

The Changing Experience of English Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers developments in state secondary education in England from the debate on the 1944 Education Act to the publication of Circular 10/65 which established comprehensive education as 'official' government policy in 1965. The period starts with the development of a 'tripartite' system of different types of secondary schools and ends with the start of official reorganisation on the basis of a single type of school designed for all abilities and aptitudes. The historical cast of education reforms are examined through the lens of biography: contrasting published contemporaneous accounts by pupils and teachers with the story of my secondary education at one of the early London comprehensive schools. The English selective system, the historical effect of class and the effect of 'cultural capital' and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977) on the educational attainment of children of the time are examined, valued and considered. It is contended that failure to address the underlying cause, namely education organised by class, by introducing comprehensive institutions at the inception of mass secondary education, has been responsible for the failure to create a system that encouraged an increase in social mobility, the consequences of which, are still evident to this day.

INTRODUCTION

In this article on social class and education, I shall be examining the development of mass public education in England and Wales during the period 1944 to 1965 and using biographical sources, described below, comparing experiences with my own in a comprehensive school in east London from 1965-1971. The article's focus will be on the development of the tripartite system, use of selection, the move towards comprehensive education and the effect of class on the provision of opportunity in English education.

My interest in the subject is to some extent a consequence of my own experience as a child in the education system of the time. I was born in Stepney, east London in 1954 to a solidly working-class family. My father was a skilled worker, a cabinetmaker and my mother worked in various jobs, including as a shop assistant for Woolworths and a catering assistant in a local chemical works canteen. Consequently, my maternal grandmother, with whom we lived in a terraced house in Hackney, brought me up. Completing the household was my maternal uncle, a tailor's cutter, with whom I shared a bedroom.

My father and uncle were both active trade unionists and I remember family discussions usually about politics, on Friday nights when other members of my family came around. Friday was bath night and relatives would come to use our bath, situated in the kitchen (or scullery as my grandmother called it) at the back of our rented two storey house. We were extremely lucky to have this; all my friends had to use the local public washing baths. A

gas heater provided hot water as the house only had cold running water, although we were also fortunate enough to have an indoor toilet.

After leaving a London primary school in 1965, having failed the eleven plus examination and destined for the local comprehensive school, I along with many others, emerged eventually from the educational system ‘...into adult life branded as failures from its process of classification and grading’ (McCulloch, 1998:1). To what extent our destinies were predetermined by our social origins and the prevailing educational system will be examined during this study.

In *Bad Blood*, Lorna Sage tells the story of her vicarage childhood in Hanmer, a small village in Flintshire in the 1950s and her progression through school to university. In this article, I will utilize her description of her primary and secondary education to exemplify the process of social reproduction in school, and in particular, her experience of the English selective system. In *A Good School*, Mary Evans recounts her memories as a pupil, in an unidentified girls’ grammar school from 1956 to 1963. I shall be using these reminiscences to illustrate contemporary society’s opinions of the tripartite system in existence subsequent to the 1944 Education Act. Annette Kuhn also describes the process of selection in Chiswick, London, during the 1950s in her book *Family Secrets*. I will use her recollections to compare and contrast her success in the selection process with my own experiences.

Autobiographical accounts written by secondary modern and comprehensive school pupils were more difficult to find, perhaps as a continuation of the effects of the practices of selection and streaming. Therefore, the autobiographies to which I refer were written by teachers, rather than pupils. In *My Liverpool Schools*, Norman Bridge relates his experiences of teaching in both secondary modern and comprehensive schools in that city, during the 1950s and 60s. His memories of the school buildings and of the consequences of selection proved informative. Ruth Kirkley taught History in several south London girls’ schools in the 1960s and 70s, and gives graphic depictions of the feelings of failure expressed by pupils in her secondary modern and comprehensive schools in her book *Thursday’s Child*.

THE DEMAND FOR CHANGE

The nature of a child’s education should be based on his capacity and promise, not by the circumstances of his parents (White Paper 1943:20 cited in Jones, 2003:16).

In 1940s Britain, there was a popular clamour for reform. This was partly as a response to the wartime coalition government’s commitment to peacetime full employment, a desire for general improvements to the social and economic welfare of the populace, and as described by Wallace, to a ‘war-engendered spirit of egalitarianism’ (1981: 285). British society had changed and the population had raised its aspirations, with education widely perceived as leading to an increase in opportunities (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973).

The country’s standing in the world had also changed; the breakup of the Empire was imminent, the economy was in an uncertain condition and Britain was deeply in debt to the

United States. With new technological advances in the post-war period, proposed expansion and modernisation of agriculture and manufacturing and the necessary reconstruction of the nation's buildings and infrastructure, the promise of full employment created demands for new skills and an educated workforce. Consequently, for the majority of children, the old elementary system of education, which had failed so many, needed to change also.

Education in England and Wales had traditionally been divided along class lines and at least since the 1918 Education Act most working-class children only received 'elementary' education from the ages five to fourteen. Lorna Sage in her book, *Bad Blood*, describes her experiences in a country elementary school in the late 1940s as 'less concerned with teaching its pupils reading, writing or arithmetic than with obedience and knowing things by heart' (2000:18). Sage's experiences suggest that the educational system of the time was concerned more about social reproduction than an inclusive education, merely providing the basic knowledge necessary to reinforce the existing social order, a view endorsed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural and social reproduction.

Bourdieu (1977) suggested that disparities in children's educational achievement could not be entirely explained by economic factors, but were influenced by cultural habits, passed down through the family, described as 'cultural capital'. Bourdieu challenged the perception that education facilitates social mobility through individual achievement and suggested instead, that schools validated and supplemented cultural capital inherited through the family. Goldthorpe supports this view and suggests that 'Cultural reproduction ... is necessary to social structural reproduction, and 'dominant' classes therefore use their powers in order to ensure that schools operate in an essentially conservative way' (1996: 488). For example, Sage noted that at the time,

None of the more substantial farmers sent their children to Hanmer school. It had been designed to produce domestic servants and farm labourers, and functional illiteracy was still part of the expectation, almost part of the curriculum (2000:19).

During the 1920s and 30s, the Hadow reorganisation had separated elementary education into three stages by age group: infant, junior and senior. This facilitated specialist teaching for the over elevens for the first time, permitting streaming in junior and senior schools and was met with extensive support (Simon, 1991).

As demonstrated by Sage, this education was indeed elementary if not rudimentary and devised to educate boys to become competent workers and to prepare girls 'for the responsibilities of married life' (McCulloch, 1998: 20). Secondary education was available but restricted to 'fee-paying children from the middle-classes, plus a handful of exceptionally able pupils caught by the offer of free places or by a "scholarship" ladder' (Searle, 1971: 79 cited in McCulloch, 1998: 26). It was axiomatic that education should be subservient to the requirements of employers, with children retained in education or released into the workforce as suited the economic factors prevailing at the time, rather than achieving a satisfactory level of general education for all (CCCS, 1982).

Furthermore, as the social critic and leading economic historian R.H. Tawney commented in the 1930s, educational policy had been formulated in the pre-war years 'by men few, if

any, of whom have themselves attended the schools principally affected by it, or would dream of allowing their children to attend them' (1931:144-5 cited in McCulloch, 1998:4). The issue lives on. In the recent past, the issue of school selection would prove contentious for several New Labour politicians – Tony Blair as new leader of the opposition in 1994, followed by Harriet Harman in 1996 and Ruth Kelly in 2007. It appears that little has changed in the intervening years in that respect.

The 1944 Education Act

The election of the Labour Party with an overwhelming 48.8% of the vote in the first post-war election in 1945, which formed a government with Clement Attlee as Prime Minister (BBC Politics 97), was a manifestation of this popular desire for change. The 1942 Beveridge Report had previously outlined in principle, the concept of the welfare state, including plans to transform the school system into a more democratic model, and had received widespread support throughout the country. The in-coming Labour government proposed to introduce the Beveridge reforms (including his attack on the giant of Ignorance) as evidence of modern Britain emerging from the chaos and debris of the war.

Provision of universal secondary education was not a radical innovation, but followed recommendations in the 1938 Spens Report and had been a long-term goal of the Labour Party since the 1920s (see McCulloch, 1998; Jones, 2003). Consequently, the detailed provisions of the 1944 Education Act included establishing a clear distinction between primary and secondary education, eliminating the former all-age (5-14) elementary sector, introducing secondary education for all pupils to the age of fourteen, abolishing tuition fees for pupils attending publicly provided or grant-aided secondary schools and establishing impartial funding to local authorities and to different school sectors. What the text did not do, however, was to specify what types of schools to provide. Instead, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were given the task of producing development plans appropriate for their local area.

After the 1944 Act, children would remain in primary education until the age of eleven before moving to a discrete form of secondary education. This demarcation had caused much consternation and discussion during the drafting of the provisions of the Act. An influential member of the drafting committee, Griffiths G. Williams, head of the secondary branch of education, insisted that secondary education should start at eleven years of age, whereas other committee members had advanced the opinion that eleven was too young to make lasting career decisions, proposing instead that it be postponed to thirteen. Williams was well connected, and Wallace (1981) suggests that his authority ensured that his opinion prevailed.

Following recommendations from the Norwood Report that suggested the classification of individuals and therefore their education into 'certain rough groupings' (1943: 1, cited in Jones, 2003: 21), the 1944 drafting committee proposed that the organization of secondary education should follow similar lines. However, this view would later be described as 'theoretical and artificial' by the chief inspector for secondary schools (Charles, 1945, cited in McCulloch, 1998: 65). Nevertheless, the education system remained divided by status, enforced by selection into separate components, as epitomised by the 'tripartite system'.

THE TRIPARTITE SYSTEM

Most LEAs, acting on the recommendations of the Spens and Norwood Committees and the 1943 White Paper, *Educational Reconstruction*, determined that secondary education would be organised into a tripartite system of secondary grammar, secondary technical and secondary modern schools (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973, McCulloch, 1998), with each following a discrete curriculum. For most LEAs, this system was established by the end of the decade, although some experimented with different arrangements (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973).

It was anticipated that between each of these new types of school there would exist ‘a parity of esteem’ (McCulloch, 1998: 44). However, a sceptical public required persuading of this equivalence, with Labour’s first education minister Ellen Wilkinson stressing that parents ‘must be convinced that a grammar school is now a specialised type of secondary school and not the *real* thing’ (1946, original italics, cited in McCulloch, 1998: 62). The National Union of Teachers President, G.C.T. Giles also remarked on problems experienced when attempting to convince the public of the value of the new secondary modern schools, contending that it was difficult ‘to sell the secondary modern school to parents because it does not appear to them to lead anywhere’ (1946: 71, cited in Jones, 2003: 30).

Despite efforts to engender parity of esteem, the overall unfavourable regard in which secondary modern schools were held was described by Norman Bridge. ‘It was clear in the minds of parents and their children of school age, the secondary modern school was the school you had to go to whether you wanted to or not’ (1992: 126). This sense of resignation is familiar from my own experience in a comprehensive school. Both parents and pupils were under no illusions about the ‘second class’ nature of my school; pupils attended there simply because they were not good enough for a grammar school education. The concept of ‘parity of esteem’ had not managed to alter the fact that a failure to pass the 11+ examination was still a failure.

Wilkinson as education minister and the Labour Party in general, supported the principle of tripartism, despite an official pledge of support for multilateral schools at annual conference in 1942 (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973). It was suggested that a system based on selection contradicted Wilkinson’s socialist principles (CCCS, 1982; McCulloch, 1998), but she rejoined that by eliminating maintained school fees, tripartism ensured that selection was on merit only (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973).

The introduction of the tripartite system was not without opposition, and at a local level, this was often robust; some LEAs rejected Norwood’s conclusions and offered alternative schemes such as multilateral or bipartite schools (McCulloch, 1998). The Trades Unions Congress had argued prior to the Act that ‘social divisions would be maintained by the separation of schooling along the lines of the division of labour’ (CCCS, 1982:61). In the pamphlet *The New School Tie*, Giles criticised the tripartite structure and contended that the new schools should take all the children from a neighbourhood, as in the United States and Russia (1946 cited in CCCS, 1982:67). Opponents, including those within the Labour party, contended that as the new system would require selection to apportion places, the selection

process itself was random and would merely restrict allocation (CCCS, 1982), and as such was contrary to the spirit of egalitarianism engendered by the Act.

It was anticipated that the new secondary modern schools (SMS) would educate approximately three quarters of secondary pupils, and be non-selective, whereas both grammar and technical schools were free to retain selection for the allocation of places, with the more academically able awarded places in the elite grammar schools. It was envisaged also that the SMS would not enter pupils for the public examinations, as these were traditionally associated with grammar schools, thereby not exposing the pupils to the extra demands engendered by sitting them (McCulloch, 1998). In the Ministry of Education pamphlet, *The Nation's Schools*, it was asserted that the SMS aimed to give children a 'balanced education that is at once practical and general' (1945, cited in McCulloch, 1998: 61), which would continue to reflect their future role in society, giving schools the opportunity to develop a distinct curriculum to serve their pupils' unique needs.

For most SMS pupils, this meant an education that would be suitable for their vocation in life; manual employment and for girls this would be 'located in the home rather than in paid employment' (McCulloch, 1998: 121). For some girls, particularly those from a 'generally poorer social background', the curriculum should include skills that would link with 'their future hope - marriage' (McCulloch, 1998:122). Consequently, the curriculum reinforced the past prejudices of the elementary schools, reflected the contemporaneous values of the period and strengthened arguments advanced by opponents of the SMS. Critics claimed that the new schools, together with the tripartite system, would merely maintain the social differences endemic in society, replacing 'social class distinctions by equally objectionable intellectual distinctions' (Wood, 1946, cited in McCulloch, 1998: 65), thereby diminishing the 'parity of esteem' proposed at their inception.

Condemnation extended beyond the curriculum, to include the condition of the fabric of some of the schools. Many were considered old and ill equipped for their purpose, without sufficient provision of equipment and books. This was widely perceived to be due to lack of investment in building new schools, and the view persisted that 'anything will do for the schools provided for the children of the poor' (McCulloch, 1998: 67). This lack of suitable school accommodation for some schools, allied to their disreputable local neighbourhoods, meant that many were labelled as 'slum schools' (McCulloch, 1998: 80), and were subsequently viewed unfavourably by prospective pupils' parents and by a national press eager for sensational stories (Taylor, 1963). Nevertheless, some SMS, particularly those outside major urban areas, were examples of modern school design and were airy, light and spacious; the design attracting favourable comment at home and abroad and were often described as 'open air' schools (Bridge, 1992:67).

Selection had meant that the children entering a SMS were already regarded as failures by society, and it is hardly surprising that many conformed to this low opinion, which was considered to be a self-fulfilling prophecy (Kirkley, 1995; Kuhn, 2002). In her book, *Thursday's Child*, Kirkley, as a teacher, describes her experiences of pupil attitudes towards education. 'I met arrogance, fury, contempt, bewilderment and silence', explaining that 'If you are powerless you react either by keeping the lowest possible profile or by violence' (1995: 73).

In SMS, children already demoralised by failure, felt unable to embrace concepts and knowledge that was not of immediate value. Kirkley provides the following account of one teacher-pupil interaction conversation:

“Why’ve we got to have an atlas?”

“To see where different countries are.”

“Why? I’m not going anywhere.”

“One day you might and anyway you hear about places on the News. It’s nice to know where they are.”

“What for? Who listens to the news anyway? I listen to Radio Caroline. That’s the best and there’s no news on that.” (1995:7 2).

Transition to a grammar school had its own inherent problems, however. For working-class children this often represented an alien environment, with uniforms, publicly recognised examinations and a separate ethos. Grammar schools were also designed to reproduce the social status of the majority of their pupils’ parents, a practice that legitimised the unequal distribution of ‘cultural capital’ described by Bourdieu (1977).

Mary Evans, arriving for her first day at grammar school in the 1950s, expressed surprise at how similar the pupils were, the ‘most striking characteristic’ being that ‘they too arrived in cars, from detached homes and with standard English voices’; the few working-class pupils were considered to be ‘people from hitherto unexplored territories’ (1991: 26). This socially reproductive role of school in the early 1950s was also described by Sage, remarking that her grammar school ‘still cultivated the air of being somehow still fee-paying, it was designed to produce solid, disciplined, well-groomed girls who’d marry local traders and solicitors like their fathers’ (2000:144).

Despite being intended to conceal social differences, the school uniform served to reinforce divisions of social class (Taylor, 1963) particularly between different types of school. Evans (2000) noted that the secondary modern girls on her bus were distinguished by the manner in which they personalised their uniforms, compared with her own formal clothing. Born into a working-class family, Annette Kuhn (2002:102) says the wearing of a grammar school uniform made her feel ‘like a refugee dressed in someone else’s clothes’.

My own experience of school uniform was similar. Our comprehensive school had a uniform consisting of a dark blue blazer with the school badge on the breast pocket, white, grey, or blue shirts, dark grey trousers (blue skirts for girls) and a school tie. There was even a light and dark blue school cap, which I managed to lose reasonably quickly. The degree to which the school uniform was worn depended upon in which year group the pupil was in. Enforcement became more lax as they progressed, with pupils substituting fashionable items in their senior years, although it was still enforced; I remember getting a detention for wearing a plain blue tie because I could not find my school tie one morning. This contrasted sharply with the grammar schools in the area in which pupils had to adhere to a strictly enforced dress code. At our nearby catholic girls’ grammar school, the nuns ensured that the girls wore their summer straw boaters on the way home after school by waiting for them at the local bus stop.

For a working-class girl like Kuhn, the shock of her new environment was powerful. She describes further selection into streams on her first day at school, allotted according to their 11+ examination scores. She notes that for many children movement between the streams was uncommon and that she remained in the top stream. Whilst researching this article, I too remembered a similar first day experience at comprehensive school, of children called out from a great mass of pupils seated on the floor of the ground floor hall, to form our new, streamed classes, and like Kuhn, also never dropping out of the top stream.

The perceived higher status of the grammar schools continues to the present day. Their role in social reproduction can be judged by the current controversy of affluent parents buying houses in catchment areas of good state grammar schools to ensure the placement of their children, increasing local house prices and further reinforcing social segregation.

SELECTION

Selection for the majority of the school population consisted of the 11+ examination, although it has been suggested that it took place even earlier at infant school (Simon, 1953). From my own personal experience, originating from a skilled working-class East End background, the perception was that of the 11+ being a defining moment in a person's life. This view is supported by Evans among others, who describes the consequence of failure, at least in the 1950s as 'going to a school with no uniform, no examinations and a short career' (1991: 24).

My parents and family referred to passing this test as gaining a 'scholarship', no doubt reflecting the prevailing system of selection to grammar schools in their youth. Against this background, my subsequent failure to pass the 11+ exam was seen as disastrous. In an attempt to increase my chances of passing the 11+ whilst still at primary school, my father insisted that I study mathematics during my spare time despite my desire to play football with my friends, as he considered this subject key to any future success. To this end, he bought me a thick textbook containing maths exercises, graduated in complexity, which became obligatory for me to complete several evenings a week. This caused an antipathy towards the subject that took me until I attended Technical College to overcome.

Despite my best efforts, I contrived to fail this important test of ability, and accordingly was from that day forward, regarded as something of a failure in my father's opinion, unlike the experience of Annette Kuhn (1995: 102), who remarked that after passing the 11+, she became 'a centre of agreeable attention. My achievement was a source of great pride, especially for my mother'. I in contrast, was unfavourably compared to various cousins that had attained grammar school places, one of whom eventually became a computer programmer and another became an eminent Consultant Haematologist. It was made very clear to me that I had missed an important opportunity that would have a lasting effect on my future. Of the exam itself, I recall very little (it has been a long time), but I seem to have a vague recollection of frustrated bafflement.

I was born in August, and therefore had always been the youngest child in my particular year. My family or the school never considered that this fact might have had some bearing

on the outcome of this selective examination. However, the pitfalls of such selection and testing were evident many years before. In a pamphlet published in 1947, it was claimed that selection for secondary education at eleven years of age ‘raises many problems, the most thorny that of individuality and personality’ (Morgan, 1947 cited in CCCS, 1982: 61). One commentator noted that ‘Intelligence, like height and weight, grows unevenly in every child’ (Daniels, 1947 cited in Thom, 2004: 521).

In retrospect, the selection of children for educational segregation at such a young age does seem harsh, and with disagreement on the Butler committee, was seen as a contentious choice even in 1941. Some pupils mature later than others do, some learn to pass examinations earlier, and the ability to pass an examination is not the same as the ability to learn. However, the continued existence of a selective educational system naturally required a method of selection of some description. Simon contends that its purpose was to regulate the intake of grammar schools, as places existed only for a fifth of the children, and to exert social control by supporting the existing social and economic order (1953, 1991).

The 11+ examination itself appears less than valid, with some students coached to pass, or as in the case of Lorna Sage, assisted. Sage describes passing the exam as being ‘graciously cheated’ through, due to her family status, the invigilator surreptitiously indicating with his finger answers that required revisiting (2000:20). Mary Evans describes the socially reproductive characteristic of the 11+ as ‘almost impossible to fail’ for middle-class pupils, but conversely ‘almost impossible for working-class children to pass’ (1991:26). This supports Bourdieu’s (1977) argument that this type of assessment constitutes an ‘exclusive advantage’, by institutionalisation of the methods of evaluation favouring pupils from a particular class or classes.

Evans considers that for some children, the 11+ was the ‘first (and in many cases the last) public examination that they took’, as public examinations were not available to secondary modern pupils at the time, declaring that ‘after one and a half hours the die was cast, our educational fate was sealed’ (1991: 25). It is particularly disturbing to consider, as Simon (1953) suggests, that ‘the die was cast’ even earlier for around sixty percent of the children when they were placed in streams at infant school.

Educational psychologists had long cast doubts over the validity of intelligence testing, disputing the belief that intelligence was innate, a view central to the tripartite system, and by the 1950s, a growing body of opinion considered the selection process as invalid, inefficient and unfair. Research in the early 1960s had noted that testing had more use as an administrative tool, as intelligence ‘was a term “immensely useful” to the process of bureaucratic sorting’, but it was a blunt instrument that ““vastly simplified” human situations’ (Jones, 2003:60).

Statistics collected from schools failed to support selective testing, with an increasing disparity between the success rates of pupils, with some secondary moderns out-performing grammar schools. This was partly ascribed to coaching potential grammar school students for the 11+. But if pupils’ scores could be improved by coaching, the constancy of intelligence as an innate characteristic could be called into question; ‘if it could be altered, as some claimed, by as much as 16 points, serious injustices were being perpetrated in the

guise of extreme fairness' (Thom, 2004: 516-517). LEAs were also beginning to grow concerned that the selection process was not providing equality of opportunity (Thom, 2004).

Criticism moved from the 11+ to a general condemnation of the use of selection for secondary education. The National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT) observed that among their members,

The majority opinion remained that selection was the evil and to examine methods of selection to see if one was better than another was implicitly to condone the selection process itself (Thom, 2004: 526).

Throughout the 1950s, using work pioneered by Simon among others (Thom, 2004), NALT supported by the Communist Party, campaigned for the end of the tripartite system and for the introduction of comprehensive education, arguing that this would be the only equitable way of ensuring that all children had impartial access to secondary education. Their lobbying successfully changed contemporary public and government opinion to reject the accepted belief in the value of intelligence testing and selection in education. However, it was not until 1956 that the Labour Party conference finally supported comprehensive education for all (Thom, 2004).

THE MOVE TOWARDS COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION

Opposition to the tripartite system had existed for many years before and after the 1944 Act, with modifications proposed from both inside and outside education to develop a more egalitarian system (Jones, 2003). Furthermore, by the 1950s research had identified that inequity of opportunity in education had indeed continued in the same manner as before the 1944 Act, undisturbed by the principle of secondary education for all. Divided education had not succeeded in reducing social inequality, or improving social mobility and opportunity, and class continued to determine allocation of school places. At the time, future Labour education secretary Anthony Crosland noted that the 'divisive and stratifying effect' of inequality of opportunity demonstrated that 'there was no longer a case for selection, and every reason to move towards a non-segregated, comprehensive system of schools' (1956:197-204, cited in Jones, 2003:51).

It was becoming increasingly clear that further reform was necessary. Secondary technical schools were becoming irrelevant, with less than four per cent of the school population attending them as opposed to the 10-15 per cent originally expected (McCulloch, 1998), and the system of secondary education envisaged after the 1944 Act with parity of esteem, remained unrealised. LEAs were modifying the mix of schools with some adopting a 'bipartite' system of grammar and modern schools because of the low demand for technical schools. Whereas others, most notably the London County Council, despite retaining existing grammar schools, had long preferred to develop a multilateral or comprehensive system offering education to children of all aptitudes, rejecting both tripartite and bipartite systems (McCulloch, 1998: 60).

In 1951, the political environment changed when the Conservative Party returned to government with a small majority, remaining in power until 1964, and further moves to implement extensive comprehensive education were resisted. Criticism regarding declining standards of education had increased, commentators often nostalgically reminiscing about pre-war standards and deploring the influence of popular culture, describing it as 'proletarianization' (Jones, 2003: 43). Consequently, the government was apprehensive about continuing the comprehensive experiment (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973).

Education spending had been cut in 1951, but economic growth and rising school numbers rapidly caused a reversal of this policy (Jones, 2003). Parents were also continuing to express dissatisfaction with the secondary modern schools, arguing that the lack of certification impaired social advancement (Jones, 2003); the outgoing Conservative government in 1964, introducing the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), addressed this latter point (Benn and Chitty, 1997).

The Conservatives were ostensibly tolerant of comprehensive experimentation in certain regions with the stipulation that it did not interfere with grammar schools or attempt to attract the middle-class children that would normally attend them, thereby effectively preventing development of secondary schools in some areas (Jones, 2003). However, the number of comprehensive schools actually increased during the decade 1953-1962, particularly on new housing estates, driven by pressure from local authorities. This was partly a consequence of higher parental aspiration, and to the growing critical analysis of the relevance of intelligence tests (Rubinstein and Simon, 1973).

A new Labour government, returned in 1964 with the election slogan '...a grammar school education for all...' (Jones, 2003: 51), recognised the need for further educational reform, and moved to introduce comprehensive education as an instrument of social justice and economic effectiveness (Jones, 2003). The year following election, the government issued circular 10/65 to LEAs, requiring that plans be formulated for its introduction (McCulloch, 1998).

The reaction to the introduction of non-selective comprehensive education was immediate. Opponents of the comprehensives attacked the government accusing them of coercion, and revived arguments about social engineering. For the supporters of grammar school education, this was seen as an 'attack upon their privilege' as well as on the 'poorer working-class pupils' who had benefited through scholarships, from selective education previously and the National Educational Association was established to 'preserve the grammar school' (Benn and Chitty, 1997: 29). Benn and Chitty (1997) noted that no similar associations were formed to defend the majority of pupils, who were taught in secondary modern schools, against the comprehensives.

AN EAST LONDON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL 1965-1971

In London at this time, comprehensive schools had developed from the experimental period of the late 1940s. They often consisted of amalgamated former senior elementary and central schools, which also included a minority of expanded grammar schools.

Consequently, each had an individual profile, catering for different social milieus, within a definite stratified local, school hierarchy, each differing in popularity and standing. By 1966, seventy seven London comprehensives existed, offering GCEs at both 'O' and 'A' levels, with encouraging levels of success, partly due to the growing tendency for pupils to remain beyond the minimum school leaving age (Maclure, 1990).

Grammar schools, comprehensives and SMSs existed alongside each other, although some grammars moved out of London to avoid the comprehensive revolution (Maclure, 1990). This led to a collection as divergent as Dr. Rhodes Boyson's Highbury Grove with its emphasis on traditional methods and Alex Bloom's more liberal 'School Pattern' at St George-in-the East being used in London (Maclure, 1990; Fielding, 2005) and included one of my local schools, Hackney Downs School. During this period, Hackney Downs was a well-regarded successful school, untainted by the opprobrium that waited; it was later branded 'the worst school in Britain' (Tomlinson, 1998:166). Originally a grammar school, (Worshipful Company of Grocers Hackney Downs Boys School, founded 1876), it converted to a comprehensive in 1974 and became a victim of its own success. Because of its good educational reputation, Hackney Downs accepted a large amount of difficult or expelled pupils from other schools and consequently by 1994, '60 percent of the pupils had been identified as having special educational needs' (Tomlinson, 1998:164). It closed in 1995, a casualty of financial restrictions, amid government accusations of fiscal incompetence (Tomlinson, 1998) and internal systemic discord.

As a consequence of failing the 11+, I found myself attending a mixed comprehensive school in south Hackney, which strangely, I still live within three hundred metres of (although it has long been converted into apartments for the young, upwardly mobile). At the time, I seem to remember, it had a better reputation than some of its contemporaries had, although considered naturally, as a comprehensive, to be inferior to Hackney Downs. The school consisted of upper and lower schools separated by over half a kilometre. Both buildings were of solid London School Board design from the previous century and seemed to me, perfectly adequate for their purpose.

The school's intake of children was diverse, both educationally and racially, but with the numbers of higher achievers noticeably reduced due to the 'creaming' effect of local grammar schools, which in London still managed to account for 18.8% of secondary entry according to a 1966 report (Maclure, 1990:177). Organisationally, the school was divided into four 'Houses', suggesting an attempt to emulate the grammar school ethos. I was allocated to Scott House, the others being Fleming, Cass, and Alexander, each distinguished by a distinct coloured ribbon worn above the school badge on the blazer. The Houses were further sub-divided into Tutor Groups according to year and classes consisted of a mixture of Houses and Tutor Groups.

In addition to the usual core subjects, the curriculum for the initial three years contained practical lessons such as woodwork and metalwork for boys, with domestic science for the girls. In the fourth year, pupils separated into 'academic' and 'technical' streams with subjects such as maths, English, history and geography considered suitable for the academic route, often to GSE 'O' level. For the technical classes, the boys continued studying woodwork and metalwork and the girls typing and needlework along with maths

and English to CSE level and had also, the opportunity to attend classes at the local 'technical college'. Clearly, our futures were planned out for us with our class destinations matching our class origins, the school merely facilitating the process, as contended by Bourdieu.

Unlike the grammar schools in the locality, we did not possess school playing fields, making do with local parks, public swimming baths and Hackney Marshes instead. However, despite this drawback, we managed to field cricket teams, football teams, more surprisingly, Rugby teams, and a rowing club with several of my friends going on first to represent Hackney and then London, in these sports. This was mainly due to the efforts of several teachers that would not accept the conventional belief that these were elite sports, only suitable for middle-class children. Matches and regattas were organised against grammar schools and some private schools, which were awaited eagerly on our part, particularly by the Rugby teams, as a chance to show what boys from a 'comp' could achieve.

Most of my friends left school after the fifth year, but I stayed on to the lower sixth form, mainly to retake my 'O' level maths as I had, not entirely surprisingly, failed it at the first attempt. On leaving school, I became an apprentice telecommunications technician as did several of my friends, training for what was then considered to be a good skilled job, later retraining due to redundancy, as a decorator, running my own business and now teaching Painting and Decorating in a Further Education college. Others entered trades such as carpentry, or went into local offices and factories. However, several friends went on to study medicine or art at university, somehow resisting their previously mapped out paths.

CONCLUSION

The lack of equitable access to education has always been one of the biggest barriers to social inclusion and mobility in this country, and the period 1944 to 1965 represented the greatest possibility to effect lasting changes to increase opportunity. Crosland's influential book, *The Future of Socialism*, identified education as a way of increasing opportunity to the point that 'occupation and destinies no longer corresponded to their social origins' (cited in Jones, 2003:50).

However, the eventual failure to create a system that encouraged an increase in social mobility may be attributable to the introduction of a divided secondary system based on selection, which perpetuated social reproduction; a system currently exacerbated by the establishment of academies and faith schools. The post-war Labour government had made a bold attempt to develop a system that would redress that inequity, but ultimately failed to address the underlying cause, namely education organised by class, by introducing a comprehensive system of education at its inception.

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