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**The death of progressive education:
how teachers lost control of the classroom**
Routledge, 2007,
paperback: 978-0-415-35971: hardback: 978-0-415-35972.

In this book I have attempted to reconstruct important aspects of the debate on the school curriculum as it evolved during the period since the Second World War. The focus is on the two vital questions of, first, what should be taught to children at different stages in their schooling, and, secondly, how it should be taught. The research for this was based on several previously unexploited sources, including the Public Record Office and the national press.

The book develops several interlinked arguments. First, it is argued that the tension between 'traditionalists' and those who favoured a 'child-centred' education has persisted throughout the period since 1945 and was not simply a result of the Black paper movement and the rise of Thatcherism. During the period immediately after the Second World War attempts to ban or to limit the influence of Communist teachers were just one aspect of this struggle for control of the curriculum and this is detailed as a result of new and original research.

Secondly, socio-economic changes are examined to explain the significance of these debates. The book argues that the rise of Neo-Liberal ideas during the 1960s and 1970s is largely explicable with reference to changes taking place in the workplace and that the social structures which have persisted since then help explain its continuing popularity with politicians and policy makers.

There is a detailed account of the developments of the 1960s and 1970s, when 'progressive' approaches to classroom teaching appeared to be at their height and when politicians from all of the major political parties were beginning to argue that the State had a responsibility to assume greater direct control of the education system than had ever previously been the case. The famous Ruskin Speech, delivered in October 1976 is shown to be an almost inevitable development in view of the changes that were taking place more widely in political rhetoric and political perceptions. Following that, the impact of Thatcher's educational policies and educational legislation are fully examined.

In the concluding chapters the ways in which this changed politics of education impinged on classroom practice and on teachers' perceptions is explored. It is argued that both John Major and Tony Blair as prime Ministers pursued versions of

Thatcherite educational policies which have had the effect of further alienating and disempowering the teaching profession. I have also argued that a new orthodoxy is developing in terms of the way in which this recent educational past is generally perceived. It is increasingly common to find commentators referring to the 'excesses' of the 1960s, when progressive teaching methods prevailed and when the teaching of core skills began to be neglected. The book argues that this is a misleading summary of developments at that time but is increasingly used to colour educational debate even down to the present.

This book is the first attempt to offer an overview of this aspect of the politics of education in England in the years since 1945. In writing it I have sought to develop arguments which help to explain why we are where we are now and why we have arrived at the educational crisis in which schools in England now find themselves.

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