Education – a 'comprehensive review'; whatever happened to lifelong learning?

Wortley, May 2015

As in other sessions, discussion of the wide-ranging big issues below will require brief and concise comment to allow everybody who wishes to contribute and to take the arguments forward.

1. At the time of writing (29th April) education had played a minor part in the election campaign. Trevor Fisher (of the *Socialist Educational Association*) posted:

'The Independent editorial before Easter commented on this, and there has been little change since then. We do not have to agree with all the paper is saying to feel concerned that it is making this case. The full statement can be found at:

http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/for-our-education-system-to-flourish-school-staff-need-a-huge-increase-in-support-10150605.html
(the editorial is used with permission of the Independent)'

In the same month (April 23rd) Tristram Hunt in a *Guardian* review saluting Ken Robinson's book *Creative Schools* wrote:

'Ken Robinson's thesis is compelling: we are currently operating a Fordist model of mass education that is failing to prepare young people for the dramatic socioeconomic demands of the digital age. What is more worrying is that politicians, rather than supporting the schools system with the flexibility and innovation obviously needed, have fallen for a theology of standardised testing and assessment that is exacerbating the crisis'

Robinson's TED talk (2006) *Do Schools Kill Creativity* (now viewed by an estimated 300 million world wide) is still relevant. Visit;
http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

Trevor Fisher then wrote a letter, responding to Hunt's review, published in *The Guardian*, 25th April) on Michael Gove and exam systems: comparing Gove's GCSE reforms with the more successful International GCSEs, pointing out that independent schools have abandoned the domestic product for IGCEs and Trevor proposed that the Secretary of State for Education should allow state schools the same freedom of choice.

We'll discuss schools and exam systems using the above, focusing on the question of how best to achieve the schools and exam systems to address our demands.

2. From Chomsky in the US to Marina Warner (London Review of Books, March 19th) in Britain many academics now see the Academy as terrain promoting the *Precariat* through theory and practice. (Short-term contracts, no security, intimidated by Management). The same applies to FE, of course. A few quotes and examples will be given. Views on how we can most effectively combat this trend.

3. Whatever's happened to 'lifelong learning'? Adult Education is now in many spheres a bleak and desolate landscape. Returning to Raymond Williams' *Open Letter to WEA Tutors* (1961) we'll ask how did this dystopian shift happen and, taking the WEA as an example, can we re-connect with the liberating and radical agenda which Williams and many others thought through, and worked for, in the last century?

……..

Participants are also recommended to read

http://socialisteducationalassociation.org/2015/03/25/whats-next-for-education/#more-52717

for important background, especially on 1. above.

These notes may be amended up to the weekend…