

Education and the State

Whatever Happened to Education as a Public Good?

By Andy Green

In an era which is rapidly losing the idea of education as a public good, it is as well to remember the origins of our modern education systems, and the role of the state in their creation. Today we see a rapid marketising of education in many countries around the world, with increasing privatisation of educational services, the introduction of private sector management practises in public educational institutions, and a growing perception of education as a private consumer good. The collective purposes of education, which animated the formation of national education systems, are being rapidly attenuated as providers increasingly view parents and students as customers, and the latter see education as a 'positional' good for which they must compete, bargain and, in many instances, pay. This was not how our education systems were originally formed. The bicentennial anniversary of Denmark's 1814 School Act – the harbinger of the national education system in Denmark – provides a good opportunity to reassess the role of the state in the development of public education.

The Origins of Public Education in the West

The creation of modern public education systems in the West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was essentially the work of the state. Markets (private groups with help from governments) had generated apprenticeships, some professional schools, and networks of religious schools from the Reformation onwards, but private actors nowhere had the resources or motive to supply universal public systems of education. This could only be done by states acting at local and national levels. States sometimes harnessed private initiative in building national education systems but states were necessarily the main actors.

The objectives which motivated the reformers who lobbied for public education systems were multiple and varied somewhat from place to place. Particular social classes would campaign for certain forms of schooling to suit their interests; the different churches would seek types of school which promoted their own faiths. Some saw benefits to their manufacturing interests from more widespread schooling; others wished to see the moral improvement of the urban poor. The growing state apparatuses of modernising states were thirsty for new trained recruits to staff the swelling bureaucracies and expanding militaries. For the governments of nation states in transition from absolutism to different types of bourgeois republican and constitutionalist rule, the creation of national education systems was primarily about nation-building.

The form of the national system was first prefigured in continental Europe during the absolutist monarchies of the eighteenth century. These not only developed many of the general features of the modern state – central bureaucracies, standing armies, national taxation; they also pioneered the first moves towards public education with the provision of state funds for schooling, the drafting of prescribed curricula and legislation on school attendance. Education was seen as an important means for furthering the mercantilist aims of the state. It was essential for providing the trained cadres for the government bureaucracy and the military, and had an important role to play in generating the skills needed for the fledgling state manufacturing projects. Not least, also, it was recognized as a powerful instrument for promoting political loyalty amongst the people and for creating a cohesive national culture after the image of the ruling class. Scandinavia was no exception to this. Absolutist monarchies in Sweden and Denmark-Norway were increasingly active in educational reform during the late eighteenth century. Well educated recruits were needed to staff the growing bureaucracies of both states. And as feudalism was abolished at the turn of the century in Denmark, Cameralist officials well understood the importance of elementary education for the newly emancipated peasantry operating in a new market environment.¹

The decisive moment for the consolidation of national systems came during the aftermath of the French Revolution when the modern, capitalist state, in various guises, simultaneously took shape in regimes as diverse as those of the royal Junker state of Prussia, the Napoleonic Empire of France and the Early Republic of the United States of America. The importance of education grew with the increasing intensity of the process of state formation, and educational development was most dynamic and wide-ranging precisely in those periods and in those countries where state formation occurred in the most deliberate and compacted fashion. This was particularly the case where the reformed state emerged through profound social and political upheavals, as in France and the United States, and where it was directly involved in the process of forced industrialization ‘from above’, as in Prussia. In Scandinavia the same general pattern was evident. Educational reform became most intensive from the end of the eighteenth century, spurred by the pressures of war and states’ needs to adapt during the transition from absolutism to new economic and political forms. As Wiborg writes, it was from then onwards that the state bureaucracies became “profoundly engaged in establishing, funding and managing a system of education as part of the endeavour to create a unified state”.² Denmark’s 1814 School Act, which made education obligatory for all children aged seven to fourteen, was an important landmark, marking the beginning of the state’s construction of a public school system.

¹ Wiborg 2009.

² Wiborg 2009: 24.

The general patterns of development of national education systems across north-west Europe are well known. National networks of elementary schools were consolidated with the help of the state, and gradually free tuition and compulsory attendance laws ensured universal childhood participation; secondary education expanded from its tiny elite base and progressively incorporated more modern curricula and pedagogy; technical and vocation schools proliferated, albeit unevenly, to meet new industrial demands. As educational provision expanded, so it also became more regulated and, by degrees, more systematic in organization. Diverse institutions were unified into a single structure, increasingly administered through an integrated educational bureaucracy and with teaching provided by trained staff. An age-graded, hierarchical system developed whose component parts were systematically linked and complementary, in time to become part of an 'educational ladder' whose different rungs were articulated through regulated curricula and entrance requirements. Lastly, educational control passed increasingly to the state. As public schools came to predominate over private and voluntary institutions, governments ineluctably increased their influence on education. Whether through central or local authorities, the state increasingly controlled education through the allocation of funds, the licensing and inspection of schools, the recruitment, training and certification of teachers and, in varying degrees, through the oversight of national certification and standard curricula.

The nineteenth-century education system came to assume a primary responsibility for the moral, cultural and political development of the nation. It became the secular church. It was variously called upon to assimilate immigrant cultures, to promote established religious doctrines, to spread the standard form of the appointed national language, to forge a national identity and a national culture, to generalize new habits of routine and rational calculation, to encourage patriotic values, to inculcate moral disciplines and, above all, to indoctrinate in the political and economic creeds of the dominant classes. It helped to construct the very subjectivities of citizenship, justifying the ways of the state to the people and the duties of the people to the state. It sought to create each person as a universal subject but it did so differentially according to class and gender. It formed the responsible citizen, the diligent worker, the willing tax-payer, the reliable juror, the conscientious parent, the dutiful wife, the patriotic soldier and the dependable or deferential voter.³

These processes occurred unevenly in different western states. National education systems developed most rapidly in countries (like Denmark, Prussia, France, the USA and later Japan) which were undergoing the most intensive and accelerated process of state formation.⁴ This was usually as a response to external mi-

³ Green 2013; Kaestle 1983; Bailyn 1997.

⁴ Archer 1979.

litary threats or territorial conflicts, as in Denmark and Prussia; to rebuild after revolutions and civil wars, as in France and the USA; or to catch up economically with more advanced states, as in Prussia, again, and also in other continental European states seeking to emulate the industrial dynamism of England. In each case the primary purpose of educational development was nation-building and state formation, both key parts of what I would call the epic drama of national development, which has been no-where been better captured than in Eugen Weber's great 1979 study of nation-building in France.⁵ This was a public and collective enterprise, if one driven by the elites, and the state had by definition to take the lead.

Education and State Formation in East Asia

As in the West in the nineteenth century, the creation of public education systems in East Asia – in Japan in the 1870s and after and in the East Asian 'tiger economies' after 1945 (like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) – was primarily the work of the state. It was part of an intensive process of state formation initiated in Japan during the Meiji Restoration and in the tigers after they gained independence (except in Hong Kong) in the decades after World War Two.



⁵ Weber 1976.

In each case rapid state formation was led by highly interventionist ‘developmental states’. These were motivated by a form of ‘situational nationalism’⁶ which was born out of a need to ensure the survival of states which were threatened from outside (in the case of Japan and Korea) or whose survival as newly independent states was compromised by a fragile geo-political situation and economic underdevelopment. In the cases of South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, developmental states arose as a project of state reconstruction at a time when the political viability of each of these states was in question: in South Korea because of the Cold War division of the country; in Taiwan because it was not recognized by mainland China; and in Singapore because it was a small and apparently unviable state sandwiched between two states, China and Malaysia, with which its population had close ethnic ties, but with which it was on poor terms. In each case, state developmentalism was in the first place a political necessity rather than an economic priority. As Castells has written, for the developmental state, ‘economic development was not a goal but a means ... the East Asian developmental state was born of a need for survival, and then it grew on the basis of a nationalist project of self-affirmation of cultural and political identity in the world system.’⁷ What subsequently marked out these developmental states was the sustained promotion of rapid economic development, not least through educational reform, as a means of maintaining state legitimacy.

The very rapid development of public education systems in all these states was motivated by urgent public and collective objectives. These included: consolidating new national identities; integrating communities and fostering social cohesion; spreading common languages in diverse communities with multiple language and religions (English and Mandarin in Singapore); forging a disciplined workforce and developing the skills for economic growth; and developing the capacity of the state bureaucracies.

East Asian education systems – excepting Singapore’s – made use of substantial private investments in education (through fees paid to secondary schools and universities and to the proliferating private tutorial schools) which allowed provision to grow more rapidly. But the development of education was clearly driven and controlled by the state. Initially investment in education came mostly from government and fees only became a substantial part of total funding as families became affluent enough to contribute. Private secondary schools and universities were tightly regulated and mostly part-funded by the state. There were strong educational bureaucracies at national and regional levels to maintain the coherence of education systems and to reinforce the norms under which they operated.

⁶ Johnson 1982.

⁷ Castells 1992: 57-8.

Until quite recently, the East Asian education systems were highly centralized. There were quite standardized institutional structures, with post-war Japan, South Korea and Taiwan adopting the then relatively democratic 6-3-3 US pattern of six year primary education, followed by three years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary education. Primary and lower secondary schools were neighbourhood-based, non-selective comprehensive institutions with mixed ability classes and a strong emphasis on interactive classroom teaching. Schools had relatively little autonomy, with centrally controlled and equalised resource distribution between schools (including through the rotation of heads and teachers in some cases). National systems of examination were controlled by the state which also determined the strongly prescriptive national curricula, with state authorization of textbooks (Japan) and state-provided instruction materials (Singapore). State centralisation brought various benefits, including the initial integration of formerly fragmented education provision into unitary systems; the embedding of normative values and standards, which helped drive up educational achievements and promoted more cohesive national identities; and the planning of educational development and skills flows (including through quotas in different subjects) to coordinate skills supply and demand.

Economic development in Japan and the tigers economies was exceptionally state-led.⁸ Developmental states used their powerful and highly competent bureaucracies to plan economic development and to coordinate skills supply and demand in dynamic ways. Industrial policies for growth in particular economic sectors were accompanied by manpower planning which sought to increase the supply of skills in selected areas in anticipation of future demand. State levers were also used to drive up employer demand for skills (through the use of wage minima, taxes on employers for paying low wages, deals over skills transfer with MNCs).⁹

East Asian education systems have become less centralized over time. But during the early years of rapid economic growth, state-led development of fairly standardized education systems proved extraordinarily effective, and these states now have amongst the highest enrolments and highest standards in core skills of any in the world, regularly out-performing other states in international tests like PISA and TIMSS. Asian families have traditionally a high regard for education and are willing to invest heavily in it. This cultural legacy plus the rising opportunities provided by rapid economic growth no doubt motivated students to work hard and ratcheted up achievement. But what drove the rapid development of education most were shared public objectives for economic growth and nation-building.¹⁰

^{8.} Johnson 1992; Kohli 2004; Woo-Cummings 1999.

^{9.} Rodan 1989.

^{10.} Green 2013.

The Drivers of Contemporary Marketisation

The public objectives, which motivated the development of national education systems in the West and Japan in the nineteenth century and elsewhere in East Asia post WW2, have become etiolated in many countries since the 1980s. Public education systems remain the norm across the world, and state-funded schools still greatly outnumber private fee-charging schools in most countries, but there is no doubt that there has been a major drive towards marketising education in many countries during the past 30 years. This is driven by a number of factors – some politically contingent, some more long-term, secular trends. Increasing economic globalization and technological advance since the 1980s has intensified economic competition and the shift towards the ‘knowledge economy’, thus exponentially increasing the demand for skills.¹¹ Governments find it hard to meet the rising costs of meeting this demand – especially as ageing societies place an increasing burden on public budgets – and look to share costs with users. Corporations searching for new profit opportunities increasingly lobby to provide public services, national and globally.¹² Where opportunity and mobility is curtailed (‘the opportunity trap’) more aspirational families seek positional advantage for their children and lobby for more school diversity and choice within which they may seek advantages for their children.¹³ With a dominant neo-liberal paradigm of globalization, international bodies advocating what Pasi Sahlberg calls the ‘Global Education Reform Movement’ (GERM) have relentlessly pushed new public management policies which ape private sector practices.¹⁴ This clearly takes us a long way from the collective purposes espoused by the pioneers of mass public education. The notion of education as a public good is certainly substantially under threat. Nevertheless, it is important to challenge some of the more exaggerated myths about educational globalisation and its effects on education.

Challenging Some Myths of Global Education Policy (and Research)

While the trend towards educational marketization in many countries is real it is important to question the claims that it is all inevitable and convergent. In fact the policy rhetoric of the GERM is much more uniform than what actually happens on the ground. Marketisation is a very uneven process.¹⁵ Despite the rhetoric of GERM, there is also very little evidence that educational markets – with enhanced school competition, accountability, school diversity and choice etc – improve standards. There is nothing inevitable about educational marketization – it depends on national political decisions – at least in the countries rich

¹¹ Brown et al 2001, 2011.

¹² Ball 2012.

¹³ Brown et al 2011.

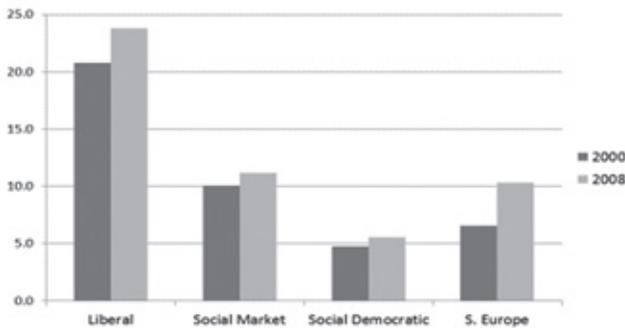
¹⁴ Sahlberg 2012.

¹⁵ Green and Mostafa 2013.

enough not to be dependent on aid agencies. Globalization is not a one-way historical street.

The move towards marketisation of education, at least in OECD countries, is neither as uniform nor as extensive as some writers on educational globalisation suggest. Private funding of education is still limited, particularly in OECD countries, and only a relatively small proportion of schools are fully private. Private funding makes up a greater share of higher education costs, but even here this has only advanced substantially in a minority of countries. Selection to schools by ability, which many see as an inevitable outcome of greater school choice and diversity, is actually in decline across the OECD, as is ability grouping within schools (at least on the evidence from PISA). School autonomy, constantly touted as a solution to most education problems by the GERM lobbyists, is probably declining not growing. Theorists of educational globalisation generally predict that education will become more unequal as a result of all of this.¹⁶ However, the evidence on this is mixed. The distribution of skills appears to be narrowing across countries over time, as is distribution of educational attainment (in terms of levels of education completed).¹⁷ However, the impact of family background on achievement may, at the same time, be rising. OECD trend data for the 1990s from *Education at a Glance* and for the 2000s from PISA give a better idea of what is actually happening than the predictions from some education theorists.

Figure 1: Trends in Private Shares in Total Educational Spending, 2000, 2008.



Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2011, Indicator 3. Table 3.3.

There has only been a small recent increase in proportion of total education spending deriving from private sources in OECD countries¹⁸ from 13.7 percent

¹⁶ Maroy 2001.

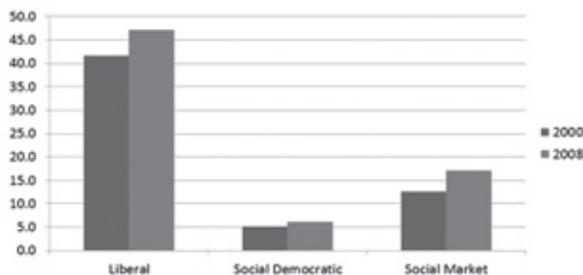
¹⁷ Ballarino et al 2014.

¹⁸ For a subset of countries included in all the surveys.

in 2000 to 16.5 percent in 2008. Liberal, Anglophone countries tend to have the highest proportion of spending coming from private sources (23.8 percent in 2008). As Figure 1 shows, the proportion was lower in the Social Market countries of north-west continental Europe (11.2 percent) and Southern European countries (10.3 percent) and lowest in the Social Democratic countries (5.5 percent in 2008). The share of private funding in spending on tertiary education is higher and rose during the period (from an average of 26.7 percent in 2000 to 32.1 percent in 2008).¹⁹ However, this varies substantially between different groups of countries. Liberal countries tend to have the highest share, followed by the Social Market countries, and with the Social Democratic countries having the lowest, by a long way (see Figure 2).

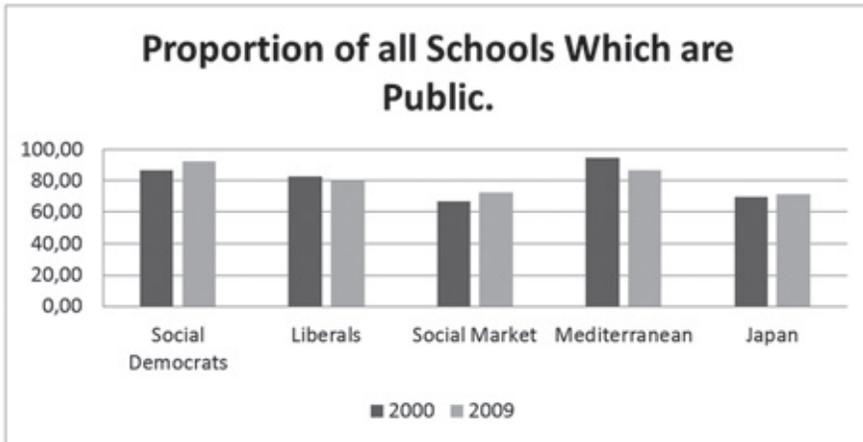
PISA data also show little evidence of widespread privatisation of schools between 2000 and 2009. The proportion of schools classified as ‘Private Independent’ (that is with no state funding) rose slightly across countries, from 4.25 percent to 4.42 percent. The proportion classified as ‘Private Dependent’ (that is receiving some state funding) declined from 14.92 percent to 14.01 percent. The proportion of schools which are defined as ‘Public’ (ie neither ‘Private Independent’ nor ‘Private Dependent’) actually increased slightly between 2000 and 2009 (from 80.81 to 81.57 percent). The slight increase in the relative shares of private spending on education may be due to increases in levels of fees or other educational costs to parents. This may be illustrating a trend towards ‘marketisation’ of public organisations, but does not signal widespread privatization of schools *per se*. Private organisations may be increasingly employed in the delivery of *aspects* of public school provision, but the proportion of school which are fully privately owned and funded is barely increasing.

Figure 2: Proportion of Total Tertiary Education Funding from Private Sources , 2000 and 2008.



Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2011, Indicator 3. Table 3.2.

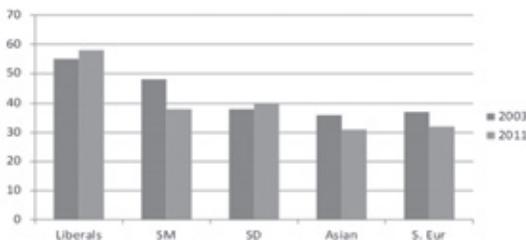
¹⁹. Green and Mostafa 2013.



Source: *Education at a Glance, Statistical Report, 2012, Indicator D. Table D. 6. 6.*

OECD data collected from panels of country experts on levels of decision making suggest that the number of decisions made at the central level has risen on average across countries whereas the number of decisions made at the school level has decreased. Between 2003 and 2011 local decision-making decreased in ten out of 21 countries and increased in only four.²⁰ This flies in the face claims of a common and convergent trend towards decentralisation.²¹

Figure 6: Proportion of Decisions Made at School Level across Country Groups in 2003 and 2011



There is a quite widespread belief amongst globalisation theorists that ‘neo-liberal’ models of education – which emphasise school choice and diversity, new public management techniques, and the marketization and privatisation of aspects of education – are becoming increasingly dominant worldwide, not least through the influence of supra-national bodies like the OECD and World Bank.²² The evidence that such policies are increasingly adopted in the policy rhetoric of

²⁰ See Green and Mostafa 2013.

²¹ Astiz et al 2002.

²² E.g. Ball 2012; Lingard et al 2001; Maroy 2001.

OECD countries is certainly strong, and it provides support for the ‘World Culture’ theory of the ‘Stanford School’ researchers,²³ that a global culture is developing amongst policy elites across countries. However, the trends observed here for OECD countries do not seem to confirm that structures and practices are uniformly moving in the directions suggested – and advocated – by the policies. Countries are indeed tending to adopt more school choice policies, albeit of various different kinds,²⁴ and there have been widespread attempts to implement forms of regulation which give schools greater autonomy.²⁵ However, the perceptions of head teachers in OECD schools is that decisions are becoming increasingly regionalised and centralised and thus that schools have less and less autonomy. Many countries, including some Nordic countries,²⁶ have implemented new measures to encourage private schools. However, the proportion of fully private schools, and the proportion of funding from private sources, have only increased by a rather small amount on average across the OECD. This does not mean that public schools systems have not become increasingly ‘marketized’ through the out-sourcing of school services and use of private sector management techniques within schools and education authorities.²⁷ However, in most OECD countries this does not equate to wholesale privatisation and the dismantling of public provision, nor even, in the Nordic case, to the abandonment of comprehensive schooling.

It is often predicted that increasing privatisation and school choice in public schools will be accompanied by more academic selection and ability grouping in schools, which will lead in turn to rising inequalities in educational outcomes.²⁸ However, the evidence from PISA and the OECD Survey of Adult Skills is that inequalities in educational outcomes have been generally decreasing across the OECD, despite, paradoxically, increasing income inequality.²⁹ It is undoubtedly the case that a number of English-speaking countries, including New Zealand, the USA and the UK, have introduced more selection and ability grouping.³⁰ This may have increased inequalities in education over the longer term, although the evidence for this is still disputed. But on evidence here, inequalities in outcomes have actually decreased (although not by much) in these countries during the 2000s.

The second myth is that countries adopting the neo-liberal reform agenda in education will get better results on average. There is precious little evidence to support this. Pasi Sahlberg cites seven countries which he says have been par-

^{23.} Meyer et al 1997.

^{24.} OECD 2012.

^{25.} Maroy 2001.

^{26.} Wiborg 2013.

^{27.} Ball 2012.

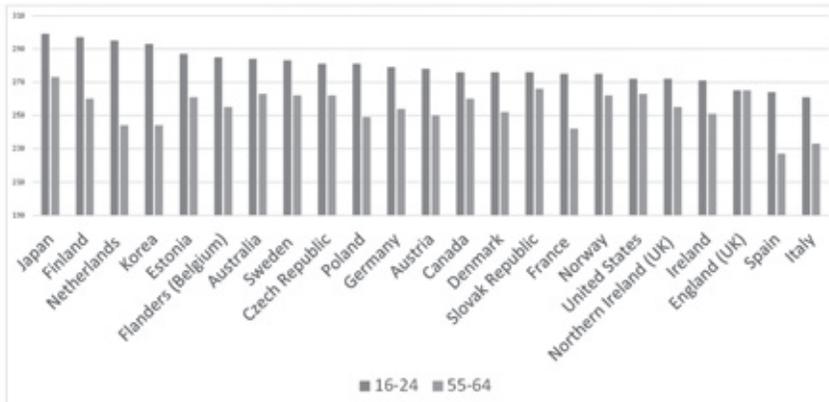
^{28.} Maroy 2001.

^{29.} Green, Green and Pensiero 2014.

^{30.} Whitty et al 2002.

ticularly active in adopting the policies of school choice and diversity and school competition and accountability, which are at the heart of the reform agenda of the GERM.³¹ These include Australia, Canada, England, the Netherlands, Sweden, the USA and New Zealand. Yet most of these countries have not performed notably well on international tests of skills. The recent OECD Survey of Adult Skills (SAS) tested the adults aged 16-64 in 24 countries for their skills in literacy and numeracy. Figures 7 and 8 show the average scores for younger and older age groups, ranked by the former. The scores of the 16-24 year olds are most relevant for assessing the impact of recent reforms. Of the countries in Sahlberg's list only the Netherlands and Sweden performed relatively well, with the Netherlands ranking in third place on literacy scores and Sweden ranking eighth in literacy and seventh in numeracy. But both of the countries have only adopted GERM policies selectively and quite recently. The performance of Australia and Canada was only in the middle of the country range in both domains. In England and the USA, which have gone furthest in adopting neo-liberal policies, the average scores ranked no higher than eighteenth position out of 22 in either domain. The only countries scoring worse in the two domains together were Italy and Spain, and England and the USA were the only countries where the scores of the 16-24 year olds were not significantly better than those of the 55-64 year olds in either literacy or numeracy.

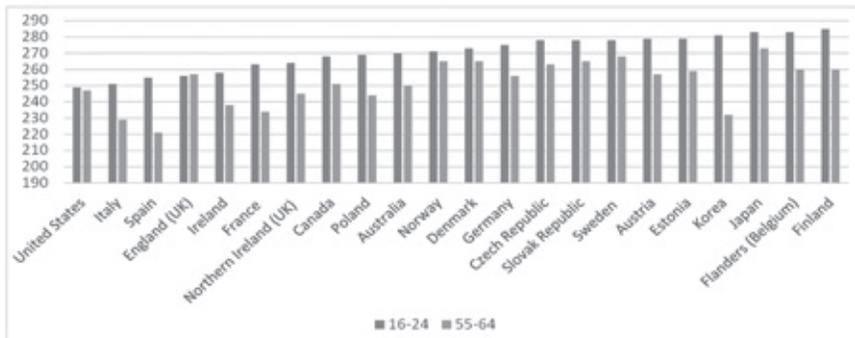
Figure 7: Literacy Means by Country and Age Group



Source: Green, Green and Pensiero, 2013.

³¹: Sahlberg 2012.

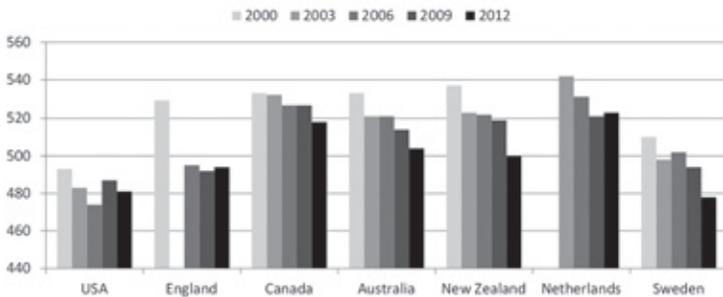
Figure 8: Numeracy Means by Country and Age Group – From SAS



Source: Green, Green and Pensiero, 2013.

Sahlberg also looks at the trends on numeracy test scores for his most marketised countries during the 12 years of the PISA programme (see Figure 9). In each case average scores have declined during the period.

Figure 9: National averages of 15-year-old students' mathematics achievement measured by PISA between 2000 and 2012.



From Sahlberg, 2012

Countries which have gone furthest in adopting the reform agenda have not performed notably well in terms of raising the levels of skill in the areas covered by international tests. On the other hand, some countries which have largely eschewed the reforms of the GERM have done better. Germany has not been notable for marketising its education system yet it has been one of the notable improvers in PISA. The European champion in PISA has, of course, been Finland, a country which has consistently outperformed other European countries in international tests in literacy, maths and science over the years. Yet it has hardly

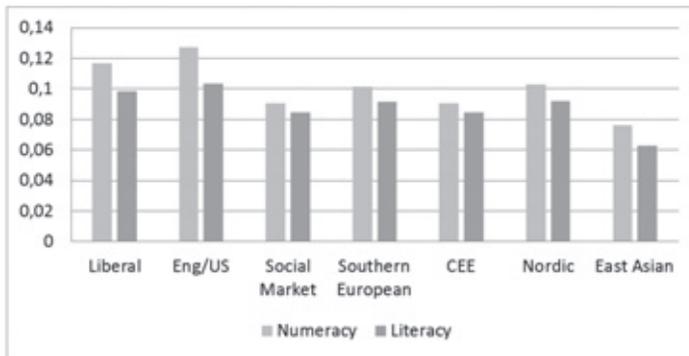
been a paragon of neo-liberal reform. It has a relatively standardized school system where the norm is for neighbourhood-based, non-selective comprehensive schools without ability grouping in classes. There has been little effort to promote school choice and diversity and school quality is not seen to be driven by competition between schools. Far from having a highly formalised system of accountability, it has no national school inspection system and no national testing of students. Its most distinctive characteristics are the high levels of teacher training and professionalism, and the considerable autonomy granted to teachers. This is a far cry from the teacher-proof systems, replete with scripted lessons, favoured by many edubusiness school chains admired by advocates of school privatisation.³²

Marketisation and Inequality in the Anglophone countries

Education systems in the Anglophone countries, which have gone furthest amongst OECD countries in marketising education, do not achieve particularly high standards. But they do show particularly high levels of inequality, both in terms of the wide distribution of skills outcomes, and in terms in inequality of skills opportunity.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of numeracy and literacy scores for the 25-29 year olds in SAS by country group, using skills Gini measures. The values for each country group is the mean of the values for the countries in the group. Anglophone countries, and particularly England and the USA, have significantly wider distributions than other groups of countries, with the East Asian countries (Japan and South Korea) being the most equal.

Figure 10: Numeracy and Literacy Ginis for 25-29s by Country Group

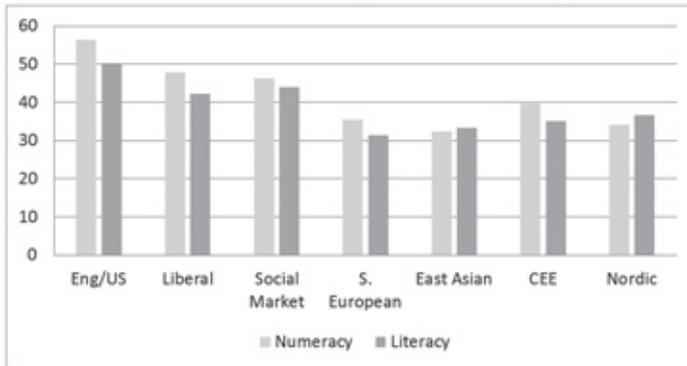


Source: Green, Green and Pensiero, 2013.

³² Sahlberg 2012.

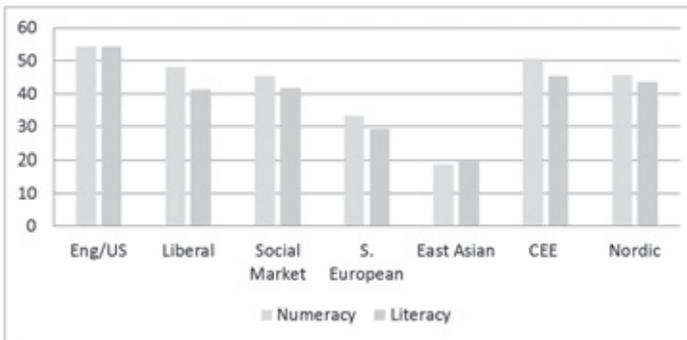
Inequality in skills opportunities is measured by the impact of family background on individuals' skills. Figures 11 and 12 show the difference in average scores of individuals whose parent(s) had no more than lower secondary education and those who had a parent with higher education. The gap is significantly greater in Anglophone countries, and particularly in England and the USA, than in other country groups, with the East Asian group again being the most egalitarian.

Figure 11: Social Gradient for Adult Literacy and Numeracy by Country Groups



Source: Green, Green and Pensiero, 2013.

Figure 12: Social Gradient for Numeracy and Literacy for 16-24s by Country Group



Source: Green, Green and Pensiero, 2013.

So, whereas public education systems remain well entrenched in most countries in the OECD, with neo-liberal policies often having relatively peripheral effects, in some countries the GERM movement is substantially transforming education. In England, for instance, marketization is rapidly dismantling the public education system and creating in its stead a patchwork of provision last seen before 1870.

An obsession with school choice and diversity, and competition between schools, is leading to the creation of multiple types of school with different governance and funding, admissions procedures and curriculum priorities. The current list includes free schools, faith schools, studio schools, university technical colleges and academies of various kinds, including sponsored academies, chain academies (ARK, ULT, AET etc) and converter academies. Providers include charities, foundations, social enterprises, faith and community groups and private education businesses. These schools are still publicly funded, and controlled, to different degrees, by the state, but the sense of an integrated public system with a public purpose is disappearing. Local Education Authorities have been eviscerated and local planning eroded.

This patchwork of providers and school types, not to mention the byzantine complexity of the awarding bodies and certificates, lacks transparency to such a degree that only the most 'savvy' and well-informed of parents and students can navigate it. This provides unfair advantages to better off, more mobile, and better informed parents and creates more social segregation in schools with less balanced intakes. As the Sutton Trust recently found the proportion of students eligible for free school meals (FSM) who had 5 good GCSEs in the top 500 comprehensive schools is below half the national average. Ninety-five percent of these schools take fewer FSM students than the proportion in their local area.³³ The OECD (2010) found that school intakes explain 77 percent of the variation in school performance in England – only topped by Luxembourg and way higher than the OECD average of 55 percent.

The fragmented nature of provision undermines any sense of normative standards and expectations for young people and will create greater inequality of outcomes in a country which already has one of the most unequal education systems in the OECD.

Consumer 'choice' in the market – or rather choice for some consumers – is replacing any kind of local democratic control of schooling. Local authorities lack power, teacher unions and professional associations are sidelined, and parental influence on school governing bodies is weakened in schools which are run as businesses. At the same time, central government has assumed more and more powers – with the office of Secretary of State for Education acquiring 2500 new powers since 1960, which in recent years have been exercised more and more arbitrarily.

Teacher motivation and professionalism are undermined by constant policy shifts and criticism from government, as well as draconian 'accountability systems' – so that schools have become low-trust institutions – the opposite of what characterizes the successful Finnish system.

³³ Sutton Trust 2013.

Despite all the stress on standards, and the obsession with ‘performativity,’ marketization does not appear to be delivering its declared objective of raising standards in England, or not at least in the things that we can measure accurately. More exams may be passed, although this is likely due to constant adjustments to the standards. But in the tests of literacy and numeracy in the recent OECD Survey of Adult Skills 16-25 year olds in England scored worse than in all but two other countries and, uniquely amongst countries, no better than the 55-65 year olds.

This is not surprising given the highly unequal outcomes of the education system. The best achieve reasonably well on international tests, relative to those in other countries, but we have a longer tail of low achievers than most countries which brings down the mean scores. As OECD PISA reports repeatedly show, equality and excellence are far from incompatible and many of the best performing systems are also the most egalitarian (Finland and Japan for instance).

In England excessive inequality in income and skills is not only associated a range of unwanted social outcomes – from low trust and public health, to high obesity, teenage pregnancy and violent crime.³⁴ Educational inequality is also undermining overall standards in education and threatening our future skills base. The excessive marketization of education in England, which reduces schooling to competitive individual consumption, is undermining the important public purposes of education, including producing the skills for England to compete economically in the world and, equally important, promoting opportunity and social cohesion.

Re-Building Democratic and Integrated Education Systems

The neo-liberal countries, including the USA and England, have been disproportionately driving the global education reform agenda in recent years. This has not always been the case: arguably it was Sweden and the Nordic countries which were most influential in the 1960s and 1970s, not least within the OECD which has become one of the pre-eminent international education policy bodies for the richer countries. But the dominance of neo-liberal forms of globalisation since the 1980s has certainly effected global policy in education to a substantial degree. National governments are affected by this, especially in the poorer countries which are in no position to reject the policy prescriptions of the donor agencies. The impact of global education policy on national policies is partly due to policy diffusion, as the world culture theorists argue, and partly due to national elites in different countries identifying similar problems and seeking solutions in the policy tool-kits offered by the international agencies. However, policy formulation and implementation is finally a national prerogative, at least for richer countries, and national governments have to respond to the demands of a host of national

³⁴. Wilkinson and Pickett 2009.

interests when they make policy. If the electorates in democratic countries do not want to see public education demolished they will resist the trend.

The task for those who wish to see public education survive is to build political alliances in support of public education and to convince people that the public good, and the interests of the majority, are best served by maintaining education as a public service. This does not mean resisting all types of reform. On the contrary it means vigorously promoting reforms which improve all schools, rather than reforms which promote improvement in some schools at the expense of others which are left behind. There is a considerable challenge here because undeniably parents' attitudes to schools in many countries have become increasingly individualistic. Many parents feel they can help their children get ahead of other people's children by using their social advantages within a flexible education market. Education is a private good as well as a public good, and its benefits as a private good are often positional – they rely on doing well relative to others.

This fact has to be faced by politicians. On the other hand, education is not a zero-sum competition. If more children can do well in education, it brings benefits to all, because the public gains – in terms of better performing economies, improved public health, greater social cohesion – can be enjoyed by all, including those who have not improved their position thereby in the credential race. There are also private benefits from education which are not positional, where higher levels of education have benefits irrespective of one's position relative to other people. These include a ability to enjoy and appreciate a wider range of culture, to be open to, and tolerant of, a wider range of experiences and beliefs, and to understand more about what is going on in our complex world.

In societies increasingly riven by growing inequalities in wealth and income, education is a high stakes business and people are the more likely to see it instrumentally, mainly as a vehicle for getting ahead of, or just keeping up, with others. Until we can reduce current social inequalities, it will continue to be an uphill struggle to persuade people to view education as a collective enterprise not an individual competition. Nevertheless, the public benefits of education are very substantial, supported by volumes of research, not least into the history of public education systems. Education researchers who are well versed in the evidence must continue to make the case for education as a public good.



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