing fairness and equality regarding appointments and policy without it descending

into nepotism, as this was a specific accusation levelled against the "Trojan Horse" schools. He articulated,

> *Let me say it from the outset that any suggestion that we were engaged in some kind of nepotism or favouritism is rejected … We encountered a lot of resistance to change that was needed to transform the schools into successful schools. A culture of excuses had to be overcome … This took a longer time to accomplish, as a common vision needed to be established between all the stakeholders, which were focused on the most important stakeholder, the children in the school.*

In many senses, Alam became involved in the education system because of a burning desire to see that his co-Muslim community did not persistently suffer as a result of schools that continued to fail the young Muslims predominantly concentrated in the local area and, hence, in the local schools. He was committed to challenging a culture of acceptance that deemed it perfectly viable to regard underperformance as a function of the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the community and the schoolchildren, not the running of the schools. Moreover, it was carried out through understanding and applying the system, and not by resorting to favouritism or any other form of cronyism.

Challenging the Gaze on Muslims and Differences

After the events of 9/11 in the United States and various acts of terrorism carried out by Muslims in Britain and Europe during the 2000s and more recently, the negative attention on Muslims as "suspect communities" has grown severely (Mythen, Walklate and Khan 2009). I asked Alam if these were additional concerns that motivated his work as Chair of the Park View Trust and what precisely he hoped to achieve by doing so. Alam emphasised:

> *We wanted the school to be inclusive of all the communities the school served and to value the cultural background of all the children in the school. I believe that confident children achieve well, so developing the confidence of children is critical to their educational success in education and in wider society … Children must feel comfortable in their own skin …*

Egalitarianism is an important starting point for Alam. Undoing the disadvantage that Muslims were increasingly facing in a hostile anti-Muslim atmosphere further motivated him in his efforts to reduce the achievement gap, partly enhanced by the institutional practices within the education system. He further added:

Discrimination and Islamophobia were very palpable in many people's attitudes and behaviour … I remember distinctly, following the events of 9/11, I personally conducted assemblies within the school to emphasise that from an Islamic point of view this was completely wrong and immoral to kill innocent people, regardless of the wider political context. For Muslim children Islam is naturally a reference point for who they are and where they draw their values from primarily. We had to take account of this and work with it—not to ignore it and pretend otherwise.

Hegemonic narratives produced by neoliberal elites in media and politics regard Muslims as possessing certain cultural attributes that go against the grain of British society. Before the "Trojan Horse" narrative erupted, I asked how the Trust schools were addressing these concerns. He elaborated:

We did not see the cultural background of children as being problematic or something that needed to be rectified or improved upon. Nor did I see the cultural issues as being irreconcilable or unbridgeable … We deliberately and con sciously adopted an attitude and policy of being inclusive of the communities that we served. Examples [include] providing washing facilities, prayer facilities, conducting Islamic service for children in the morning, making special arrangements for children that are fasting during Ramadan, and within the curriculum introducing community languages, for example Urdu and Arabic alongside Spanish and French. Children should feel and be an integral part of British society … No one should have to choose between being Muslim, Jewish, Christian and British. They're not opposites and certainly not irreconcilable.

The post-9/11 "war on terror" climate undoubtedly changed the perception landscape concerning Muslims. It has added to existing fears and enhanced others relating to extremism and terrorism (Kundani 2004). For Muslims using legitimate existing policy measures to reorganise themselves in response to the ever-growing challenges they face, the levels of suspicion do not abate. This is because while there is a sense that Muslims are a threat to society due to certain innate characteristics, Muslims who defy the dominant templates do not become "a success story" in their own right. Rather, they can encounter even greater trepidation and hostility from dominant society. Unless, that is, they seemingly lose their "conservative Muslimness" in the pursuit of integration, or through attempts to liberalise or reform Islam itself. Advancing the idea of being both British *and* Muslim by being "less Muslim" is a requirement of the neoconservative paradigm.

THE ACCUSED

The so-called "Trojan Horse letter", first made known in March 2014, was the start of the events that led to the furore of "Islamisation" in Birmingham schools, eventually leading to the actions ordered by Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education at the time.

The foundations of the accusations rest entirely on the content of this now infamous letter, whose provenance remains officially unbeknown, but with consequences acutely felt by the communities concentrated in the schools that were ultimately taken over by the centre. I asked Alam if he had any idea about where this letter originated and who would make such claims. He responded:

I am firmly of the opinion that the letter was written by a headteacher who wrongfully believed that I was behind, or at least supporting, certain actions that affected her position in the school. The motivation for the letter were twofold: one, the invention of the Trojan hoax plot would provide an explanation for the predicament of the headteacher but also then depict her as victim and target of this plot. Secondly, it served the purpose of seeking revenge for something that I was supposed have had done. It is as simple as that, as astonishing as it may sound.

After some hesitation on the part of the local authority, the government accepted the letter as *prima facie* evidence of radicalisation in schools, however there was no attempt to identify its source. Rather, for Alam, the political climate at the time was the driving force. He had his suspicions regarding the letter but these were never taken into consider ation. He added further added:

The Department for Education or Birmingham City Council have never been interested in trying to identify who authored the letter and or to try to establish its authenticity. For example, Peter Clarke in his report categorically says that he is not interested in who wrote the letter or its authenticity, he was simply interested if there was any truth in what was being claimed in the letter. The people involved are known to me and are of Muslim faith background. I believe the letter was planned and framed in such a way to see to seek a political intervention in her own case and to make our schools a target by a neocon Secretary of State whose antipathy to Islam and Muslims is not a secret, if his book "Celsius 7/7" is anything to go by.

Once Parliament made the case for an investigation, I asked Alam why he thought Michael Gove appointed Peter Clarke, whose forte is counter-terrorism.

Had the government already made up its mind about what was allegedly going on in the schools? Was Clarke there to affirm some pre-existing concept, legitimising a policy on "values", which conflates radical violent Islamism with conservative trends among Muslims? He responded:

> Triggered by the Trojan hoax letter, [the process] was, as I described at the time, a witchhunt from A-Z. We were under attack by media, the Department for Education and Ofsted and this was a coordinated effort. In a witchhunt, evidence is not important. What is important is that somebody is hanged and that a point is made. Inspectors and investigators were coming in to look for extremists, radicals and terrorists. Of course, they didn't find any, but they did some "conservative practices" and "conservative" Muslims— this was enough. The appointment of Peter Clarke, whose experience is in counterterrorism, speaks volumes about the intention and the motivation for these investigations.

Charging a senior counter-terrorism officer with the task of investigating the issues, someone with little or no understanding of education, was a deliberate choice. It prematurely directed wider perceptions on the topic, potentially prejudicing the findings. Given the media and political attention on the topic, there was also the possibility that anything neutrally stated would remain invisible in the minds of the many. Alam was particularly agitated by the entire process, suggesting that it reflected patterns of vilification, stigmatisation and, ultimately, racism. He added:

> Peter Clarke knows nothing about education. This is very apparent from his report. Quite frankly, his report is not worth the paper it is written on because the allegations that he documented in the main were never corroborated or verified or cross checked with those who were accused. His report pre-dominantly relies upon hearsay and people making claims that certain things happened or certain things were said … His report is a work of fiction because it gives a fictional account of the school and its activities and he gives a fictional account of the people who were running the schools. The interventions in our schools were wasteful and racist and they serve the purpose of discrimination and lowering the academic success of the schools.

"I WALK A LONELY STREET"

As the accusations regarding the "Trojan Horse plot" unfolded, with incessant negative media and political attention demonising the alleged protagonists, and as

the investigation reports came out in July 2014, Alam faced ever-greater pressure. Paparazzi were now outside his home. His every movement was under intense scrutiny, and he felt he was under "house arrest". In an instant, his life turned upside down. Moreover, these same media and political systems were simply not interested in his rebuttals. Rather, the dominant actors in this play had already made up their minds. In September 2015, the DfE banned him from working, taking part or becoming involved in the education of young people. Since the mid-1990s, he had been fully committed to education, and, as the performance levels demonstrated, it would appear that he achieved considerable success in the process. I asked him what this entire episode made him come to understand about the Muslim experience in Britain, and how the experience affected him personally. He was pensive at first but then opened up to present his carefully developed thoughts. He said:

> I think the Muslim experience as a migrant community, settling in this country, has not been any different from other communities that preceded us. For example, the Jewish community, people of Irish background and black backgrounds have faced challenges prejudice, discrimination and racism. Once we take away the hype around Trojan hoax, what we are left with, quite simply, is blatant discrimination against Muslim children, Muslim parents, Muslim teachers and Muslim governors, who it is believed cannot be, through democratic channels, trusted to influence, shape or run the education of their own children—a principle enshrined for others. In other words, they need to be saved or "liberated" from such influences, which are deemed to be inhibiting integration.

He went on to add that identity is an important matter in education but for too long the education system has ignored Muslim schoolchildren (Jenkins 2002). But as the law has changed to take into consideration Muslim educational needs and demands, the wider political and cultural forces have become critical of "Muslimness", equating it with failed multiculturalism and, in current periods, terrorism and extremism. However, for Alam, this is an opportunity for change—the chance to improve social relations at a time of intense pressure on British Muslims, and that the education system should actively take up the challenge. He added:

> Within the educational context, I am firmly of the view that children should not be expected to leave their backgrounds in terms of their faith or culture outside the school door. Rather, the school should be an inclusive place where children of all backgrounds can feel that this is their school and be able to

express themselves and have their religious needs met to the extent possible. There is no alternative to multiculturalism except discrimination, oppression and fascism. What monoculture can everyone subscribe to?

I asked him where he goes from here. What are the implications for British Muslims in education? In addition, what lessons can we all learn from this entire saga? He was saguine but remained sorrowful that a great opportunity, and years of progress and learning that led to the positive changes introduced, were lost. He said,

The mistrustful intimidatory and bullying culture that has resulted within schools following the Trojan hoax affair has become a generational struggle for the Muslim community, which must be overcome. It may even take a civil rights movement to restore parity and equality for Muslim communities in Britain. There is a long road ahead, which is going to be bumpy, no doubt, but we must not succumb to the sinister aims of those who seek to marginalise and frighten the Muslims into adopting the "mute" mode or "parked-up" mode.

Naturally, he was aggrieved but expressed greatest concern for the many young Muslims who would suffer the consequences of government actions for the rest of their lives. His aims in devoting his professional working life to education were to reverse the existing trends of underperformance through limited leadership, management and delivery. The "Trojan Horse" affair undermined his life's work, devaluing the learning that has ensued, but also returning to the dominant paradigm of demonisation and denigration. He added,

It is a matter of great sadness for me and for all those who were involved in the school that all our good work has now been brought to an end and the schools that we created are now underachieving and will probably continue to undera chieve over the decades to come. Parental voices are being ignored and the involvement from those whose children come to the school has been almost entirely eliminated. The political intervention in our schools has resulted in the legitimisation, legalisation and institutionalisation of discrimination against Muslim children and made Islamophobia acceptable.

He remains committed to education in spite of all that has happened, and all that continues to prevent him from the work he is passionate about. He is fighting to have the ban against him lifted and to one day work again with young Muslim children to transform them, through education, into an engaged, participatory and active citizenry.

TROJAN HORSE SCHOOLS—VICTIMS OF THEIR
OWN SUCCESS

In many ways, the question of educational leadership is a significant matter to emerge from this saga. The directives introduced by Ofsted allowing schools greater autonomy feed into the neoliberal agenda manifest in education policy, a continuation of school policies that surfaced at the start of the 1990s. It has been a way of introducing market forces into education. However, in such a set of circumstances, there is a tendency for the free market to enhance existing divisions between stronger and weaker schools. But it is also possible to introduce innovative educational methods to encourage and motivate children in schools as well as to improve their performance in examinations. In this space, the "Trojan Horse" schools became a victim of their own success. These schools took the opportunity to use the system to change seemingly intractable patterns regarding performance. By doing so, they evoked the twin concerns of radicalisation and extremism at a time when these concepts carry considerable weight but also great misunderstanding.

Thus, leadership among Muslims in education has become the defining area of discussion. There is a genuine case made for recognising the interactions between teacher and learner as much as the process of education itself (Shah 2006). The situation is further problematised due to the hindrances to career progression experienced by some Muslim teachers in certain minority contexts (Shah and Shaikh 2010) and among young Muslims in education struggling to reconcile their faith-based identities with their national, ethnic or cultural allegiances (Bhatti 2011) especially men. In 1997, New Labour proceeded to fund Muslim schools in the face of a diverse society and government rhetoric towards multiculturalism. But for migrant, diasporic and transnational communities, being a Muslim minority remains a charged and contested field. It is also loaded with complexities beyond the simple dividing rhetoric of Muslim or non-Muslim (Salih 2004). There is some indication that British Muslims in education wish to move to a position that emphasises coherence and interdependency between Muslimness and Britishness (Meer 2009) but it would be far too simplistic to essentialise Muslims into a single category as myriad differences exist between and within groups in Britain (Tinker and Smart 2012). There are also differences between and within generations (Kashyap and Lewis 2012), and elsewhere in Muslim diasporas across the Western and Eastern worlds (Daun and Walford 2004). All the same, there remains an opportunity to positively mobilise "Muslimness" as a bottom-up political identity that contests the dominant negative paradigms, in the process expanding the reach of the concept of "Muslim" among both empowered as well as marginalised groups (Adamson 2011). The "Trojan Horse Schools" demonstrated

how it could be possible, but their efforts were thwarted by a charged political context driven partly by Islamophobia and neoliberalism in Western Europe.

NO SCHOOL IS VALUE FREE

As a result of this "Trojan Horse" "plot", there is further risk that educational autonomy is now perennially jeopardised because of attempts by government to expeditiously seek to identify vulnerable children or those at risk of "radicalisation". There are numerous considerations here, not least the well-being of young children, but there is also pathologisation. Educational freedom is sacrosanct in the realm of democracies. Shutting down critical voices or labelling them as radical requiring counter-terrorism or de-radicalisation "treatment" is tantamount to indoctrination (O'Donnell 2011). The state uses the education system to change the way young people see the world, not in a fair or balanced manner, but in a climate where there is both fear *and* hate that demonstrably surrounds young British Muslims today. The essence of the anxiety is that British Muslims are opposed to British freedoms and liberties, thereby legitimising the additional scrutiny directed towards them. However, no school is value freeand neither is secularism or liberalism. Moreover, as other academies and free schools have demonstrated mismanagement, none carries the "extremist" categorisation. In reality, the entire "Trojan Horse" affair exposes more about dominant political and cultural discourse in education, where perceptions blur to the extent that all conservative Muslims are projected as a risk. The "Trojan Horse" investigations were slapdash, presumptuous, weak, and in many cases simply wrong. The impact that it has had on Muslim communities in the inner-city areas, however, will have much longer effect, including furthering Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism (Awan 2014).

Sensational newspaper headlines such as *"Trojan Horse Jihadist Plot"*[35] to take over Birmingham schools served only to conflate British Muslims with terrorism, spreading divisions and adding to fear on all sides. However, in reality the "Trojan Horse" schools reversed dominant thinking on schools supposedly failing because of the pupils who make up their intake. For decades, the prevailing argument was that these schools underperformed because their pupils were of lower ability or from lower socio-economic backgrounds, preventing young people from accessing the social and cultural capital necessary to perform comparably to their middle-class counterparts. Before the "scandal", the same pupils from the same backgrounds, but now in schools with freedom and power to be run independently while maintaining the national curriculum as state schools, improved their performance fourfold. It represented a significant departure from the mainstream view that social class is the main determinant of educational

outcome. Crucially, it was a case of Muslim professionals and parents taking matters into their own hands, and subsequently succeeding against conventional thinking. It was a triumph in the face of adversity, but it challenged the status quo and revealed the fallacy of the ascendant narrative on ethnic minorities in education in the post-war period. In the end, there was little evidence that these schools abused the system or were mismanaged. Rather, it was the opposite. They took "underclass", working class and poor young people and instilled into them a sense of achievement and confidence comparable to their middle class counterparts and succeeded when they had been written off for decades.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

The assumptions of thinkers and observers wedded to the idea that social class, "neighbourhood effects" or the fact of diversity itself are the reasons for the underperformance of minority and/or poorer children in education are under severe test. Indeed, poor schools create poor neighbourhoods—not because poor schools are a function of children from poorer backgrounds. The role of teachers is also crucial to success. Motivating, inspiring and dedicated professional teachers can *and* do make all the difference. Teachers can revolutionise the lives of children with greater leadership, management and vision. The reality is that these "Trojan Horse" schools forever changed the lives of young people because they transformed schools. The "Trojan Horse" saga, as a case study of Muslim minority experiences of ethnic and religious identities in Britain, and in the context of educational resources, curricula, pedagogy and local problems, appears to validate the perspective that the nature of social relations and the perceptions of the "other" held by the dominant "other" remain crucial sources of anxiety.

Insights based on social research provide a standpoint on educational process, including dynamics relating to home-school links, curriculum content and the values placed on inherent differences among diverse groups, but there remain many additional problems facing young South Asian Muslims in English schools today. After 70 years of post-war immigration, settlement and adaptation, many of these communities continue to face racism, prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and discrimination. It affects educational outcomes *and* identity politics, where dominant notions of race and nation thrust Muslims into the limelight as the most racialised, objectified and "othered" groups in education (Shain 2013). Given the changing dynamics of an increasingly visible Muslim and South Asian minority in various British towns and cities, the view is that communities must integrate to succeed. However, adaptation to and incorporation into society has simply not happened due to discrimination and exclusion. This is not to argue that social and

cultural integration is the route to success*,* but rather to assert that prevailing external factors are forcing communities apart not together.

VALUES AND PUBLIC POLICY

The "Trojan Horse" affair demonstrated that the schooling of young Muslims will remain under fire for some time. All the while, Muslim communities will suffer the most in inner city areas—habitually neglected, forgotten and ultimately abandoned. Racialisation centres on the anti-conservative-Muslim, which is seen as a problem for multiculturalism as well as a security concern. Originally, Birmingham local authority was keen to dispel fears over Islamism in Birmingham when the matter entered into the public domain. This was largely because they wanted to project the reputation of the city, which continues to come to terms with deindustrialisation whilst it grows ever more ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse. Education managers in Birmingham City Council have been complicit in overlooking the realities facing young Muslims in education. There is racism at the heart of this problem because, in many senses, the city of Birmingham has been a "laboratory" for race and ethnic relations since the 1960s. Given its growing diversity and its changing post-industrial landscape, there is every likelihood that it will remain an important site for city-level understandings of post-war race, ethnicity and multiculturalism in Britain (Wilson 2015).

Michael Gove, briefly Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice when the Conservatives formed a majority government in June 2015, now sits on the backbenches after his failed Conservative Party leadership bid. A contest arose when David Cameron stepped down as PM after his policies led to the Brexit vote in June 2016. The idea of values—not in the cultural sense, but in the political, has firmly entered into the realm of public policy. The "Trojan Horse" saga sanctioned a vast array of counter-terrorism legislation—including protecting "British values". The presumption that promoting "British values" will eliminate structural inequalities that appear because of modern racism in society inherent since the days of empire and colonialism is nonsensical, dismissive and patronising. It merely reproduces the status quo, and recreates the conditions for disadvantage and discrimination.

It is an attempt to hold on to the preserve of Britishness in the face of its ongoing disintegration (Tomlinson 2015). It is retreat into an imagined unitary whole, based on notions of its greatness, once lauded across the world, helping to cement an ever narrowing definition of insider and outsider, included and excluded. In all cases, it reaffirms racism. The "Trojan Horse" tale was a realisation of the extent of this racism, now wholly concentrated on Muslims in Britain through the governmentality of counter-extremism policy frameworks Gearson and Rosemont

2015). Projected as representing all that is least desired about the self, the irony is that British Muslims, in reality, are more a part of British life than ever.

CONCLUSION

In an ironic twist, education is arguably the primary solution to radicalization (Siekelink, Kaulingfreks and De Winter 2015). The administration, management and leadership behind these "Trojan Horse" schools placed considerable emphasis on empowering young Muslims to know their religious character. It equipped pupils to appreciate the depth and nuances of Islam, bestowing young people with the courage and wisdom to counter the narratives propounded by the likes of Islamic State. The latter exposes the lack of Islamic awareness among disaffected youth subsequently exploited by those who seek to replace the vacuum with a sense of belonging, knowing and self-actualisation thus far denied. In the context of deep racism, discrimination, inequality and marginalisation facing many British Muslim groups in the inner cities today, an inspired programme of self-awareness in education coupled with academic scholarship is a solution that plainly functions in a climate that seeks to present all the problems of society as the problems of Muslims. The "Trojan Horse" affair merely uncovered the fear and loathing of conservative Islam and pious

Muslims in sectors of society who have the most power but the least understanding or gumption about the causes of radicalisation beyond the rhetoric that the source is conservative Islam or a lack of "values". "The answer to extremism is not moderation, but a highly critical and informed idealism" (Davies 2015).

The dominant paradigm is to continue to accept underperformance among these young Muslims as an unbreakable chain. In the mid-1980s, the Birmingham education system severely damaged the life chances of young people in inner city areas when school closures concentrated deprivation and disadvantage. The 1990s highlighted mismanagement and poor leadership in these same schools. The current generation of young Muslims in inner city Birmingham are in the exact identical schools and in precisely the same areas. Over the past four decades, little seems to have changed. In this time, the education system has failed tens of thousands of young Muslim children in schools in the inner cities of Birmingham.

Beyond the realm of education, there is also the wider problem of misrecognising the city of Birmingham as a "hotbed" of radicalisation and violent extremism, an issue that very much came to the fore in the light of the Westminster attacks on 22 March 2017. As the assailant had lived in the city for a period, albeit a matter of a few months, it was enough to create a global outcry in relation to questions of radicalisation and the identity of an entire city.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GOVE'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION?

*Timothy Mills**

ABSTRACT

By taking sides in the long-running 'Reading Wars' and terminating the existing model of early reading instruction with extreme prejudice, Michael Gove took one of the boldest, most contentious, unpopular and far-reaching decisions of his tenure as Education Secretary. This paper investigates the history, the battle lines, the weaponry and, if, indeed, he won the war, whether it resulted in more children in England being able to read. The results suggest that this, rather than his changes to curriculum and assessment, may be his greatest legacy.

INTRODUCTION

'The Reading Wars' (Connor, Morrison and Katch, 2004), have raged for nearly two centuries. In essence they have been fought across the battle lines of the pedagogy of the early reading instruction of English, with the complexity of the encoding of the English alphabetic code creating the schisms in beliefs. Much of the complexity is the result of the evolution of English into a morpho-phonemic language whereby letters indicate morphological as well as phono-logical information, with letters representing sounds but spelling also being dependent on a word's morphology (Perfetti, 2003). Add to this, 26 letters representing 45 sounds spelled in nearly 200 different combinations of letters and the result is the most complex alphabetic code in existence (Goswami, Ziegler and Richardson, 2005). This complexity makes the sequence of reading instruction far more complicated for such an opaque writing system (Rayner et al., 2012).

On one side of the battle lines lie the army of academics and pedagogues who claim that English is so complex that it can no longer be regarded as a phonic language (Gates, 1928; Smith, 1971; Goodman, 1970; Clay, 1991; Adoniou, 2017) and cannot therefore be taught using instruction that exclusively teaches sound to letter pattern correspondence. On the other side are massed the ranks who hold to the principle that letters in an alphabetic code represent speech and English thus

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obeys the rules for a productive alphabetic writing system (Perfetti, 1985) whereby an infinitely large number of words can be created from a small set of reusable letters that represent the sounds. As a result, they argue, initial reading instruction requires the exclusive teaching of grapheme-to-phoneme correspondence rules for words to be decoded and read.

The conflict is often characterised as phonics versus non-phonics, but this is misleading. Phonics has been used on both sides of the debate for over one hundred years, often as an incidental technique to analyse an unknown word *after* identification by a teacher. It is the exclusive, systematic teaching of the English alphabetic code – Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) - as the *only* technique for initial instruction for decoding of words that is so intensely disputed.

The principle behind SSP instruction is that the letter-sound correspondences are taught methodically starting from simple one-to-one correspondences through to more complex letter pattern correspondences. The approach explicitly teaches the connection between graphemes and phonemes and is fundamentally a bottom-up information processing system (Williams, 1979). By mastering the coding of sound to letter correspondence of the English alphabetic code, emergent readers, it is claimed, can apply that code knowledge to decipher any word by enacting a letter to sound to word process in tandem with a lexical route (Dehaene, 2015) to achieve meaning.

In contrast, language-based approaches to initial reading instruction, like those developed by Goodman (1970), Smith (1975) and Clay (1991), are based on the refutation of reading as a precise process that involves, according to Goodman (1970), 'exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units…' (1970:33), but that it is a selective process that involves the partial use of available language cues based on 'readers' expectations' (1970:33). The reader, it maintains, guesses words based on semantic and contextual expectations and then confirms, rejects and refines these guesses in 'an interaction between thought and language…' (1970:34). Inaccuracies, or miscues, as Goodman (1982) calls these errors, are inherent and vital to this process of psycholinguistic guesswork. The theory is linked to Chomsky's (1965) model of oral sentence production which results in precise encoding of speech being sampled and approximated when the message is decoded and follows a top-down model of information processing. Thus, Goodman (1982) maintains, the oral output of the reader may not be directly related to the graphic stimulus of the text and may involve 'transformation in vocabulary and syntax' (1982: 38) even if meaning is retained. The implication is that the reader is reading for meaning not for accuracy and it is semantics and context that drive the reading process not alphabetic decoding.

It is not difficult to see why SSP could be represented as Govian: highly technical, complex and requiring specific training, practice and repetition, children have to work hard to decode, gaining it a reputation for 'drill and kill'. Whole language methods, on the other hand, with the emphasis on guessing, constructivism and intuitive learning could be represented as far more progressive by enabling and encouraging teachers to concentrate on the far more intuitively attractive and enticing elements of literacy: meaning, language and a love of reading (Kim, 2008).

'A CURSE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES'

Confusion between phonics instruction and whole language instruction resulted in what appeared to be, if not a ceasefire, then a compromise in the form of mixed methods of instruction. This method implies that the correct method is the one most appropriate at the time. Children are encouraged to remember some words by shape, use picture, contextual and semantic cues as well as phonic elements. This gained traction in England in the 1960s with The Plowden Report (Blackstone, 1967) concluding that, 'Children are helped to read by memorising the look of words, often with the help of pictures, by guessing from a context…and by phonics, beginning with the initial sounds. They are encouraged to try all the methods available to them and not depend on only one method…' (1967:212).

In 1997 this approach was embedded in England's National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998). The strategy was explicit in its expectation that the teaching of reading should employ mixed methods through its articulation of the 'searchlight' model whereby unknown words were identified using a cocktail of a child's phonic knowledge, contextual knowledge, syntactic and semantic knowledge. A child encountering an unknown word could identify it by using phonic cues, or guess it from the context, the pictures, semantics or syntax. One issue with the approach was that children often became reliant on one searchlight and often the most inefficient in line with Pressley's (2006) suggestion that '…teaching children to decode by giving primacy to semantic-contextual and syntactic-contextual cues over graphemic-phonemic cues is equivalent to teaching them to read the way weak readers read!' (2006:164). Another issue, and one that has haunted analytic, post-hoc, phonics strategies, is that phonics became the strategy of last resort often as a result of insufficient teacher subject knowledge (McCullough, 1955). Reading outcomes in England did, however, rise initially but after three years flattened, plateaued and by 2010 were falling with nearly 20% of children not achieving the expected level 4 in reading (DfE, 2011).

THE CLACKMANNANSHIRE STUDY AND ITS INFLUENCE

SSP gained momentum with the publication of a seven-year study in Scotland. Johnston and Watson's (2004) research into 304 primary-school-aged children taught reading through synthetic phonics and analytic phonics across thirteen classes for sixteen weeks found that those taught by SSP were seven months ahead of their chronological reading age, seven months ahead of the other children in the study and eight months ahead in terms of their spelling.

Classes being taught by SSP were from the most socially deprived backgrounds of all study participants. These children were followed to the end of their primary school careers, by which time they were three and half years ahead of their chronological reading age and significantly ahead of age expectations in their reading comprehension and spelling (Johnston, McGeown and Watson, 2011). Although criticised for a research design that conflated the phonic elements with other potential contributing factors (Ellis and Moss, 2013, Wyse and Goswami, 2008) and the differing amount of teaching (Wyse and Styles, 2007), the dramatic contrast in outcomes gave the research significant leverage.

Brooks (2003), in his study commissioned by the DfES, criticised the phonics element of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998), recognising that the format of instruction within the NLS was different to that used in the Clackmannanshire study (Johnston and Watson, 2004). The major difference hinged on whether the target word was known in advance by articulation by the teacher or whether, as was the case in the Clackmannanshire (Johnston and Watson, 2004), children worked the word out for themselves by using their phonic knowledge. Brooks (2003) recommended that a resolution to the differences of the two positions be reached through discussion but concluded that phonics teaching within the NLS was synthetic. As a result, a resolution was not forthcoming and when, in 2004, 'Playing with Sounds' (DfES, 2004) was introduced to supplement 'Progression in Phonics' (DfES, 1999), the programme embedded unscaffolded blending into the approach. Brooks (2017) later recognised this as an approach that lacked coherence (as the majority of words encountered by emergent readers are unfamiliar) and was contrary to the findings of Johnston and Watson (2004) that phonics be 'fast and first'.

With the publication of the Clackmannanshire study (Johnston and Watson, 2004) the parliamentary Education and Skills committee established a review of the teaching of reading. Conducted by Rose (2006), it acknowledged the conceptual rationality of children utilising letter-sound knowledge to decode unknown words and recommended SSP as the future of reading instruction. As a result, 'Playing with Sounds' (DfES, 2004) was replaced by a government developed SSP programme, 'Letters and Sounds' (DfES, 2007) which explicitly warned against the utilisation of alternative cueing strategies.

TAKING SIDES

The Rose Review (2006) and the recommendations for a revised curriculum that expressly included SSP all developed under New Labour and was stillborn with the election of the coalition government in 2010. SSP, however, had been championed by the Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP whilst in opposition when questioning the then government's education policy. Gibb had been influenced by Rudolph Flesch's 'Why Jonny Can't Read' (1955), a vitriolic attack on the whole word method of reading instruction in the USA. Flesch's book sold well in the US but gained little influence in the teaching world having been rounded on by the academic community, particularly Harvard University's Carroll (1956). Little did Flesch realise the influence he would have fifty years later and 3,500 miles away. It was Gibb, as Gove's School Standards Minister, who took the fight to the whole language, mixed methods battalions.

Gibb and Gove used a phalanx of weapons. The first, and probably most controversial, was the classic Govian tactic of deploying statutory testing to drive change with the introduction of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) (DfE, 2019) which assessed the basic phonic knowledge of English five and six-year-olds in Year One. The pilot study carried out in 2010 revealed that only 31.8% (DfE, 2011) of those sampled achieved the threshold score. This resulted in the PSC becoming compulsory from 2012 with outcomes being published and analysed in individual school data accessible to OFSTED. A core-criteria for phonics teaching materials (DfE, 2010) was introduced against which schools could assess their programmes followed by officially approved phonics programmes in 2013 (DfE, 2014) and match funding for training and resources. The second lever of influence was the inclusion of SSP in the Teacher Standards which specifically stated that when teaching early reading, teachers should be able to, 'demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' (DfE, 2011:1). This had the added influence of obliging teacher training institutions to ensure that trainees had knowledge of, and training, in SSP.

The new National Curriculum for England introduced by Gove in 2014 stated that, '…phonics should be emphasised in early teaching of reading to beginners (i.e. unskilled readers)' (DfE, 2014:14). The final weapon in the armoury was the inclusion of SSP expectations in the inspection framework. OFSTED inspectors had to attend compulsory phonics training and inspectors were required to comment on the quality of phonics teaching (OFSTED, 2015). This was updated in 2019 to include expectations that younger children gain phonics knowledge, that reading books closely connect to that knowledge and that assessments be made by inspectors as to how well staff teach children to read systematically using synthetic phonics and how well they assess children's progress in gaining phonic knowledge (OFSTED, 2019).

THE FIGHTBACK

It was not plain sailing for Gove and Gibb.

In 2012 the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the second-largest teaching union representing in excess of three hundred thousand teachers, denounced the introduction of systematic synthetic phonics as the promotion of a single fashionable technique with one NUT executive stating, 'Most adults do not read phonically. They read by visual memory or they use context cueing to predict what the sentence might be…' (Mulholland, 2014: 13). The union was emphatic that phonics alone would not produce fluent readers and that mixed methods were essential. The largest teaching union, the NAS/UWT, asserted that children, '… need to use a combination of cues such as initial letter sounds and illustrations to make meaning from text…' (politics.co.uk, 2013:3).

This resistance from educational institutional leadership reflected the attitudes of their members. According to a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (2012) survey the majority of teachers specifically mentioned the use of picture cues as a reading technique along with the visual memorisation of word shapes and the sight learning of words. Further research by the NFER (Walker and Bartlett, 2013) found that 67% of teachers believed that a mixed methods approach to the teaching of reading was the most effective. A survey by the NAS/UWT in 2013 (politics.co.uk, 2013) showed that 89% of teachers believed that children needed to use a variety of cues to extract meaning from text confirming the results of Sheffield Hallam University's research two years earlier that revealed that 74% of primary school teachers encouraged pupils to use a range of cueing systems that included picture clues (Lloyd-Jones, 2013).

A significant number of high-profile academics were also unconvinced about the efficacy of SSP. Glazzard (2017) argued that many younger children were not able to deal with the smallest unit of sound, the phoneme, but must begin with larger units and recommended onset and rimes maintaining that reading instruction was not a 'one size fits all' (2017:53) model. Clark (2017) was similarly unconvinced, stating that there was no significant research that suggested that the method was more effective than analytic phonics or whole language instruction and that a psycholinguistic guessing approach could be effective concluding that there was, 'no evidence to support phonics in isolation as the one best method…' (2017:97). Clark (2017) also questioned the wisdom of introducing children to reading long before this takes place in other countries and recommended delaying the teaching of reading. Dombey (2017) also supported a mixed approach which combines enjoyment, syntactic analysis and

phonetic examination in equal measure as more efficacious than phonics instruction alone.

Much of the academic criticism of SSP instruction took a socio-political perspective. Gardner (2017) likened the PSC to a 'virus' (2017:113) undermining the art of pedagogy and saw the insistence on the adoption of SSP as a reductionist model of teaching by direct instruction which viewed literacy as a systematic process leading to standardised accountability and a statutory check as a right-wing political policing imperative. Gardner (2017) cited the mandatory inclusion of systematic synthetic phonics teaching within the English Teacher Standards (DfE, 2011) as evidence of this 'policing' (2017:114).

Wrigley (2017) concurred with Gardner's (2017) view that phonics teaching and screening were the result of ministerial power being 'increasingly exercised and abused,' (2017:213) and policing by 'the privatized Ofsted system of England' (2017: 214). He suggested that the teaching of SSP fitted the right-wing political preference of explicit instruction. Cox (2017) also questioned the political imperatives behind systematic synthetic phonics and urged restraint over the speed of implementation of a phonics screening check in Australia, questioning whose expertise and whose knowledge was taking precedence. He, like Gardner (2017), cited Robinson's (2015) claim that the commercialisation and politicisation of education was damaging the prospects of young people. Robinson's (2015) promotion of creativity over knowledge and attacks on direct instruction models of teaching were, by implication, attacks on systematic synthetic phonics instruction.

Dombey (2017) proposed that reading was more about making sense of text than the privileging of the identification of words and cited Taylor and Pearson's (2002) study which, she suggested, indicated that an approach which combines enjoyment, syntactic analysis and phonetic examination in equal measure was more efficacious than phonics instruction alone.

All of these academics acknowledge the importance of phonetic approaches to word decoding for emergent readers, and the majority recognise synthetic phonics as the most effective strategy for the teaching of the decoding of unfamiliar words. What they suggest, however, is that SSP instruction is not empirically superior to analytic phonics for the teaching of reading.

Despite the resistance, the only successful reversal of policy was the abandonment of the proposed Year 3 phonics screening check after pressure from the unions (naht.org.uk, 2017). All other policies and strategies remained, with Nick Gibb declaring in 2019, 'The question for teachers is no longer "look and say" or phonics. Instead, the question is which phonics programmes are most effective?' (Hazell, 2019:1).

A POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PARADOX

The result was the paradoxical position of Conservative Education Ministers aligning themselves with the philosophy of the critical theorists, including the socialist Paulo Freire (1996), against unions, liberal academics and teachers for the purpose and motivation of attempting to ensure all children had the best chance of being able to read. For where Gove and Gibb had the moral high ground was upon the overwhelming mountain of evidence that indicated that systematic code-based instruction in early reading was by far the most effective instructional approach.

When Chall (1967) conducted a three-year analysis of all previous research regarding early reading instruction in the United States her conclusions were unequivocal:

> *'Most children … are taught to read by…a meaning emphasis method. Yet the research from 1912 to 1965 indicates that a code-emphasis method – ie. one that views beginning reading as essentially different from mature reading and emphasizes learning of the printed code for the spoken language – produces better results…'* (1967: 307).

In terms of word recognition, spelling, vocabulary and comprehension, children taught using systematic phonics outperformed those being taught using intrinsic phonics. Only in reading rate did those utilising an intrinsic phonics approach gain an advantage and this advantage was nullified and surpassed by grade 4.

These results were supported by Bond and Dykstra's (1967) largescale study, Gough and Tumner's (1986) research that resulted in the seminal 'Simple View of Reading' (now referenced in OFSTED training), the USA's National Reading Panel Report (2000) followed by Ehri et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis, Camilli et al.' (2003) reanalysis and Johnston and Watson's (2004) Clackmannanshire study which was supported by Torgenson et al.'s (2006) meta-analysis.

Mixed methods, in contrast, were undermined by the failure of the National Literacy Strategy's searchlight model to improve reading outcomes. Goodman's (1972) whole language approach was adopted by the state of California for seven years. At the end of those seven years 60% of Californian nine and ten-year-olds were unable to gain an even superficial understanding of their books and California slumped from fifth position to the bottom of the United States reading league tables (Turner and Burkard, 1996).

It would appear, counterintuitively, that Gove and Gibb were in agreement with Marx (Bowles and Gintis, 1977), that in a capitalist society education was a

superstructure serving the base economic structure and if the economy required a quarter of eleven-year-olds to be unable to read then that would be exactly what the education system would deliver (Bowles and Gintis, 1977). This aligned with Bordieu's (Silva and Ward, 2010) view that education was the most effective way of perpetuating social patterns because not only did it provide a justification for the inequalities, it treated the ruling cultural heritage as a natural state rather than a social gift. A Conservative Secretary of State for Education, it appeared, wanted to undermine the maintenance of Gramsci's (Gramsci et al., 1994) hegemony, and the crucial role education played in maintaining it (Althusser, 2010), that enabled contradictory principles to flourish through the appearance of reciprocity (Williams, 1977). His efforts to ensure that all children were taught how to read by the most effective method was being attacked by the very people and institutions whose vocation and training implied they wanted the same thing.

Isn't it ironic?

SO, DID IT WORK? CAN ALL CHILDREN NOW READ?

The evidence of the effect on reading of the compulsory teaching of SSP is nuanced and at first glance disappointing. In terms of the Phonics Screening Check there have been unequivocal improvements. From 58% of children achieving the threshold score in the first check in 2012 (DfE, 2019), the figures in 2019 have risen to 82% (DfE, 2019). For Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) outcomes the picture is complicated by the change in 2016 to a more demanding assessment framework making comparison difficult. Since 2016 the percentage of children attaining the teacher-assessed expected standard of reading at KS1 has hovered at around 75% (DfE, 2019). At KS2, pupils achieving the expected standard in an externally marked assessment has risen from 66% in 2016 to 73% in 2019 (DfE, 2019).

Internationally, in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (DfE, 2017) England has risen from 11th to 8th from 2012 to 2016 with this rise adding support, according to the Department for Education (2016), to the case for the 'efficacy of phonics approaches' (2016:2). However, Solity (2018) has suggested that the sample was flawed and once adjusted for the inclusion of independent school children, England returns to 11th place. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes in 2018, the first English cohort to have been assessed at the PSC, and who had therefore been exposed to SSP instruction, were included in the results. Although England's mean reading score improved from 495 in 2009 to 505 in 2018 the improvements were not statistically significant (DfE, 2019), and it performed similarly to English-speaking countries that have

not adopted SSP as a fundament of early reading instruction. Buckingham (2020) notes, however, that this cohort would have been exposed to variable phonics instruction.

With a slight increase in Key Stage 2 reading outcomes and no significant rise in England's position in reading league tables internationally, the only meaningful improvement, after ten years of compulsory phonics instruction, appears to be in phonics. Perhaps as Bowers (2020) concludes, 'there is little or no evidence that this approach is more effective than many of the most common alternative methods used in school, including whole language...' (2020:682).

Were Gove and Gibb guilty of engaging in a wild goose chase?

It is worth returning to the research, the vast majority of which supports code-based approaches to early reading instruction and the conclusion drawn by reading psychologists Rayner et al. (2012), who have no pedagogical or political axe to grind, that, 'while many may discover some letter-sound correspondences without phonics instruction, teaching methods that make the alphabetic principle explicit provide a key to our writing system that produces better readers overall' (2012:341). Their conclusion is supported by neuroimaging studies that track the brain's reading circuitry and suggest that early phonics instruction is neurodevelopmentally appropriate for beginning readers with the dorsal and anterior systems involved in the orthographic-phonological processing most active in beginning readers (Frost et al., 2009). This may be the key for explaining the disappointing statistics.

Systematic instruction in the English alphabetic code appears to be the most efficacious way of ensuring that the English alphabetic code is mastered by emergent readers. Seidenberg (2017) claimed, 'For reading scientists the evidence that the phonological pathway is used in reading and especially important in beginning reading is about as close to conclusive as research on complex human behavior can get' (2017:124). Rayner et al. (2012) assert that mastery of that code enables effective decoding but is, however, not sufficient, of itself, for fluent reading and effective reading comprehension. Young readers, they assert, start with stronger oral comprehension skills than those related to reading comprehension. As Curtis (1980) maintains, the initial roadblock to understanding text is the difficulty encountered translating words on the page into their spoken forms. Mastery of letter-sound correspondences supports accurate and fast word recognition eventually through repeated fixation on words and letter patterns (Share, 2004) that trigger the word superiority effect (Reicher, 1969) that facilitates instant word recognition. To use Beck's (1998) analogy, automatic decoding is equivalent to the fundamental skill of dribbling a basketball. Dribbling is not sufficient to score points but is necessary to play the game. Mastering dribbling will not make a star player, but a weak dribble will be a barrier to becoming a star

player. Thus, the mastering of decoding skills provides the foundations for automatic word recognition that frees children to focus on the meaning of the text.

This liberation of cognitive load (Sweller et al. 2011) may lie at the heart of the discouraging improvements in reading outcomes. KS2 reading tests, PIRLS and PISA assessments are all reading comprehension tests and although decoding mastery is necessary for the emergence of reading fluency and the extraction of meaning from text, it is not sufficient. As Beck et al. (1999) observed, the impression is often given in reading development that reading comprehension is the final stage in a hierarchical structure. This, they suggest, results in the assessment of reading comprehension being accepted as the most accurate assessment of reading. However, if as Cervetti et al. (2016) suggest, 'Reading comprehension and knowledge have a reciprocal relationship in which knowledge supports comprehension and comprehension builds new knowledge…'(2016:763), or as Pearson (2006) put it, 'knowledge begets comprehension begets knowledge' (2006:6), then reading comprehension is more dependent upon the acquisition of knowledge rather than the development of word recognition. SSP can improve word recognition and enhance the development of reading fluency. However, to evaluate its efficacy on an assessment that is also dependent on the development of cognitive maturation and global, cultural and discrete knowledge may be a conflation. It is perhaps the equivalent of blaming a basketball team's poor showing on the players' infant schools' dribbling coach. Lack of progress in reading comprehension scores may be a greater assessment of the curriculum that generates the knowledge to understand the text rather than the programmes and policies that enable decoding of that text.

A far more valid assessment of the introduction of SSP within the curriculum would be a word recognition test or a reading fluency test. There is, however, no national or international assessment programme of this and therefore no benchmark or comparative data. If SSP failed to improve word recognition scores and words-read-per-minute there would be valid reasons for the analytic phonics, whole word, balanced literacy, whole language advocates to call for its demise.

There are other issues with the introduction of SSP that may have undermined the efficacy of the instruction and its impact on reading outcomes. Firstly, the inertia from teachers, particularly those trained under the National Literacy Strategy 'searchlight' mixed methods model, may have undermined some of the instruction and resulted in mixed methods by proxy. This may have been exacerbated by a lack of compulsory code training for teachers in KS2 who then encouraged compensatory guessing strategies (Ehri, 2004) for older readers when faced with unknown words. The inspection framework may also have been undermined as many of inspectors, although they received training, would have taught utilising the 'searchlights' model and may have brought with them unconscious bias and

insecure subject knowledge. Furthermore, the failure of government to identify a single phonics programme resulted in a number of DfE approved programmes, most of which are associated with a financial investment for schools. Schools may have selected the lowest cost option or more usually the most ubiquitous programme in the hope that its very ubiquity indicated efficacy. Very few programmes attach any detailed research data to their marketing literature or are required to and there exists a paucity of research into them.

However, paradoxically, the greatest flaw lay in the most instrumental lever: The Phonics Screening Check. The assessment requires Year One children to read forty words. The forty words consist of a mixture of actual words and pseudowords (alien words). Pseudowords are invented words that portray no meaning but follow legitimate phonic patterns of the English alphabetic code. The rationale for using pseudoword deciphering as a measure of decoding skill has an extensive research base in the assessment of alphabetic writing systems, is considered a reliable assessment of decoding proficiency (Gough, 1983) and is widely used in the measurement of decoding (Ehri et al., 2007; Pullen et al., 2005; Shankweiler et al. 1999; Snowling, 1981; Uhry & Shepherd, 1993).

The skills that are necessary for decoding are isolated from the ability to read words by sight during pseudoword reading because the reader cannot rely on past experience with a pseudoword and is unable to guess the word or rely upon word shape memorisation (Good, Baker, and Peyton, 2008). The reader is entirely reliant upon their understanding of the letter-sound relationships (the alphabetic principle) and the precepts that govern those relationships. The inclusion, therefore, of real words in the check is counterintuitive and undermines its validity (Darnell et al., 2017). The check should consist entirely of pseudowords.

More worrying, according to Darnell et al. (2017) is the restricted content of the test which enables many children to reach the threshold by exhibiting only partial code knowledge. This, of itself, would not be an issue, but with many schools ceasing phonics instruction after children have reached the threshold, the prospect of code mastery becomes uncertain. With only partial code knowledge the associated spectres of poor instant word recognition and retarded development of reading fluency start to materialise, particularly for pupils unable to crack the code for themselves (McGuinness, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The championing of SSP under Gove was a bold policy that courted unpopularity and resistance but was supported by substantial research. That so much progress was made in its implementation and embedding by a coalition government with a shallow majority is testament to an unflinching, some would say dogmatic, belief

in its righteousness and perhaps also in a genuine desire to turn the tide of reading failure in England particularly among the less privileged. That the policy has not resulted yet in evidence of universal literacy and England sitting atop the world reading tables may be more a result of inappropriate assessment and a failure of the system to ensure code mastery along with a hope that addressing one part of the phases of reading instruction would right the other parts.

Those faults do not condemn the policy to failure. There seems much to build on. A Phonics Screening Check at Year Three that assesses the entire code would go some way to militating against phonic deficits debilitating pupils in later years along with opportunity for and assessment of rapid word recognition for children in lower KS2. Furthermore, an understanding that reading fluency is not a proxy for reading comprehension may help schools prepare pupils more effectively for the demands of secondary school. With a few apposite developments and by entering the fray one more time, Gove and Gibb could arguably have done more for reading in England than any past ministerial team. It might even be their finest hour.

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THE WILDERNESS YEARS: AN ANALYSIS OF GOVES'S EDUCATION REFORMS ON TEACHER ASSESSMENT LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

During Michael Gove's educational reforms between 2010–2014, he imposed several policy changes that changed the nature of assessment in terms of grading, terminal examinations and classroom expectations. Despite his vision of England rising up the international league tables, there has been little change in England's position and even signs of stagnation of attainment at upper secondary. This paper uses the Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) framework to understand why the reforms associated with assessment have had little impact on attainment and reveals the devastating effect of such wholesale change to school assessment systems, without time or support to change, leaving teachers in a decade of assessment wilderness.

INTRODUCTION

> Wilderness: If politicians or other well-known people spend time in the wilderness, *they are not in an influential position or very active in their profession* for that time.

A significant feature of the 2010 education reforms in England were changes to assessment. The reforms reduced the number of state-imposed examinations throughout the school system, overhauled what was to be examined in GCSE and A-level qualifications through a completely new national curriculum, and even removed the long established grading systems (national curriculum levels and GCSE grades) and replaced the GCSE letter grades (A*–G) with a numbered grading system (9-1). One politician drove these changes, Michael Gove in his role as Secretary of Education (2010–2014), and is understood to have taken a more active role in the changes than any other Education Secretary.

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Classroom assessment is a complex practice and is far more than just formal examinations: it can be seen as an ongoing process; a professional skill; and a set of skills that employ strategies to enhance teaching and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Heritage & Harrison, 2020). Teacher assessment literacy in its simplest form is what teachers understand, know and can do regarding assessment (Stiggins, 1991). It can be used to support trainee teachers and established teachers to analyse their current understanding of assessment (Koh, 2011). In this paper, I employ a robust empirically based framework established by Xu & Brown (2016), Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP), to analyse the known impact of the neo-conservative policies on classroom assessment, teacher assessment identity, and assessment outcomes for this generation of school leavers.

GOVE'S ASSESSMENT POLICY

The interactions between policy, assessment and classroom practices are complex (e.g. Black & Wiliam, 2018; Stiggins, 2001). Following the Department for Education (2010) White Paper *Importance of Teaching*, Gove's rationale for world-leading national curriculum reform was set out by Oates (2011), unusually with a forward from the Secretary of State, Gove himself. Oates (2011) states his proposals are founded upon the highest performing jurisdictions, using international assessments as an evidence base on which to draw conclusions. In terms of assessment, the focus of the present paper, Oates' (2011, p. 126) main critiques of the, then, current national curriculum, were threefold: assessment was overbearing, with adverse impact on teaching and learning (evidenced by England's position in the international comparison tables); specific issues with drilling for tests; and lack of robust information for policymakers on national standards (particularly concerns over grade inflation).

In response to each of these criticisms, Gove made several reforms on England's assessment systems. To counter what was considered the overbearing assessment, GCSEs and A-levels moved from the established modular system to a terminal examination system. Meaning that there were no external assessment for learners from age 11 until age 16.

However, the claims made by the Coalition Government about the state of education in England were questioned. In a review by Oxford University curriculum and assessment academics, they showed that there was no evidence for England's decline in international tests, there is no evidence for GCSE grade inflation, raised doubts about the advantages of moving to linear examinations and the government claims about failures in teacher assessment (Baird et al., 2013). The case for the changes being evidence based was not as clear as Oates (2011) and Gove presented.

The translation of policy into practice is always problematic, but it helps if the policy is rolled out in a logical and supported way. Assessment and curriculum are closely entwined, so both need to be considered simultaneously. This was not the case in this reform, the structure of assessments were changed before the new curriculum was announced, and teachers started teaching GCSE and A-level course without any idea of the style and content of the examinations themselves (Mansell, 2012), almost as if assessment had no bearing on what and how teachers teach.

ASSESSMENT LITERACY

The term 'Assessment Literacy' appears to have been coined by Stiggins (1991) in his critique of teachers' lack of knowledge of assessment and associated processes. Since then there has been a proliferation of studies into the development of, the features of, and the application of teacher assessment literacy. Although concerns about its validity as a concept have been muted (Popham, 2009), the consensus is that it is a useful concept through which to improve teachers' knowledge and understanding of assesses in their practice (Hill *et al.*, 2010).

Xu and Brown (2016) extensively reviewed studies on assessment literacy from a thirty year period and offered a reconceptualisation of teacher assessment literacy in the form of the Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) pyramid (Figure 1).

Their focus for their study was for the development of pre-service teachers and considered not just the knowledge base required to be an assessment literate
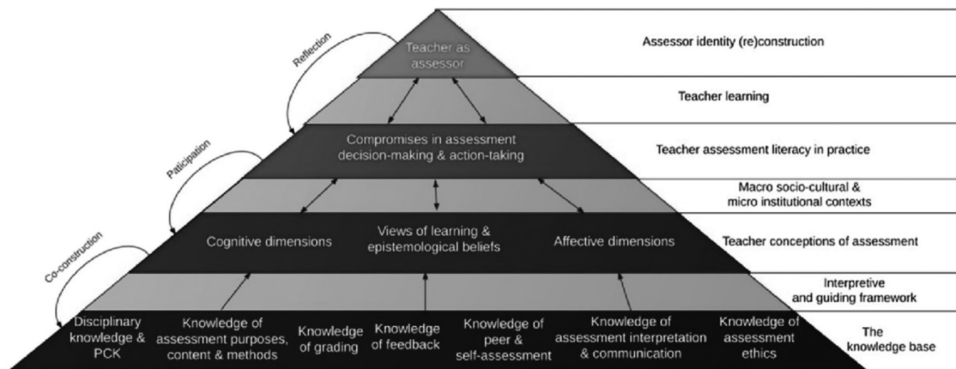

Figure 1: A conceptual Framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (Xu & Brown, 2018)

teacher, but the interacting dimensions between that knowledge base, the sociocultural interactions, and teacher identity as assessor. As the authors explain:

TALiP is a dynamic, complex entity combining teachers' assessment knowledge, their conceptions of assessment, and their responses to the external contexts embedded with actual constraints and affordances in the environment (Xu & Brown, 2018, p.157).

The national curriculum changes from 2010 in England provide an interesting environment in which to analyse potential and actual impact on teacher assessment literacy in a changing policy landscape.

GOVE'S POLICY IMPACT ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Before embarking on the analysis of changes in teacher assessment literacy, it is useful to ascertain what impact the education policy changes have had between on student outcomes 2014 and 2020.

As Gove envisioned, the education reforms would have England's school leavers being world-leading in qualifications, marching up the international comparison tables. However, indications so far would not suggest anything remotely close to this.

In terms of international comparisons, which are exalted by politicians, but are treated with caution by academics, the picture is mixed. Since the start of the policy changes in 2014, both Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematical and Science Study (TIMSS) have produced a cycle of results.

The 2018 PISA tests 15 year olds were analysed by Sizmur *et al.*, (2019) and summarised that:

The mean scores in reading and science in England have not changed significantly over successive PISA cycles, but in mathematics, England's overall mean score showed a statistically significant increase compared with PISA 2015.

TIMMS results were published in 2019, giving an insight to international comparisons of Year 5 pupils and Year 9 pupils in Maths and Science. In their analysis Richardson *et al* (2020 p. 234) conclude that:

Overall, the 2019 TIMSS results saw an improvement in year 5 pupils' performance in mathematics, stability in year 9 mathematics and year 5 science, and a decline in year 9 performance in science.

The pupils involved in these tests had only had partial experience of the new curriculum in England from 2014. However, this remains a mixed picture and hardly the climb Gove anticipated from his policies.

In their recent analysis, Rogers & Spours (2000) call this the 'great stagnation of upper secondary education.' Highlighting this plateauing of attainment which is disproportionately affecting the middle to low attainers. This is supported by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) (Hutchinson et al, 2020) report that shows that since the coalition government's policies were introduced that the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has stopped closing, and this started before the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this in mind, the following analysis using the TALiP framework, may go some way to explaining Gove's policy failures.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I use the Xu & Brown (2016) TALiP framework to analyse and discuss the impact of education reforms instigated by Gove on teacher assessment literacy, drawing on academic literature and relevant grey literature. In the following analysis I consider the impact of the policy on each of these aspects of 'The Knowledge Base' and through the lenses of teacher conceptions of assessment and teacher assessment literacy in practice, the implications for teacher as assessor.

UNSETTLING THE FOUNDATIONS OF TALiP

Considering the seven foundations of assessment literacy in the TALiP framework (Figure 1), I contend that at least five of this have been changed fundamentally by Gove's educational reforms, and the remaining two (Knowledge of Feedback and Knowledge of Peer & Self-assessment) have required a shift in professional knowledge of teachers enacting these policies. In this analysis I will focus on three foundational areas of TALiP: Disciplinary knowledge and PCK; Knowledge of assessment purposes, content and methods; and Knowledge of grading, and the repercussions on teacher assessment literacy with indications to why Gove's educational policies have failed.

DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE AND PCK

Gove not only changed assessment regime, but foundations of *what* is actually taught in classrooms. One of the most contested policy changes that of the national curriculum style and content (e.g. Beck, 2012). Persuaded by the cultural literacy

arguments of Hirsch (2007), (see Gordon, 2018) and the cognitive science informed theories of learning from Willingham (2009), the education policies morphed from Labour's more cross curricular and vocational curriculum to a knowledge based, academic discipline curriculum (Department for Education, 2010).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) describes the knowledge and skills associated with teaching a discipline (Shulman, 1986) and has been used to understand and support subject knowledge and professional development of teachers (e.g. Park & Oliver, 2008). PCK is not just what teachers teach, but *how* they teach it. Disciplinary knowledge is an essential foundation in assessment literacy, as it informs how they teach. As Xu & Brown (2016 p.156) justify:

> *Since educational assessment is about measuring the curriculum content taught in schools/universities, knowledge of disciplines and how to teach that content cannot be excluded from the assessment knowledge base.*

In light of the radical changes of what is being taught by teachers, we can explore some of the reported impact on teacher assessment literacy using the TALiP framework.

TEACHER CONCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT

What teachers teach is 'filtered and interpreted by teacher conceptions of assessment' (Xu & Brown, 2016 p. 156). It can be argued that Gove's changes to the curriculum deskilled even the most experienced teachers. Whether teachers were in favour or opposed to the change, the curriculum shift challenged the very nature of what they teach and the status of their discipline within the curriculum.

For Gove, his proposals for the curriculum change got off to a bad start. The introduction of synthetic phonics in primary teaching has been highly controversial and problematic in its implementation and outcomes (Carter, 2020). The core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science at secondary level were overhauled becoming narrower, more prescriptive and in the case of English questionable inclusion or exclusion of texts (Isaacs, 2014) and the proposed removal of English Literature, until the English teaching profession protested (Marshall, 2017).

History teachers felt devalued as Gove himself was rewriting their curriculum (Watson, 2019), without any professional or academic understanding of history education, curriculum or assessment. This was challenged by the profession and some eventual compromises were made (Harris & Burn, 2016).

Geography teachers felt the changes threatened their subject as a discipline (Lambert, 2013). The art subjects were not only threated by the imposition of what they considered a poor model for their curriculum (Steers, 2014), but have

continued to feel the side-lining of their subject. For example, due to the introduction of English Baccalaureate (EBacc), Music education has felt a significant decline in its status and uptake (Bath *et al.*). From a wider sociological perspective, Young (2011) predicted the move to subjects in this way would lead to new inequalities in education.

For many teachers therefore, this curriculum change challenged their very epistemology of their discipline as a curriculum subject, overturned long held beliefs and had direct on their everyday practice and practices and created tensions between the Department for Education and professional teaching bodies. On all three aspects of the TALiP framework (Figure 1), most teachers where having tensions in the cognitive, epistemological and emotional domains.

COMPROMISES IN ASSESSMENT

Teachers were affected by the 2014 national curriculum for England, the change would have had an effect on their assessment practice and the compromises they make. Xu & Brown (2018 p. 157) explain:

> *Teachers' assessment decision making is a process by which teachers balance the demands of external factors and constraints with their own beliefs and values… TALiP is constantly negotiating between teachers' conceptions of assessment and the macro socio-cultural, micro institutional contexts and expected knowledge base, it reflects a temporary equilibrium reached among tensions.*

Any single policy change imposes the need to rework professional knowledge and understanding, and its application to practice. This takes time, applying the TALiP framework, teachers needed to react to these changes (cognitively, epistemologically and emotionally), make compromises through decision making and action taking and use this learning to reconstruct their identity as an assessor.

Assessor identity: from defending to resenting

Between 2010 when curriculum changes were announced and 2014 when they were enforced, was a time of uncertainty. Many teachers were defending their discipline. From 2014 until the first GCSEs were sat in 2017, although the curriculum was established, teachers were still learning what it meant in relation to the other changes. Considering this aspect of curriculum change in isolation, this (re)construction of teacher identity as assessor could arguably be a complete 'construction' of identity due to the severity of the changes made. The changes in

disciplinary knowledge have particularly caused cognitive and epistemological tensions that needed reconciling in many teachers and associated with that will be affective tensions such as questioning their status, role as a teacher, role as assessor and the personal attacks from Gove himself on the status of the teaching profession and education academics (Lupton & Thomson, 2013). This was a particularly unusual aspect of policy change. The personal involvement of Secretary of State, the confrontational style to the very people who had to instigate that change (including a letter to *The Independent* newspaper from one hundred academics opposing the curriculum reform) and rather than appeasing the concerned professional workforce, Gove chose to attack them as the "enemies of promise". This was followed by all four teaching unions calling a vote of no confidence in Gove. Not only did this curriculum reform deskill teachers, but the minister was attacking the profession and many of their epistemological beliefs. This emotional impact still resonates and many teachers hold resentment as part of their TALiP.

KNOWLEDGE OF ASSESSMENT PURPOSES, CONTENT AND METHODS

Having discussed the unsettling effects of changing the national curriculum content on teacher assessment literacy, this next foundational aspect of TALiP considers *how* that content is assessed. Xu and Brown (2018 p. 56) established that:

> *Teachers need to know how and why they assess (i.e., formative and summative), how different assessment methods can be related to the learning goals and specific content being learned, and what a variety of relevant assessment strategies are.*

Again, these changes to formal assessments were wholesale, not just adjustments. Long established approaches to assessment at Key Stage 3 in the form of SATs and National Curriculum levels were abolished. I will discuss the impact of changes to grading in the next section. For this section, the focus is on the impact on teacher assessment literacy between 2010 and 2017 when the new style GCSE examinations were sat by students using the new grades 1–9, the impact of the removal of coursework, and the impact of terminal examinations dominating the assessment model. The stakes in high stakes assessment had become higher, on a much smaller evidence base (Torrance, 2018 p. 5).

By 2014, building on the White Paper (DfE, 2010), several changes started to be implemented, including the EBacc, and the teaching of GCSE subjects and A-level subjects. However, there was a period of time when the teaching of the

new curriculum had started but the new assessment purposes and methods had not. Teachers were given the frustrating situation of teaching their modified curriculum without any understanding of how it might be assessed (Mansell, 2014).

The removal of coursework may have left teachers with more time to teach content, but for practical based subjects, the disappearance has changed the nature of the subject itself. For example, in the sciences, practical coursework has become more and more controlled over the years to the point now, that it has been removed at GCSE and has become an add on to A-level Sciences (Childs & Baird, 2020). Practical work is a traditional part of science education and a much needed skill for future scientists.

TEACHER CONCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT

The changes to the examinations were wholesale and fast. Cognitively, teachers were kept in the dark for sometime about the exact nature of examinations: what they would assess and how they would assess it. It was particularly emotionally unsettling for teachers teaching a course before they understood the assessment, particularly when Ofqual and the Examination Boards were unable to give timely guidance. Epistemologically, many teachers were unsure or opposed to the new terminal assessments often due to accessibility for many learners. This was compounded by the strong accountability measures (also new) of the EBacc and Progress 8.

ASSESSOR IDENTITY: FROM DISEMPOWERED TO PLAYING THE GAME

Most GCSE and A-level subjects have sat their first round of new style examinations and it is only now that they can start reflecting. The TALiP framework illustrates how teachers' identify as assessor can change depending on current influences. In the current situation, I suspect many teachers identity is that of uncertainty and disempowerment: uncertain about the examinations, the types of questions, how their student may respond and unable to support their students with answers to the fundamental question of what the test will be like. It is only once those first examinations have been sat, the papers are revealed, and the results come out that teachers can feel more confident and more empowered to teach effectively with improved assessment literacy.

It is only now that teachers can start the processes of reflection, participation and co-construction from the TALiP framework (Figure 1). Only after the first sittings are teachers empowered to reflect on what was in the exam, how the students

responded and how to improve their teaching in response. I have equated 'washback' with these processes, which is the positive or negative effects of assessments on teaching (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). For example, a negative effect is 'teaching to the test' or worse the test becoming the teaching as in the case of phonics screening checks (Carter, 2020). Positive washback can be seen as modifications in teaching to promote improved learning, supporting students with exam technique, and understanding the different grade boundaries. In high accountability assessment and administrative regimes, washback can be skewed to more negative responses. The challenge for examination boards and education administrations is to write texts that are worth teaching to and avoid teachers 'playing the game.'

KNOWLEDGE OF GRADING

Gove's two main policies that affected grading were the removal of National Curriculum Levels for KS2 and KS3 (with no replacement) and the replacement of the GCSE A*-G system with grades 1–9 which were to be awarded by ranking the national cohort of students. None of these changes were a modification of existing policy, they were a seismic shift, a complete ground zero from which teachers, subject leaders and schools had to make sense of and build into their practice.

Immediately teachers were facing three significant changes to their assessment literacy. Firstly, their knowledge base had been removed of established grading systems, secondly, there was nothing to replace national curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 and thirdly there was little information on what the new GCSE grades meant until the year of the first examinations.

National curriculum levels had had several iterations in their history since 1988, and the most current form of levels was the application of them to a system called Assessing Pupil Progress. There were all criterion based, with level descriptors for various domains of each subject. It had merits for whole school assessment practices (Ofsted, 2011) and it suited some subjects better than others. Alongside the rise in Assessment for Learning in England (Black & Wiliam, 2003), national curriculum levels descriptors became a way of communicating progress in some cases lesson by lesson, or individual pieces of work and in some cases to a meaningless sub-level (a division of levels). This proliferation of using levels in this way raised a lot of criticism (Reay & Wiliam, 1999). In the background there has been a demonisation of criterion based assessment in England (Christodoulou, 2017) despite it being a valid and useful form of assessment in other jurisdictions (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

The void of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 levels led to teachers and education publishers to invent their own assessment strategies to fill the vacuum. In 2014, when it was clear that the government were not going to replace levels there were

a number of consultations held by various unions and subject associations. For example for Primary education, the National Association of Headteachers commissioned a report on assessment (NAHT, 2014) and the government did release a report on Primary Assessment and Accountability (Department for Education, 2014), that controversially insisted on baseline assessment for Reception pupils (Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016) but then leaves primary schools to do their own summative assessments throughout the Key Stage 1 & 2 until they do English and Maths SATs at the end of Key Stage 2. However, this void has been filled with a resurgence in using comparative judgement to assess primary writing (Wheadon et al, 2020).

In secondary schools, the lack of meaningful information from the Key Stage 2 SATs in English and Maths has led to many schools giving Year 7 pupils a secondary baseline test at the start of their secondary school career (e.g. AQA, 2021). In the chasm, some schools continued using levels for a number of years, more adventurous schools attempted their own quasi-level assessment model (Lilly *et al*., 2014) and then there were a multitude of progress trackers at Key Stage 3.

We had moved from one model, with limitations, of which schools had a shared understanding. This could have been modified and its appropriate use have been supported with professional development of teachers. Instead, schools were left to invent their own tracking approach, often without suitable assessment literacy or buy in a package, which varied considerably in quality and assessment integrity. This led to a fragmented informal assessment system between schools, further losing the ability to communicate progress of individuals or groups between them.

A further consequence was that instead of filling the vacuum with another unknown, schools have attempted to extrapolate GCSE grading down to Key Stage 3. The has a variety of incarnations, but they all have significant flaws. This means that Year 7 pupils are being graded on final GCSE grades (that until recently had not yet been officially awarded). There was at least one diamond amongst the coal, the maligned and disgruntled music teachers got a team of assessment experts together to produce a bespoke assessment and progression framework using a criterion approach (Fautley & Daubney, 2014; 2019).

ASSESSOR IDENTITY: FROM DE-GRADED TO RESIGNATION

The impact on these changes on teacher conceptions of assessment was immediately catastrophic: all prior knowledge of the assessment systems, grading systems and exam systems was irrelevant. Teachers who were dissatisfied with national curriculum levels, would have been pleased with their removal, but there was no replacement. How could progress be assessed or measured at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3? Teachers who were comfortable and confident with using levels (some

had their whole career using them) would have been left reeling from the loss of what they perceived as a useful and workable system. There was no useful interpretive and guiding framework.

Using the TALiP framework, the impact of these changes on the cognitive, belief and affective domains meant that teacher conception of assessment was not just reduced, but eliminated. Together with the changes to the curriculum, teacher assessment identity had moved into the wilderness years between 2014–2020.

In a study of how these policies affected teachers conceptions of assessment, Braun & Maguire (2018) give some insights into how primary teachers perceived the enactment of these policies. The pressure and uncertainty of policy change and the fact that it is at odds with teacher epistemologies, for example shifting the focus of teaching from individuals to targeted groups and second guessing policy, caused teachers to experience 'disaffected consent' (Gilbert, 2015), 'doing without believing.' (Braun & Maguire, 2018). Although this has been unresearched at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, it is likely in that 2014–2020 period teachers at all key stages and in most subjects were feeling lost, disaffected and then resigned to taking on untried, unfit for purpose and assessment strategies.

Grading, culturally and pragmatically, has been the main mode of communication for teachers about their students' attainment, progress and potential. This shared language was removed, making teachers feel de-professionalised in assessing, predicting and communication of these important aspects with their peers, their students and the parents of those students. Teachers were on a steep learning curve with little support from the government. The (re)construction of 'teacher as assessor' could be argued as a catastrophic change in identify, from being informed and knowledgeable, to being in the dark and incapable of decision: totally degraded, followed by a resigned compliance.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The global pandemic has forced significant changes in education, particularly the cancellation of examinations in GCSE and A-level. In the examinations of Summer 2020, students were unable to sit their examinations due to national lockdown measures. Instead, teachers were asked to provide a grade for their students in each subject (Ofqual, 2020). This brought about significant uneasiness in the profession, with schools asking examination boards and the government for support and guidance (Jadhav, 2020). The solution was far from satisfactory, with an algorithm that randomly assigned grades to students, causing huge dismay for students, teachers and parents (Paulden, 2020).

In England, teachers regularly make predictions for GCSE grades and A-level Grades, but when assigning actual attainment at the end of these qualifications,

they lack confidence. This could be accounted for by lack of training in assessment literacy: an understanding of validity and reliability skills in moderation; and appropriate sources of evidence. However, I contend that is mainly due to the reliance on examinations as the only form of assessment. Usually in the form of mock examinations that use previous exam papers.

The forced cancellation of examinations has opened a flaw in this approach to assessment of qualifications and exposed teachers need for improved assessment literacy, so that they, with professional confidence, supported with appropriate evidence, make professional and moderated judgements about their students' attainment at any time.

CONCLUSIONS

One politician was able to exert his influential position to make sweeping changes to educational policy, in doing so, he has professionalised, disempowered and degraded the teaching profession, casting the profession into an assessment wilderness for a decade.

Gove intended to make ambitious changes to education in England, positioning us in the top-performing countries. So far, there is little evidence that any of the policy changes have had any impact on improving standards in education. In this paper, I have explored the impact of his changes to assessment policy to explain why these policies have failed, using the TALiP framework.

In the rationale for change (Oates, 2011) what was seen as overbearing external assessment has been replaced with so few and such high stakes assessment, that the assessment system has become too fragile (Torrance, 2018). With regard to the concerns of the negative impact of assessment on teaching and learning, it is clear that the way these reforms have been managed has exacerbated that and led the education system into a period of darkness and disorientation with regard to teaching, learning and assessment. Even though there have been some positive developments such a subject organisations developing their own assessment systems, this is fragmented and out of necessity rather than strategy.

Our children and their education deserved better than this, and we need to ensure that governments do not allow a single person to exert such power. Education, teaching and learning and assessment are too complex to allow someone with more confidence than competence to make such destructive changes. We need to ask why this can happen, and prevent it happening again.

The TALiP framework exposes the complexities of the impact of change to assessment and the considerations needed for making such changes. Teachers need to be part of the process of educational change on cognitive, epistemological and affective levels. Change needs to be managed, not imposed. Working with the

profession, trusting the profession and developing the profession are essential aspects of change. In addition, assessment needs to be seen as important as teaching, learning and curriculum. It needs investment in time, finance and recognition in policy to make meaningful and positive impact on children's education.

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INTERVIEW

THE EROSION OF TRUST – A REFLECTION

David Gumbrell in conversation with BJE's deputy editor Mark Deacon

INTRODUCTION

David Gumbrell was a Primary headteacher in a successful London school when Michael Gove was Education Secretary. He is now a successful writer, trainer and academic with a special interest in teacher induction, development and well-being. The following are some of his reflections from the position of school leadership on what he sees as fundamental flaws in Gove's leadership of education. Whilst, Gumbrell remains aware of potential unconscious bias he uses trust as the pivot, for his reflections. He states 'I hope to mitigate the inevitable emotional attachment to my profession and my view as to the effect that Michael Gove has had upon it, both at the time and also the resultant legacy of his ministerial post.

Gove was and remains a polarising figure. For some Gove was the saviour of high-quality education, others regarded him as a 'vandal', busy sacking the person-centred education which had built up and refined since Plowden. Although never a consensus view, many teacher expressed their dismay at the reforms to the accreditation structure, curriculum, schemes of assessment and opportunities to control schools brought in by Gove.

THE INTERVIEW

It's easy to throw stones at politicians, lets start positively. Where do you see a positive legacy for Gove?
For many, his vestige will be that he was the minister who pushed through Pupil Premium funding and increased the autonomy of schools. Passionate about both of these aims, he drove these policies forward and I am sure that many benefited from the financial rewards, or greater powers afforded to those who followed his lead.

And yet you have serious reservations about his time in office?
For others, the reality is somewhat different. Echo chambers of consultation, in pursuit of the notoriety of moving at pace, Gove appears to have inadvertently alienated the people that he needed most, the teachers on the chalk face. He appeared to this audience, to not listen to Headteachers and instead was lured by the next headline, possibly realigning himself to the profession which he had before his time of office, journalism.

How would you examine Gove's tenure as Education Secretary?
Through the lens of trust, it appears that the speed of change was just too great and yet trust relationships take time.

Michael Gove himself stated 'The pace of change in our education system recently has been fast and the reaction at times furious'. In saying this, he must have realised that he wasn't able to attain the traction for his policies that he would have wished for. Despite this, he seemingly remained reticent to amend them, and so professional views were becoming ever more polarised.

Speed and trust are two words that are juxtaposed here and could be why Gove was sacked so close to an election by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. In summarising his legacy, Alex Forsyth, BBC Correspondent, finished her report saying 'With less than a year until the General election, there is no doubt it takes having someone less controversial in charge of education, will help win back some support, not least from teachers'. A sad indictment from the personal friend and boss that David Cameron was, yet history shows that sometimes politics is quite brutal.

Controversial, or just not trusted?
It is possible that Michael Gove, in his desire to make his swift changes to policy, policies that I am sure were well intended, did not have the impact that he would have wanted. Instead, they divided the very people that he wanted to bring along with him.

We have to remember that in June 2010 a General Election year, Gove addressed an audience at the National College Annual Conference where he stated

I am, frankly, impatient for us all, as a nation, to do better. In the relentless drive to help every child achieve everything of which they are capable there can be neither rest nor tranquillity.

In that urgency, Gove appeared to not do the necessary groundwork to build a platform of trust first. Perhaps it was the lack of a bedrock, there could only be one outcome, namely, his replacement as the next Education Secretary, by Nicky Morgan in 2014.

Could you explain what you mean by "Build trust?"
Andrea Bonior Ph.D., in Psychology Today, outlines 7 ways to build trust:

1. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
2. Be vulnerable – gradually.
3. Remember the role of respect.

4. Give the benefit of the doubt.
5. Express your feelings functionally, especially when it's tough.
6. Take a risk together.
7. Be willing to give as well as receive.

Looking at each of these, it becomes increasingly obvious that the hard work of these foundations may have been flouted, assumed to just be there, or simply not invested in heavily enough in the infancy of the coalition and with the Headteachers and teachers within the education workforce.

Michael Gove in my view failed to surround himself with people who would temper his enthusiasm, widen his experiences and challenge the notion that all schools needed to be academies or free schools. He seemed at times to almost relish the moments when he played the pantomime villain and yet failed to realise that a demotivated workforce would not deliver the academic standards that he had set his career on achieving.

He certainly said what he meant to say and meant what he said. Russell Hobby was reported by the BBC stating *'Michael Gove had a radical and sincere vision for transforming education, but he largely failed to bring the profession with him'.*

So what was going on?
Russell Hobby, then general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, was able to see the sincerity of the vision, that Michael Gove was doing what he thought was right for education. However, his vision was constrained, limited and limiting. He sat within an echo-chamber of fellow educationists who would reinforce his decisions as truths, back his vision as accurate and thus proceeded into the public domain with that eschewed belief that he was right to proceed. However, this stance is counter to many of the seven principles of trust.

At his right-hand side was Dominic Cummings. In the background, he would encourage Michael Gove to take a hard line, to show no signs of weakness to his coalition partner, David Laws, nor to the Unions. It was a defence mechanism combined with a need to push through the educational dream that he had been harnessing and honing in his days as Shadow Secretary and as a Times journalist. He was quick to throw arrows at the Government at that time and yet he wanted to now protect himself from the volley of verbal assaults that were now firmly aimed in his direction.

Do you think Michael Gove ever made himself vulnerable?
Secondly, Michael Gove and the word vulnerability appear to be mutually exclusive words in terms of his leadership style. In his urgency to set out a plan and deliver it within the four years of office he just dictated the future, laid down his

ambition plan and deafened himself to any objectors. His tenacity is commendable, his ability to furrow his ploughed line admirable, yet his chance to bring others with him was missed. He may have been better placed to show authentic vulnerability, rather than wield power and might.

Giving and receiving respect is an important characteristic of a good leader.
Respect is something that Gove craved, certainly amongst his professional peers. He aimed to garner the respect of the populous for his transformational education legacy. However, respect is a two-way street. Michael wanted it, but rarely, if ever, gave it. Labelling teachers with belittling phrases that may have made a journalist's headline, a fellow MP guffaw, made teachers seeth. Feeling threatened by the teaching unions, he used nebulous name-calling, more befitting to a playground spat, as his language to engender respect.

I am always impressed with what *Mick Waters (2013) comment*:

'Gove had the capacity to hit the media with generalised insults about the profession and, unsurprisingly those are what many teachers heard. To think they were seen as 'enemies of promise' or 'dealers in despair' or 'whingers' upset hard-working teachers'.

Do you believe that the environment Gove created had an impact on teachers?
This is going to take some explaining. Ruthless facts and cold hard data and a tighter framework of inspection and performance related pay are difficult to balance with the fourth tenet of Bonior's trust relationship model, *giving the benefit of the doubt*. Offering flexibility and the benefit of the doubt was seemingly eradicated and superseded with ruthless accountability measures in its place. The curriculum was tighter, money was tighter, time was tighter during the tenancy of Michael Gove. With so much at stake, inevitably teachers had to become ever more compliant to achieve their pay rise or for the school to get the next Ofsted grade. However, with less autonomy, teachers started to resign. With no flex in the system, teachers started to break. With Mr Gove's no-nonsense policy, the recruitment crisis in the education system began. In a briefing paper entitled Teacher Recruitment and Retention in England (2019), published to the House of Parliament, stated:

The number of reported full-time teacher vacancies in state-funded schools has risen, from 389 (0.1% of the workforce) in 2010 to 987 (0.3%) in 2018. The number of temporarily filled positions increased from 1,791 (0.5% of the workforce) to 2,777 (0.8%) over the same period.

This data would suggest that, during Mr Gove's tenure 2010–2014 (and in the subsequent 4 years) just over 1000 more classes have temporary teachers in front of them, with a further 600 classes with no teacher at all. This reduction in quality trained staff continues into 2020 with subsequent Education Secretaries failing to stem the flow. They too, seemingly beset on pursuing privatisation rather than building the trust of the profession at large.

Gove spoke a lot about trusting teachers, releasing them to teach and innovate.
Let me give you a typical example. In May 2013, Michael Gove attended the NAHT conference in Birmingham. His audience included members of the biggest union for head teachers, representing 85% of primary heads and 40% of secondary heads in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This was a chance to express his feelings, an opportunity to stand with and alongside education leaders.

'*It should be Government's job to help, serve and support you - not direct, patronise and fetter you*.' This started to appease. He then went on to express his feelings '*I am passionate about extending the freedoms denied to you by the last government*'.

This went some way to pacify. However, he went onto say

'*If people find it stressful that I'm demanding higher standards, then I'm not going to stop demanding higher standards*'.

This inflammatory phrase did little to recognise, sympathise or empathise with his Head teachers. The earlier words of thanks were forgotten, and the hall erupted. Trust was irrevocably broken and yet Gove responded at the end of the speech, saying to reporters that,

'*What I haven't heard over the last hour is a determination to be constructive, critical yes, but not constructive*'.

Higher levels of accountability were supplemented with radical GCSE reform. This was most certainly a risk, yet this decision was not taken together with the teaching profession who had to deliver it. Instead of this desirable consultation, Mr Gove offered them the chance to be scrutinised on the outcomes of these new tests or paid according to the proportions of young people who passed the qualification threshold. Many thousands had their school judged by Ofsted as being effective, or ineffective, according to this new, untrialled measure of success. In short, Mr Gove took the risk, but teachers and headteachers bore the brunt of the outcome of his risk. Whilst claiming that this was the vanguard of a new

future, an opportunity to drive up standards, in the short-term we were comparing apples with pears.

We could see that despite not being comparable in nature, claims and assertions were still being made about them. When the data was poor, Gove claimed it was the quality of teaching; when the data was good, Gove claimed it was academisation that was the reason for that school's success. This selective hand-picking of data did little to make teachers feel that they were in this together, or that they were trusted in their professional judgements by the right honourable Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath. Trust continued to be eroded.

Isn't data a bit of a dark art?
Absolutely. However we ca`n bring our critical faculties to bear as well as reply on experts.

Mick Waters (2013) states

Data, often suspect, drove an agenda that relied on inspection outcomes (also suspect), league table position and the ministerial influence and recognition. Because of these drivers, the diet of pupils became distorted as schools chased the pupils on the cusp, offer a range of courses that feed the machine of data, spoon-feed pupils with pulped up learning and spread 'good practice' via a study of what Ofsted might be looking for as their flavour of the month.

Within the 2014 address to think tank Policy Exchange, entitled 'Purpose of Our School Reforms', Gove stated

'Instead of setting to follow a consensus that doesn't agree – and I suspect never will – I have set out to follow the evidence'.

In looking for this evidence, he looked to education systems in Alberta, Calgary and Edmonton in Canada, Sweden, Finland and Singapore. In each he found the evidence that was needed to confirm that he was right, that his pursuit of this version of excellence was correct, that he was on the right path.

You have painted a picture of a doctrinaire Education Secretary to an extent ruthlessly driving his agenda on selective evidence. What was the consequence of this?
In an ideal world there is co-operation, a willingness to give as well as receive. This can build the sense of trust between the two parties so that they can focus on

growth. Within this ideal, the Scale of Cooperation (2019) outlines that cooperation creates trust and that it is achieved through feedback, consolidation and flow.

The possibilities, should these conditions be achieved, are both endless and desirable. However, the precursor to this condition of co-operating however is Avoiding. Within this middle range, there is a need to move from *talking about* to *talking with*. These two gateways lead to 'Struggling' with the former or 'Co-operating' with the latter; Gove chose the former. Instead of recognising the benefits of talking with teachers and headteachers, he chose to talk about teaching and that created distance between himself and the profession and eroded the trust between the two parties as a result. Gove's education revolution was turning into a fight, a conflict based in criticism.

Trust was eroding, co-operation was going to get ever harder.

How long does erosion of trust take?

We associate erosion with slow processes. Consider the whittled spires of Vermillion Cliffs National Monument, Arizona and rounded the Moeraki Rocks along Koekohe Beach, New Zealand. Each took millions of years to erode, to be shaped into the stunning geological monuments that they are today.

Within four years of office, Gove eroded the trust in the profession through removal of autonomy and control. What was exposed was a leadership style characterised as angular, twisted and sharp. A profession that was broken up into academies and free schools; a profession that remained strong yet felt battered by the elements.

Teacher training had been sped up with the SCITT programme, proposed by the Carter review of Initial Teacher Training; Gove was a man in a hurry, and yet time was not his ally.

Do you ever wonder how Gove might have reflected on his time at Education?

Gove was seemingly able to learn from this experience. His time as Justice Secretary started with a more open dialogue with people within the profession who could help and guide him. When he was moved again to Environment Secretary, he again took a more discursive approach than he had ever done at the Department for Education. Both portfolios were not his main calling and so he needed to reach out in order to learn more about them. Bennett (2019) states: -

> *Much like his appointment as Justice Secretary, Gove found himself leading a department to which he had previously given little thought. He emulated his approach at Justice and sought as wide a range of opinions as possible as soon as he sat down at his desk'.*

Cook, chief executive of the Howard League for penal reform stated to Bennett (2019) that

> *With his track record at Education, we expected an ideologue, but of course he had come into Education with a blueprint. He didn't have a vision of what he wanted to do [with Justice]. He has a moral compass, but not a plan of action.*

Do you have a grudging admiration for Michael Gove?
His political career must have taken its toll with the constant battering and weathering of the storms that he has embroiled himself in. Yet, despite all this he is still standing, and I have a certain admiration in that. He has withstood the attacks, the wave after wave of criticism, the flotsam and jetsam of life on the front bench and yet, he is still a Member of Parliament, a member of Boris Johnson's cabinet government. He is articulate, he is intelligent, he is resilient. However, Michael Gove also suffers from showing a lack of vulnerability, appears to be amiss in terms of emotional intelligence, and had a deficiency in being willing to build trust over time with the Education community. Despite his good intentions, the reality of Gove's educational landscape is not the Vermillion Cliffs, not the Moeraki Rocks, more the Needles, Isle of Wight. Rocky stacks separated and apart. Academies, or not. Outstanding, or not. Ofsted-ready, or not. Erosion, time, trust.

Although political disagreement is a normal part of any functioning democracy and yet our state education system can't run properly if so many of those working in it don't trust those making the decisions.

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[*] *As an interview references have not been provided. However, they have been checked.*