

Finally there is an excellent account of the introduction of the Italian research assessment exercise by Minelli, Rebora and Turri. This offers ample evidence that higher education reform is in progress in Italy although the lack of transparency in some operational aspects of the exercise (paralleled in the UK when the first such exercise was carried out in 1985–6) and the lack of a clear link between funding and performance suggest that it has a way to go before matching what is happening in some countries.

How should university reform proceed in Europe? The evidence suggests that governments must have a role but that for reforms to become embedded a battle of ideas needs to be won. Imposed reform, as in Australia, rarely works. Reforms need to be espoused and adapted within institutions by Thrift's race of 'player managers' who can absorb the rhetoric and come up with changes that are palatable to their colleagues. In spite of Bologna-type pressures, the European Higher Education Area, as a homogenising instrument, remains a distant bureaucratic dream and each national system needs to find its own solutions within its own national cultural and economic frameworks.

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Meritocracy, citizenship and education: New Labour's legacy, by John Beck, London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, 201 pp., £70 (hbk), ISBN 978-1847060730

I was drawn to reading and reviewing this book by the juxtaposition of citizenship and education in the title and the prospect of a review and appraisal of a decade of policy for citizenship education in England. However, the main originality of the volume lies in revisiting Michael Young's satirical concept of meritocracy. Beck takes this critique of social policy that is apparently egalitarian but actually divisive and applies it to aspects of education policy under New Labour.

John Beck's book, published in 2008 but based on material drafted over the course of a decade, is in three unequal sections, the rationale for which becomes more apparent when the basic argument about meritocracy is understood. Part 1 consists of three chapters on meritocracy, post-democracy and education. These have been specially written for the book and provide a theoretical framework and context to the four central chapters that were previously published as articles or chapters. They are given the heading "'Modernising" education and the professions'. Part 3 is a single chapter exploring nationhood and citizenship in the context of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity.

The book may be read as homage to Michael Young. The central chapters draw heavily on Basil Bernstein and the whole analysis rests on an acceptance of Colin Crouch's assertion that the introduction of quasi-markets to public services undermines democratic control to the extent that Britain is getting 'steadily closer to a condition of post-democracy' (xviii).

Young's original coining of the word 'meritocracy' in 1958 was in the context of an education system where elite private ('public') schools provided the bulk of entrants to the few elite universities, as today. However, there was a parallel system of grammar schools which selected students from primary schools on the basis of their performance in the 'eleven-plus' test, which included a so-called intelligence or IQ test. These schools also provided students, including those from less-favoured backgrounds, to the universities. Thus the principle of the grammar schools could be summarised by Young as 'IQ + Effort = Merit'.

This appealed to Conservatives because it demonstrated the possibility of social mobility whilst leaving in place an education system for the majority, the secondary modern schools, that provided little access to qualifications. However, by the 1960s and 70s both Labour and Conservative governments started to address this essential injustice by introducing comprehensive schools.

Meritocracy, then, is a system that has elements of fairness but fails to provide good-quality services for the majority. As Beck points out, Michael Young, just before his death in 2002, alerted readers of the *Guardian* to the fact that the New Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was using the word meritocracy in his speeches in a positive sense. Young suggested that: 'he caught onto the word without realising the dangers of what he is advocating'.

Beck considers two versions of citizenship under New Labour. First is the active citizenship associated with the reform of welfare and education services. This includes citizens volunteering to fill the gaps in service provision previously assumed to be the responsibility of the state. This is characterised as 'basically neoliberal citizenship tempered by a social conscience' (36). The dangers Young foresaw have been increased, in Beck's view, by the erosion of local democracy and the emasculation of unions and the professions, seen as in a position to 'seriously challenge the dominant neoliberal model and to act as a counterbalance to the dominance of the centralised state' (36). This seems an unduly romantic view. Whilst some unions and professional bodies may indeed espouse a public service ethos, this altruism inevitably takes second place to the corporate interests that they have been set up to defend.

The second understanding of citizenship is introduced in Chapter 8 in the context of issues of living together in a diverse society. Beck gives examples that lead him to conclude that 'we seem as a society to be becoming more intolerant of one another' as a result of rights claims by groups that 'seek to press their rights beyond the limits of what others see as reasonable' (150). He views as positive the approach advocated by the Ajegebo Curriculum Review on Diversity and Citizenship (see LRE special issue 6(1), 2008). However, the chapter could have benefitted from a slightly more extended conclusion to bring together the main themes of the book and consider more fully the role of citizenship education.

Beck's book joins the literature of those critiquing New Labour without offering much in the way of alternatives (see Whitty 2009). He argues that the project is a betrayal. Although he welcomes citizenship education as a statutory subject in secondary schools and also the devolution project that brought into being a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, the New Labour legacy referred to in the title is one of disempowering British citizens; eroding social citizenship; weakening independent professions; marginalising trade unions; empowering managers and disempowering employees; curtailing civil liberties 'to an alarming extent' (xviii).

The writer does not explicitly admit to ever being a Labour voter or party member, so readers are left to guess why Beck feels a sense of loss and who he thinks have been betrayed. The basis of the argument is that Tony Blair 'entered a Faustian pact with the forces of neoliberalism' (ibid.). In this case the betrayal would be of those who believed that New Labour was based on a clear rupture with Thatcherite neoliberalism. However, the New Labour prospectus was always one of recognising that issues such as choice in service provision were electorally popular and that in a democracy power comes by listening to what the voters want. That New Labour is a project of adapting to capitalism rather than radically challenging or abolishing it is clearly written on the tin.

Beck writes as a sociologist but draws on political philosophy, political science, philosophy of education and curriculum theory. His main strength is in his detailed understanding of the work of Michael Young and of curriculum theorist Basil Bernstein. As he admits in his final paragraph, his analysis 'suggests a degree of pessimism that the facts do not yet wholly justify' (154).

References

Whitty, G. 2009. Evaluating 'Blair's Educational Legacy?': Some comments on the special issue of *Oxford Review of Education*. *Oxford Review of Education* 35: 267–80.

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Exploring professionalism, edited by Bryan Cunningham, London, Institute of Education, University of London, 2008, 214 pp., £18.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-85473-805-2

This is a collection of 10 essays which sets out to explore key issues in professional life; the preface explains that the aim of the collection is to bring together a range of perspectives from which professionalism can be considered and to provide an introduction to the tools and discourses used in analysing the concept. Much of the material in the collection grew out of the Foundations of Professionalism module on the professional Doctorate in Education at the Institute of Education and, as a member of the last cohort to take that module without the benefit of this text, it has been interesting to read it and reflect on the extent to which it will have helped successor cohorts and might be of interest to a wider readership.

As would be expected, there is discussion amongst several of the essays of the nature and definition of a 'profession'. In particular, the essay contributed by Crook describes how the concept of a profession has altered over time and concludes that the concept is an artificial construct which remains contested. This is aptly demonstrated by contrasting the apparent disfavour with which he refers (23) to a postmodern view that 'we can all – dog-walkers and landscape gardeners no less than solicitors and archbishops – be professionals if we want to be professionals, and if we conduct ourselves in a manner that seems to be professional', with the view expressed by Watson in the Forward (vii) that 'the postmodernist spirit of the times' has added 'to the professional palette new domains such as capital markets, niche journalism, alternative therapies and call-centre management'.

The context within which much of the collection sits is a view that, however a profession is to be defined, professional life is now much more complicated than it once was and that professionals, rather than being left in peace once they attain professional status, to do more or less what they want, are now subject to many and often conflicting pressures and accountabilities. This is a view espoused with varying degrees of strength by the authors and it may be noted that, for example, Barnett (202) suggests that 'the more dismal accounts of the decline of professionalism may just tell us more about the commentator' than about professionalism and that Power (152) suggests that there is a tendency to 'over-romanticise earlier epochs of professional autonomy'.

Barnett describes the environment as being one of super-complexity in which professionals are 'caught amid multiple discourses that pivot variously around themes such as service, performance, marketability, client satisfaction, and knowledge and truth' (200) and notes that these discourses are in tension between themselves with the result that 'being a professional is not easy'. Lunt discusses the growing recognition of the provisional nature of knowledge and of the changing nature of the professional-client relationship. Whitty's essay considers how professional autonomy could best be balanced with the role of other stakeholders through an examination of what he describes as traditional, managerial, collaborative and democratic modes of professionalism in the context of developments in the professionalism of schoolteachers. Ball continues the theme of the sociological and political context of education professionals with an essay on performativity and privatisation. The essays by Morley on micro-politics in higher