Education Reform: The Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity
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In today’s dominant modes of pedagogy, questions about issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, religion, and other social dynamics are rarely asked. Questions about the social spaces where pedagogy takes place—in schools, media, and corporate think tanks—are not raised. And they need to be.

The Explorations of Educational Purpose book series can help establish a renewed interest in such questions and their centrality in the larger study of education and the preparation of teachers and other educational professionals. The editors of this series feel that education matters and that the world is in need of a rethinking of education and educational purpose.

Coming from a critical pedagogical orientation, Explorations of Educational Purpose aims to have the study of education transcend the trivialization that often degrades it. Rather than be content with the frivolous, scholarly lax forms of teacher education and weak teaching prevailing in the world today, we should work towards education that truly takes the unattained potential of human beings as its starting point. The series will present studies of all dimensions of education and offer alternatives. The ultimate aim of the series is to create new possibilities for people around the world who suffer under the current design of socio-political and educational institutions.
Oscar enquired of Lucinda about the book she was reading. Montaigne, she said.

Mr. Borradaile felt his neck go prickly…Mr. Borradaile did not like this sort of talk at all. He was a practical man. His father had been a wheelwright…He imagined the young woman was being pretentious, using a foreign word for mountain where an English one would have done…

(It made Lucinda) remember things about Sydney she had forgotten. This man was rich and powerful. She did not know him, but she could be confident he would dine at Government House. He was a barbarian.

Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey
(University of Queensland Press, 1988)

The sixteenth century French philosopher Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–1592) was sent by his father to get a good education so he could rise in society. He spent the last 30 years of his life writing about topics such as how to live and what it is to be a human being.
James Watson and Francis Crick were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1962 for discovery of the double helix structure of DNA published in the journal Nature on 25 April 1953, a discovery which has transformed biological and medical science. But the initial X-ray crystallography data on which the structure was based was produced by Rosalind Franklin and Maurice Wilkins at Kings College, London. (Wilkins was also awarded the Prize.)

Watson and Crick at Cambridge University spent their days talking to each other about the structure.

New information is revealed by correspondence brought together by Cold Spring Harbor scientists Alex Gann and Jan Witkowski. Franklin died in 1958 but in any event was not nominated for the Prize. (Rules of the Prize preclude award to deceased persons.)

There was concern that the distinguished American scientist Linus Pauling from CalTech would discover the structure first. Pauling was due to attend a scientific meeting in London at which Franklin and Wilkins data was to be presented. At the last minute, Pauling’s passport was cancelled by the American State Department in the belief that he had Communist sympathies.

In any event Pauling, having regained his passport, toured English laboratories before proposing a three strand structure for DNA. He could have visited Franklin’s lab but chose not to.

Foreword

There are many books and many times. A good book can be written at the wrong time and its impact may be lost forever or for years. A bad book written at the right time can be destructive. And, what of this book?

When I first read drafts of *Education Reform: the Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity* I was unsure. Might the political context date? Could the reactionary determination to push education back into twentieth century basics dissipate? Perhaps debates about school reform might become well informed, rational, and evidence-based? Any fear I had regarding the long-term currency of the book was obliterated today as I read an article in the *Daily Mail* by Michael Gove, UK Secretary of State for Education entitled, ‘I refuse to surrender to the Marxist teachers hell-bent on destroying our schools: … the new enemies of promise …’

He wrote:

*But who is responsible for this failure? Who are the guilty men and women who have deprived a generation of the knowledge they need? Who are the modern Enemies Of Promise? …They are all academics who have helped run the university departments of education responsible for developing curricula and teacher training courses.*

He concludes:

*The fight against the Enemies Of Promise is a fight for our children’s future. It’s a fight against ideology, ignorance and poverty of aspiration, a struggle to make opportunity more equal for all our children.*

*It’s a battle in which you have to take sides …* (Gove 2013)

Then I knew *Education Reform: the Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity* is the right book at the right time. A book that sees the same problems: ideology driving reform, ignorance and poverty, a struggle to make opportunity more equal for all our children. A book that helps us to see how this came to pass and a book that can inform what we might do about these challenges.

There is a war being waged, in education, let there be no doubt. There are battles being fought in policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and funding. It is a time to take sides and Griffin takes a side.

Unlike Gove, his argument does more than misinterpret and inappropriately apply a catching title from a book. In *Education Reform: the Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity* Griffin takes us on a journey through key current
educational debates. He examines the political contexts that shape education and society. He allows us to see why education research has so often failed to impact on developments in education. Where it has had impacted, he not only highlights successes but also shows how simplistic rendering of core values, principles, and research findings can be destructive rather than constructive.

*Education Reform: the Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity* examines a field of education reform that has become increasingly politically charged. A space where Governments and Nations compete for scores on international tests. A place where doing well is not enough. No, each nation must beat the others and climb the international education league table, in much the same way that a nations sporting prowess is measured at 4-yearly intervals in the Olympic Games. In the popular media, education is too readily positioned as the source and solution for every social ill. And, the misguided belief prevails that every complex problem has a simple solution: that social and economic disadvantage is solved by academic rigor; and that if only young people were made to spell properly, economic success would follow. Griffin could have only outlined the problems and challenges we face and lamented the failure of society to invest intelligently in education. The book, in part no doubt, tells a tale of woe. Yet it is a book of hope. It invites us to re-engage with fundamental questions about what education is for and how education could be positioned to enhance the life experience of all citizens, why education is in servitude to demands that we cull the worthy from the unworthy. Unlike current so-called, educational reforms and educational revolutions, Griffin provides no simple recipe for how to do education better. Rather, Griffin invites all of us to engage in a well-reasoned, articulate, and evidence-based argument to create a better future with each coming generation. There is a war being fought and battles to be one. Which side are you on? *Education Reform: the Unwinding of Intelligence and Creativity* may help you to decide.

Sydney, 24 May 2013

Peter Aubusson

**Reference**

Preface

This book has its origins in comments about education made by influential persons in 2008. Rupert Murdoch, expatriate Australian, and media magnate, delivered the Boyer Lectures for the ABC in that year; Joel Klein was Chancellor of the New York City School system and had been invited to Australia by the then Minister for Education the Hon Julia Gillard to talk about education. What they had to say did not seem to make sense to me so far as the situation in Australia was concerned.

Their comments seemed to be along the familiar lines that Australians had to do better. Who could disagree with that? But the criticisms lacked resonance, they had more to do with the situation in the US from whence these people came as if, like many other things, we had lots to learn from that country and its policies and practices. Though Australia has developed very close relations with the US, seen particularly in the preparedness to join in armed conflict in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it is not the US.

The essays comprising the chapters try to draw out the various influences upon education. Those influences go well beyond school which absorbs most of the popular argument. The book is a summary of what a reasonably intelligent person with an interest and preparedness to be critical where necessary might conclude. The essays are not comprehensive surveys of any particular aspect of education, of teaching, or of learning. They are not grounded in the intellectual discourse of educational philosophy or any particular political philosophy (well not deliberately anyway) though they certainly do not accept current economic orthodoxy and its notions of small government, pursuit of self-interest, and the merits of competition as a driver of prosperity. Rather they try to traverse the myriad influences which bear on the eventual education outcomes which result from the experiences that every one of us goes through. Though schooling is the most obvious component of those experiences, it is not the be all and end all of education. That is the first point.

The essays traverse some fundamental aspects of economics because so much of what we do these days seems to depend on a certain view of economics; generally, it is a very wrong view but for some reason that view is accepted. They also traverse community issues and disadvantage because poverty and economic and social disadvantage, especially poverty, so strongly impedes achievement, not least through its influence on health. Whilst education can help overcome the burdens of poverty, other actions are also important: there is a view that it is not just poverty but a lack of opportunity for development, development of the
individual especially, which is holding people back and limiting their social mobility. Increasingly even in the western world, people born into poverty die in poverty. That flies in the face of certain myths fundamental to societies such as that of the US. It is important to understand where one is and why, to acknowledge one’s situation.

And the essays deal with the situations facing teachers, situations little different from those facing all employees, levels of trust in them and their professionalism, access to appropriate evaluation of their performance and to opportunities for advancement. That is tied up with views about economics and the views about the role of individuals in society and indeed the purpose of education.

Many of the essays deal with education as we are used to thinking about it, what is effective teaching, what makes for successful schooling. But first of all, what early childhood is like, what happens in those first few years and how that is so important in influencing what happens later. What is involved in the learning process and is education something that mainly goes on in school? The answer to the second question is no, yet it is schooling that absorbs most attention in the education debate. And again it is economics, or a certain view of it, which so influences both those processes, education in school and in life. Most especially it is the belief that people have which determines what we do, not necessarily any wider set of views which might be grounded in more substantial evidence.

It is the evidence which contradicts what many people seem to believe which is the core of this book. Quite simply, the most successful education outcomes derive from attention to basic issues of human rights and what characterizes humanity, a natural curiosity, and the ongoing amalgamation of new experiences into previous views, a wish to advance one’s self and to have the opportunity to be involved in worthwhile pursuits. And it is based on the proposition that people with access to education generally have a good idea of what they want to get out of it. They respond to their own drivers, or try to. But how people behave is influenced by how they are treated and what is expected of them. Respect for the individual and high expectations are critical.

Unfortunately, there is a widely held contrary view that others know what is best for them. It recalls Charles Dickens’ Mr. Gradgrind and his obsession about facts. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, there are still those who consider that transmission or rote learning or didactic education, the teacher at the front of the class, the students taking notes and being tested later on their recall of what was said, is what we should strive to return to. And that a return to basics, to literacy and numeracy, is vitally important. Forget creativity and the diversity of human interests and abilities and the variety of intelligences and the way relationships and experiences can strongly influence later outcomes!

Unequivocally, I take the view of people like philosopher John Rawls and economist Amartya Sen, that social justice means ensuring the opportunity for every individual to reach their potential and that so long as some do not have that opportunity, we have to strive to make it so. Indeed successful school systems are based on the proposition that every child can learn and that high standards should be set for every student. I also take the view that we can only understand enough to
see what, at the moment, might be the truth by being prepared to challenge the current orthodoxy, even when that seems to have the authority of those in power. It is not always a comfortable situation. It is too often a prescription not followed.

So in this book reforms which emphasize concern for early childhood, school leadership, and respect for teachers are contrasted with ones based on standardized tests, private schools, and sacking bad teachers.

Clearly what works in certain circumstances, does not work in others. That is true of education as it is of most situations. Yet people are people, organizations are organizations, and societies are societies: similar beliefs and actions seem to produce similar outcomes though culture and history play a significant role. At the same time different societies provide lessons for us which challenge us to think about what we believe are appropriate in our own society.

Celebrated physiologist, bird watcher, and author Prof. Jared Diamond of the University of California is just one person who has recently alerted us to just how many lessons there are to learn from other societies in his book, *The World Until Yesterday; What Can We Learn From Traditional Societies?* (Viking 2012). In doing so he has illuminated the richness of humanity. Some anthropologists and advocates for traditional societies criticized his approach: that ought to encourage us to think about the arguments rather than reject his views out of hand! In truth anthropology can both illuminate humanity and divide it.

In a world dominated by neoliberalism and its promotion of choice and financial rewards the demand for accountability is shrill. But that accountability means metrics that unwind the most exciting aspects of teaching and learning—intelligence and creativity and the search for new relationships: innovation.

All those mantras about learning from the past and ultimately failing for not doing so are correct, but individual and collective actions can make a difference, even in the face of seemingly immovable obstacles. Unfortunately there are a very large number of obstacles. But the attempt to achieve the best must go on. This book might help to encourage that.
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The late Kenneth Rowe died tragically at Marysville, Victoria in the awful “Black Saturday” bushfires in 2009. He had been until a year before his death the leader of ACER’s research into teaching and learning. His prodigious writing included some of the most precise critiques of education policy; at his funeral ACER’s Chief Executive Prof. Geoff Masters recalled that Ken Rowe was not backward in letting people know what he thought. His statement, “Australian politicians and senior bureaucrats currently advocating the publication of performance information in the form of league tables are naively, and in typical fashion, stomping around in an uninformed epistemopathological fog” ought to be familiar to all who aspire to propose how we assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

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