



CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF EDUCATION

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By the end of this chapter, you should:

- have a knowledge of the education system from 1870 onwards
- have an understanding of changes in the philosophy, curriculum, management and accountability in primary schools
- be able to speculate about the future of education
- begin to form your own professional philosophy and values
- understand the need to respond to changes with professional integrity.



Introduction

In order to fully appreciate and understand the education system that will be in place once you qualify, it is necessary to have an insight into the influences and decisions that have taken place in the past, to form and develop this system. The norm today is for all children aged 5 years to attend primary school. However, compulsory primary education in England did not begin until 1880. Before this, there were many types of formal and informal schooling. This chapter will highlight some key dates, people and events that have contributed to the current education system and the primary curriculum.

It considers the impact of legislation on teaching and learning (for example, the curriculum and the effects of increasing centralisation, testing and league tables) and the advantages claimed for this legislation (that is, the values underpinning the National Curriculum). It shows how an informed educational philosophy helps us respond to centralised changes and considers the development of new curricula.

1870: the beginning of compulsory state education

Rationale

By 1870 England was a largely industrial rather than an agricultural society. Conditions in many of the rapidly expanding cities were often very bad. Compulsory schooling was introduced, partly to provide the labour force with the basic skills and routines necessary in an industrial society and also to attempt to prevent civil unrest, which people feared as a very real possibility.

Church and State

The Education Act of 1870, known as the 'Forster Act', laid down the requirement to establish compulsory, elementary education in England. It recognised a dual education system consisting of both voluntary denominational schools and non-denominational state schools. These were intended to supplement rather than replace schools already run by the churches, guilds and private individuals or organisations. In other countries, the church was less involved in state education but in Britain, as a result of the 1870 Act, the church has continued to play a substantial part in the education of young children.

School boards

School districts were formed throughout the country and where there was not enough educational provision for the children in a district, School Boards were formed. They set

up schools which became known as Board Schools. These had to be non-denominational. The School Boards could charge a weekly fee if there were insufficient funds, but the fee was not allowed to be more than 9 pence. The School Boards had to ensure that children between the ages of 5 and 13 attended the schools in their districts and this was enforced by an Attendance Officer.

The curriculum

The curriculum in the 1870s mainly consisted of the 3 Rs (reading, writing and 'rithmetic) and religious instruction, which was an integral part of the school curriculum but was not actually compulsory. There were some additional aspects, for example drill and 'object lessons'. Object lessons involved the study of an artefact. Needlework was an extra for girls and carpentry an extra for boys. Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the schools to test children's skills in the '3 Rs' and teachers' payment was based on the children's attainment, i.e. it was 'payment by results'.

In some respects, as we shall see, primary education remains tied to its Victorian roots. The exceptionally early start for formal schooling, the generalist primary school teacher, the separation of 'infants' and 'juniors', the focus on the basics at the expense of a broader curriculum remain and have not been seriously questioned. But the Victorian Elementary School was intended to prepare the poor for their 'station' in life rather than to broaden their opportunities.

1902–1944

There were three developments in education during this period: the Balfour Act (1902) which created Local Education Authorities, the Fisher Act (1918) which raised the school leaving age from 12 to 14, and the Hadow Reports (1923–31) one of which recommended school transfer at 11, so creating the idea of the primary school.



Reflective task

Read *Children, their World, their Education*, Chapter 13 (Alexander 2010), which compares the curriculum past and present. In groups, compare the curriculum in the late 1800s with the curriculum of today. Compare similarities and differences. To what extent are the external forces which influence the content of the curriculum the same or different today? If you could put together a primary curriculum, what would your priorities be?

Post World War II: primary schools and three types of secondary school

The Butler Education Act of 1944

The tripartite system for secondary education

The education system offered primary education, secondary education and further education. The tripartite system of secondary education, implemented in the 1944 Act, offered three types of education after the age of 11: grammar schools for the most able, based on 'intelligence tests', secondary modern schools for most pupils, and secondary technical schools for those perceived to have technical or scientific ability. This was intended to increase opportunities for all.

Church schools

After the 1944 Act, the Church of England still had control of most rural schools and many urban ones. The 1944 Act put church schools into two categories: 'voluntary aided' (where the church had greater control) and 'controlled' (where the Local Education Authority had greater control), and this is still the case. This control is in regard to buildings, staffing and the religious curriculum and worship.

Local Education Authorities

Primary education and secondary education became free for all children up to the age of 15. The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) took more responsibility and there was a rise in their status. They had to ensure that there was sufficient provision for the educational needs of pupils in their geographical area. Through the provision LEAs offered, they had to make sure that pupils had an effective education which contributed to their spiritual, moral, mental and physical development, but they were not responsible for the more detailed curriculum.

The curriculum

The Act gave head teachers, in consultation with governors, control of the school curriculum and resourcing. The Act said very little about the curriculum, apart from religious education. Teachers were left to decide what to teach and how to teach it. Religious education and collective worship were to take place in all schools, and if you worked in an aided school you could be dismissed by the governors if you did not deliver religious instruction 'efficiently and suitably'. It is quite clear at this point that there was no expectation that the national government would ever have control of the curriculum.

Special Educational Needs provision

The 1944 Act included provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs. If pupils were deemed to be unable to profit from being educated in a mainstream school, their

education had to be provided in a special school. At this time, the types and degrees of disability were named and this was the case until 1981, when it was agreed that these labels were inappropriate.

Effects of the 1944 Education Act

The selection process, rather like SATs (Statutory Assessment Test), had an effect on primary education. The need to 'get children through' the eleven plus had the same effect as the need to get Level 4 or 5 at age 11. There were also large classes through the late 1940s and 1950s and a shortage of teachers. Whole-class teaching continued and the curriculum emphasised basic literacy and numeracy. 'Writers looking back at the early curriculum saw that, in fact, the tradition derived from 1870 was still dominant' (Galton et al. 1980 p. 36). It was not until the 1960s that more formal class teaching gave way to new ideas. In 1964 the Schools Council was formed and the partnership between LEAs, schools and universities led to more experiments with the curriculum.

The Plowden Report: a new philosophy of education?

There had not been a specific review of primary education since the Hadow report of 1931. The context of the time in which the Plowden Report (1967) was written was one of a liberal view of education and society. The emphasis of the Plowden Report could be encapsulated in the phrase 'at the heart of the educational process lies the child' (Plowden 1967 p. 9). Plowden advocated experiential learning, increased parental involvement, universal pre-school education and opportunities for the less privileged. It highlighted firmly the need for differentiation and supported the requirement for personalisation when saying 'individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class ... must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention' (Plowden 1967 p. 25). Chapter 2 also discusses testing, and the use of IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests in eleven-plus selection tests in the 1950s and 1960s. Plowden says that they 'should not be treated as infallible predictors. Judgements which determine careers should be deferred as long as possible'. It was the Labour government of this time that almost removed all eleven-plus tests at the end of primary schooling, but since it lost the election in 1970, it failed to quite eradicate all testing at 11. There are many aspects of the Plowden Report that most primary teachers would agree with.

One of the main educational tasks of the primary school is to build on and strengthen children's intrinsic interest in learning and lead them to learn for themselves rather than from fear of disapproval or desire for praise. (Plowden 1967 p. 532)

The persistent acknowledgement of individual learning, flexibility in the curriculum, use of the environment, learning by discovery and the importance of the evaluation of children's progress has a certain resonance, not only with educational theory but in the philosophy of many teachers.

The Plowden Report endorsed the move away from formal class teaching to group work, projects and learning through play and creativity. Chapters of the report challenged the existing aims of primary education, classroom organisation and the curriculum and supported 'child-centred' primary schools. It was a real attempt to enlarge the concept of primary education.

Nevertheless, most schools changed very little. The HMI primary survey (DES 1978) reported that only 5 per cent of primary schools was 'exploratory' and three quarters still used 'didactic' methods.

Back to basics, market forces and increasing centralisation

Economic recession led to cut backs in educational expenditure and was partly blamed for the series of 'Black Papers' written by right-wing educationalists. The first paper was published in 1969. Specifically focusing on the 'progressive education' being developed in the primary schools, the writers challenged the figures on reading standards, accused teachers of neglecting basics and concentrating too much on informality. The years 1992 and 1998 also saw a return of the 'back to basics' theme and a desire to challenge 'progressive' ideas in education.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate 1975

In 1975 Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) began a survey of the primary curriculum. This included assessments of children's work at 7, 9 and 11. The report was not published until 1978. It criticised teachers' underestimation of children's abilities and noted the lack of specialist teachers. The questioning of teacher assessment, which later resulted in Standardised Attainment Tests (SATs), and the content of the curriculum are recurring themes for both Conservative and Labour governments and successive Secretaries of State for Education.

Callaghan's Ruskin Speech – Great Debate on Education 1976

Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, 'brought comfort to his Tory enemies ... schools were convenient scapegoats, education a scarecrow ...'. This was 'the impression conveyed by the Prime Minister' (Morris 1988 p. 7). He argued that not just

teachers and parents but also government and industry had an important part to play in formulating the aims of education.

In his historic speech, Callaghan spoke about:

- a public debate on education; employers, trades unions and parents, teachers and administrators were to make their views known
- a curriculum which paid too little attention to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic
- how teachers lacked adequate professional skills, could not discipline children or teach them good manners and did not manage to instil in them the need for hard work
- the underlying reason for all this which was that the educational system was out of touch with the fundamental needs of the country.

This Great Debate on Education seems to have been ongoing since 1976 and consecutive governments have increasingly tightened their grip on education. Whether 'progressive education' was slowed down by James Callaghan's speech or by the next 18 years of Conservative rule and education policy is debatable.

The 1979 Education Act

Margaret Thatcher was Education Secretary before becoming Prime Minister. She overturned Labour's 1976 Act and gave back to LEAs the right to select pupils for secondary education at 11. However secondary education was popular and reversal did not gain the backing expected.

A framework for the curriculum 1980

This was the first of a long series about what the curriculum should contain: *Framework for the School Curriculum* (HMI 1980a), *A View of the Curriculum* (HMI 1980b), *The School Curriculum* (DES 1981a), Circular 6/81 (DES 1981b). *The School Curriculum 1981* encouraged putting a high priority on English and mathematics:

It is essential that the early skills in reading, writing and calculating should be effectively learned in primary schools, since deficiencies at this stage cannot easily be remedied later and children will face the world seriously handicapped. Para 35.

However, schools also had to provide a 'wide range of experience, in order to stimulate the children's interest and imagination and fully to extend pupils of all abilities' (DES 1980 p. 10). Religious Education, Topic Work, Science, Art and

Craft, Physical Education, Music and French were all mentioned in this report, alongside personal and social development. From 1981 to 1986, Sir Keith Joseph had responsibility for implementing education policies, right down to everyday practice.

The Curriculum from 5 to 16 (HMI 1985)

This was a forward-looking document talking about 'areas of learning and experience'. This concept was developed in the introduction of a National Curriculum, in the Education Reform Act 1988. The curriculum of all schools had to provide pupils with the following areas of learning and experience: aesthetic and creative, human and social, linguistic and literary, mathematical, moral, physical, scientific, spiritual and technological.

Parent power

Successive governments had tried to get parents to engage with education. The Conservative government of the 1980s saw parents as consumers and clients. The 1980 Education Act gave more power to parents. Parents were encouraged to serve on governing bodies. Growing parental choice meant that parents had the right to choose their children's schools and could appeal if they were not accepted by the school they chose. The forerunner of league tables began when exam and test results were published. The Warnock Report (1978) gave parents new rights in relation to Special Educational Needs. LEAs identified the needs of children with learning difficulties but also had to produce 'statements' for parents on how these needs would be met. Parent power was increased in the 1984 Green Paper, *Parental Influence at School* (HMI 1984), which reiterated the role and responsibilities of parents and the vital role parents have to play in the education system.

The 1986 Education Act

The 1986 (1) Education Act introduced the requirement that the LEAs had to give governors financial information on the financing of schools. The 1986 (2) Education Act took the proposals in the 1985 White Paper, *Better Schools*, arguing yet again for breadth, balance and progression in order to achieve standards in literacy and numeracy; a close throwback to comments by HMI in 1975. *Better Schools* opened with: 'The Government will: take the lead in promoting national agreement about the purposes and the content of the curriculum ...' (DES 1985 p. 1).

The Education Reform Bill 1988

The Great Education Reform Bill (generally known as Gerbil) was seen as the most important Education Act since the 1944 Act which aimed to give more power to schools. However, from the LEAs' point of view, it was taking power from them and giving it to the Secretary of State.

A National Curriculum

The Act had large implications for primary schools. The government proposed a common curriculum for pupils aged 5 to 16, a National Curriculum. This was a shift away from teachers deciding what was taught to central government having control. The curriculum was in discrete subjects and there were three core subjects (English, mathematics and science) and seven 'foundation subjects'. Prior to this, teachers wrote schemes of work they considered appropriate for their pupils.

Written by a government 'quango' of subject specialists and with a substantial content base, teachers were hardly involved in the development of the National Curriculum and felt they were deliverers of a curriculum rather than designers and pace-setters. The National Curriculum had three main aims: the school curriculum had to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve; pupils across the country were entitled to the same broad curriculum; and the curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life (DES 1988).

The *Three Wise Men Report* (DES 1992) was a government commissioned report which emphasised the need for a return to quality in primary school pedagogy. 'Whatever the mode of curriculum organisation, the breadth, balance and consistency of the curriculum experienced by pupils must be of central concern' (DES 1992 p. 23). The *Three Wise Men Report* was written by Robin Alexander, Jim Rose and Chris Woodhead, all of whom had a further impact on primary education beyond this document.

Assessment

Before the Education Reform Act, pupil progress was tracked by teacher assessments. The Act introduced compulsory national standard attainment tests (SATs) at 7, 11 and 14. The tests were based on the 1988 Black Report produced by the National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT). The results had to be published annually in league tables. This allowed the government to compare schools directly in terms of this data.

Local Management of Schools

Local Management of Schools (LMS), flagged in the Education Act, was not introduced until 1991. It allowed the delegation of financial and managerial responsibilities to schools. Management for the budget was the responsibility of the school and budgets were taken away from LEAs. There were some centrally held resources in the LEAs, such as curriculum advisory and support services and school library services, although these increasingly diminished during the 1990s. There were mixed views amongst head teachers as to whether LMS gave greater flexibility but they certainly had greater responsibility.

Grant Maintained schools

Although grammar schools were not reintroduced, Grant Maintained (GM) schools were introduced. Schools were able to opt out of LEA control and be funded directly by central government. It was seen as a bribe to schools to encourage them to opt out, especially as they were offered additional funding. Grant Maintained schools also had more control over admissions and were allowed to select up to 10 per cent of their pupils on ability.

The Office for Standards in Education

The creation of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) also resulted from the 1988 Education Act, although it wasn't actually set up until 1992, when it replaced visits to schools by Her Majesty's Inspectors with a more rigorous inspection system. When Ofsted inspected schools, a report was to be published, and the emphasis was on inspection and not support. It came across as an antagonising system and stressful for teachers as there was naming and shaming of failing schools when they were placed into 'special measures'. Chris Woodhead, one of the authors of the Three Wise Men Report, was appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools and Head of Ofsted in September 1994.

The National Curriculum Revised: The Dearing Report 1993

The Dearing Report made several key proposals about the National Curriculum and the changes cost an estimated £744 million. He advised that the curriculum should be slimmed down, the time given to testing should be reduced and around 20 per cent of teaching time should be freed up for use at the discretion of schools. However, the proposals were difficult to implement as government wanted literacy and numeracy to

take up 50 per cent of the timetable, leaving the other eight subjects to be squashed into the remaining 50 per cent.

'Education, Education, Education' 1997

'Ask me my three main priorities for government and I tell you education, education, and education' (Blair 1996). Blair put education right at the top of the political agenda during the election of 1997. Speaking to the Labour Party conference after becoming Prime Minister in 1997, he stated: 'Our goal: to make Britain the best educated and skilled country in the world; a nation, not of a few talents, but of all the talents. And every single part of our schools system must be modernised to achieve it' (Blair 1997).

Excellence in Schools 1997

This White Paper pointed towards the importance of the basics and set a target of 80 per cent for all 11-year-olds to reach the 'required standard' of literacy and 75 per cent to reach the 'required standard' of numeracy by 2002.

It was proposed that class sizes should be less than 30 for 5–7-year-olds and this was adopted in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. There was to be at least an hour a day spent on English and mathematics in primary schools and this set the scene for the literacy and numeracy strategies.

LEAs set targets for raising standards in individual schools. Governors had to publish school performance tables which showed the rate of progress pupils made against the targets set. Schools deemed 'failing' by Ofsted could not hide. LEAs could intervene in the schools, which were given two years to improve or they would be closed or forced to have management changes imposed.

Back to basics 1998

Yet again the 'back to basics' theme returned, and schools no longer had to teach National Curriculum programmes of study in all subjects, just in the three core subjects. This set up the background for introducing the literacy and numeracy strategies.

Literacy and numeracy strategies 1998 and 1999

Both these strategies were very prescriptive, giving both the content of what had to be taught and the delivery method. These were daily lessons which, although not

statutory, were often seen as mandatory. Schools had to be very brave to break the mould and deliver their own ideas of lessons and schemes for literacy and numeracy. The National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998), the National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE 1999b) and National Learning Targets were introduced (DfEE 1999a). The Labour government was now seen to be telling teachers how to teach, in addition to teaching the National Curriculum, which had been seen as telling them what to teach.

National Curriculum 2000

The launch of a National Curriculum review took place in 1997. However, it was 2000 before all the changes took place. To the huge relief of teaching staff, the curriculum was slimmed down, but not without the addition of Citizenship. However, whilst testing was happening at the age of 11, creativity was not top of the list in the classrooms of Years 5 and 6. The paper, *Schools – Achieving Success* (DfES 2001), proposed allowing successful primary schools to opt out of the National Curriculum and seek to develop innovation. The Foundation Stage for children aged 3–5 years was introduced and had six Areas of Learning. This may have influenced the thinking for the development of the curriculum in the Rose Review (DCSF 2009).

Every Child Matters 2003

In 2003, the government published its Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES 2003a) following the death of Victoria Climbié. The ECM agenda had five clear outcomes which schools needed to consider in the development of their curriculum. These were: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

Excellence and Enjoyment 2003

Excellence and Enjoyment (DfES 2003b) claims to promote excellence in teaching ‘the basics’ and enjoyment through the broader curriculum. The existing National Numeracy Strategy (1999) and National Literacy Strategy (1998) conflated into one document, the Primary National Strategy (PNS) (DfE 2003). The PNS again aimed to promote high standards which should be achieved through a rich, varied and exciting curriculum. It aimed to build on the literacy and numeracy strategies but to give teachers more chance to take control of their teaching. There was more flexibility for schools to adopt ways of working that suited them. Testing and target setting was all part of the PNS and assessment for learning developed out of this report.

Towards a new curriculum

The Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) announced a root and branch review of the curriculum and this was to be headed by Sir Jim Rose, another author of the so-called Three Wise Men Report (DES 1992). Running concurrently with this was a review by Robin Alexander and a team of researchers, The Cambridge Review. This is a more philosophical and research-based report, published as *Children, their World, their Education* (Alexander 2010). Neither review became policy.

Where to next?

The Cambridge Review (Alexander 2010) provides firm research evidence that, despite these intense pressures, primary schools are highly valued by children and parents. Primary schools were seen as largely happy places which consistently celebrate the positive, while not, as some claim, neglecting the '3 Rs' and 'those who regularly make this claim are either careless of the facts or are knowingly fostering calumny'.



Reflective task: perspectives on the curriculum

In role as a 5-year-old, a 10-year-old, a parent, a teacher or a member of a Local Education Authority, present your case for the primary curriculum you would like and why. Present in turn to the group. At the end of each presentation, the group should critically evaluate the curricula presented.



Summary

This chapter outlined changes in the philosophy, curriculum, organisation and accountability in primary schools moving from the 1800s to the ideas espoused in the Plowden Report, then to more centralisation, beginning with the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the creation of education fashioned by the concept of market forces and economic growth and measured attainment. Against this constantly changing background, the chapter aimed to encourage readers to understand the need to develop, defend and implement robust personal and professional philosophies which will enable them to respond to changes with professional integrity.



Supplementary information on legislation, Alexander (2010), The Final Report of the Rose Review (DCFS 2009) an overview of the implications for classroom practice of legislation described in this chapter and an additional reflective task and bibliography can be found on the website related to this book, pp. 3–7.



Questions for discussion

- 1 Do we need Ofsted or is there an alternative? Consider: teacher stress, cost, standards, accountability, closure of schools, improvement.
- 2 Consider the areas of reform in the 1988 Education Act: the National Curriculum, national testing at 7 and 11, league tables, religious education and collective worship, local management of school budgets (LMS), governing bodies, Ofsted and Grant Maintained (GM) status. How have these had an impact on our schools over the last 20 years?
- 3 Discuss your ideas about what you want your classroom environment to look like, types of grouping you would try and the balance of time you would place on each subject.

Further reading

Alexander, R. (ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education: Final Report and Recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. London: Routledge.
Available at: www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Finalreport/CPR-booklet_low-res.pdf

This comprehensive report is intended to be a discussion document. It raises fundamental and thought-provoking questions about the direction in which primary education should head in the future and provides a wealth of up-to-date research evidence to inform the discussion.

Plowden Report (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools*. Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England). London: HMSO.

This report raises challenging questions about the way primary education could have gone and the way it went over the last 40 years and whether the reasons given for this were convincing.

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