

Government reform to tuition fees. 2010. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/higher-education/students/student-finance>.

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The death of the comprehensive high school?: historical, contemporary, and comparative perspectives, edited by Barry M. Franklin and Gary McCulloch, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 218 pp., US\$85 (hardback), ISBN-13: 978-1-4039-7769-4

The attempt by governments to invent common secondary schools for all youth was a twentieth century project. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that the comprehensive high school appeared most likely to succeed across the English-speaking world. Pioneered in Scandinavia and the US such a school promised to solve a number of problems.

First was the newly discovered adolescent. A new institution was required to protect youth from premature entry into dangerous adult worlds. The school also promised greater social cohesion, especially where new migrants were required to assimilate rapidly, and where old and new ethnic, racial, religious, class and other social divisions were endemic. It promised better informed citizens for democracies. It promised a great leveling up of average educational standards. No longer would too many young people be trapped in schools – central, junior technical, secondary modern, and similar – that routinely reduced opportunities for higher education and better-paid careers. The comprehensive high school also promised a common curriculum, at least in the junior years, that would meet modern labour market requirements. Young people would be better ‘adjusted’ for employment and living in modern societies.

The essays in *The death of the comprehensive high school?* tend to suggest that these expectations were too heavy a burden for any single institution to meet. Nevertheless the editors conclude that the story is far from over yet, despite the accumulating problems.

In most places where these schools were systematically introduced, there was resistance. The antagonism of the Roman Catholic church was probably most effective in Australia – less so in the US. Some ethno-cultural-religious groups insisted on separate schools, inside or outside of public education systems, regardless of apparently rational state policies regarding assimilation and common citizenship training. There was resistance from those who had benefited from, or sought for their own children, specialist schools, schools that most likely collected the children of the wealthy or those who sought academic, or grammar school educations apart from ‘ordinary children’, or children who were considered ethnically alien or unacceptable for one reason or another. There were other enemies from the beginning, those who believed a common school for all could only drag educational standards down, would produce mediocrity, would not be in the best interests of nation or society.

The range of issues that have affected the history and contemporary circumstances of comprehensive schools therefore are very broad. This book addresses many of them in useful ways, but not all essays are equally successful.

Two of the best essays make specific populations their focus. Thomas Pedroni and Pavla Miller contrast individual and group private purposes, with the public policy intentions of comprehensive schooling. Pedroni writes about Black American voucher-using families. Miller looks at Italian–Australian families. Such families become rational actors in the schooling circumstances of the cities within which they live. They are not selfish users of neo-liberal inspired

reforms to public schooling. Instead they make the best of the schooling opportunities presented to them, within the contexts of their family histories, cultural circumstances, and in some cases, long-standing historical discriminations. Only on the surface are they neoliberal subjects in the new education markets. These essays demonstrate the potential explanatory power that attention to the stories of real families can bring to a rather tired public policy debate.

The approach by Pedroni and Miller contrasts dramatically with the essay by Rene Gonzalez and Anthony De Jesus on small school reform for students of colour. This essay constructs Latino and Latina youth as invariable victims of uncaring, alienating, over-large comprehensive high schools. The authors' passionate advocacy of segregated schooling, including that old furphy, the 'relevant curriculum' based for example on historical studies of slavery, fails to overcome crude portrayals of both comprehensive and segregated community schooling. Gonzalez and De Jesus conclude their essay by demanding coloured teachers for coloured kids. They also demand the death of the comprehensive school (90).

The first chapters concentrate on the US. Sevan Terzian explores the idea of comprehensive high schools as custodial institutions, more concerned with separating young people from the streets and the labour market, than delivering a high quality, useful education. He doubts the adequacy of such schools in delivering all the objectives with which they had been entrusted over the years. John Rury discusses the trajectories of comprehensive schools in different regions of the US, and points to the significance that different experiences of race relations, economic and labour-market circumstances have had on their effectiveness and penetration. He points to the 1970s as a significant period, in which questions about fair access to prolonged secondary schooling were displaced by issues to do with educational quality and utility.

Wayne Urban points to an episode in the history of comprehensive schools, when the schoolmen sought to extend by two years their age-based coverage of youth. The essay reminds us that there is more than one way of managing the transition of youth to adulthood. Jose Rosario reads two documentary films on contrasting American high schools, coming to the conclusion that 'soul-making', especially in the large comprehensive school did not occur well. The authoritarianism of the large school produced multiple problems for its students and teachers.

David Crook's essay on England and Wales is a substantial accomplishment. In the UK comprehensive schooling has a huge literature. This essay is remarkably fresh, a commendable summary and clear guide to half century of debate. Crook also introduces a significant distinction between *comprehensive schooling* and *comprehensive education*. Comprehensive schools may be in deep trouble, but the curriculum that young people experience in the wide variety of successor schools is likely to be comprehensive in character. This is rightly seen as an achievement of the comprehensive schooling movement.

Susanne Wiborg's essay on Scandinavia was disappointing. While it is interesting to read about the alliance of 'peasant liberalism' and social democratic parties that produced comprehensive schools, at the same time there is too little on the recent history, the curriculum, institutional and social character of this form of education in Scandinavia. The essay by Gregory Lee, Howard Lee and Roger Openshaw on the comprehensive secondary school in New Zealand has many of the virtues of Crook's essay on England and Wales, although the history of government policy tends to dominate the discussion at the expense of other issues.

The editors of this book argue that the main question for the comprehensive school is that of whom such schools should serve (4). This looks like a simple question – the answer is 'all young people in a society' – but as the different essays point out, there is contested ground between the theory, policy and practice. *The death of the comprehensive high school?* covers much of the contest. Nevertheless there is room for further discussion: the enemies of comprehensive schooling need systematic analysis. Are very small schools with a strong pastoral ethos always

the superior alternative? Recent school choice policies have their problems. Parents may choose a school, but schools may not choose to enrol their children. Do we know enough about how comprehensive schools operate in different urban, suburban and rural contexts? The perplexing question of how best to deliver post-elementary schooling to all of the people has been with us for a century – the chance of a stable answer emerging any time soon remains remote.

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Lost generation? New strategies for youth and education, by Patrick Ainley and Martin Allen, London, Continuum, 2010, 186 pp., £16.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4411-3470-7

This review is prefaced by situating its context in a personal account. The story begins in January 2008 when my family relocated from Queensland, Australia to begin a new chapter in our lives in the north of England. Apart from the shock of leaving a southern hemisphere summer to be greeted by the climes of a Yorkshire winter, education systems in the UK were new entities to us all. This was the case for myself working in higher education and for our sons who entered local public infant and junior schools. This situation is significant to Ainley and Martin's work and had particular relevance to my reading of *Lost generations*.

The book, as the authors admit, focuses primarily on institutional education in the UK. For the uninitiated (like myself), the first half of the discussion is dedicated to providing an historical review of education policy and practice since 1945. Whilst I found this to be a useful introduction to the subject more could have been done by the authors to explain the terminology unique to British education (e.g., GCSE, O levels, etc). Having done so, the description would have greater accessibility to an international audience. This could be seen to be a minor point but in an examination of how neoliberal principles (e.g., market driven social activities) have impacted on educational practice connecting to the global spectator would seem appropriate and justified.

It is in the second half of *Lost generations*, particularly the final two chapters, that the narrative delivers what this reader was waiting to hear. No doubt, telling a story of how we have got to where we are is vitally important. And yet, so too is the capacity to offer some suggestion as to how, as members of societies across the world (and to a global community), we can prospectively move on. These movements are offered by Ainley and Allen as options – as they must be. They include radical redevelopments in curriculum and pedagogy to serve what they put forward to be the purposes of institutional learning: to learn from the past, to acquire new knowledge with the intent of informing and potentially altering future social action.

So how might this vision come in to being? According to the authors education should empower people to take control of what is happening in their world, particularly in respect to changing the dominant discourses that effect everyday lives. The UK, like many other western countries, has experienced post-World War II transition from conditions supporting welfare states to societies directed by market values in what is presently known as the knowledge-based economy. As Ainley and Allen clearly point out, education has become the servant to economic concern and this circumstance has wide ranging implication for how teaching and learning now takes place. For example, they argue that the UK educational system has become obsessed with servicing labour markets so much so that students are now overqualified yet underemployed. As per the reference in title of the book, they contend that such circumstance will create a lost