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COLDRON, John

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Uses and Abuses of Primary education: The relation of primary to secondary schooling in England between 1870 and 2014

John Coldron

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Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, England

Primary (corresponding) address:

25 Sterndale Road

Sheffield

S7 2LB

Email: j.h.coldron@shu.ac.uk

Secondary address:

Centre for Education and Inclusion Research

Sheffield Institute of Education

Unit 7 Science Park

Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield

S11WB

Abstract

I analyse the relation of primary to secondary schooling. Primary has most of the time been subordinate to secondary. I identify the varying problems this durable inequality was used to address and the different meanings the distinction has accrued. In 1870 government sought to protect existing social stratification by distinguishing parallel and unequal systems of education – elementary and secondary. The contemporary distinction just on the basis of age was fully instituted in 1944 when the task of maintaining social advantage was passed to a selective secondary system. Following a brief period, when a distinctive primary practice was championed, subordinate status was reinstated through curriculum models and the appropriation by politicians of the right to prescribe professional practice. The analysis gives critical distance on key themes in current policy discourse, and helps to understand the differential capital of schools at a time when positioning in local competitive arenas is being renegotiated.

The creation of a distinction

Charles Tilly argued that categorisations can usefully be seen as ‘problem-solving social inventions’ (Tilly 1998 p21). The French revolution and its aftermath in the first half of the nineteenth century posed threats to the privileges of the middle and propertied classes from the growing political power of the majority working classes and their consequent demand for an extension of the suffrage. At the same time the growth of empire created a need for large numbers of educated administrators and the industrial revolution demanded higher levels of literacy and numeracy from a greater number of workers.

In 1867 the *Representation of the People Act* extended the franchise through a form of household suffrage and influential voices who had earlier spoken against the education of the working classes concluded that it was inevitable. Further, given the extension of the franchise, gentling of the masses through education, or schooling, seemed to them a political necessity. Robert Lowe was one of theseⁱ. For Lowe, the over-riding problem of education policy was how to meet the economic, social and political need to extend education and the franchise while preserving the stratification of English society. He envisaged education as divided into “*the education of the poor or primary education, and the education of the middle or upper classes*’ through a more advanced secondary education so that the higher classes “*know the things the working men know, only know them infinitely better in their principles and in their details*”ⁱⁱ.

The Education Act of 1870 established the principle of compulsory attendance between the ages of 5 and 10 and provided, in addition to the fee-charging preparatory, public and grammar schools, free elementary schools (Lowe’s primary education) for the poor. The

purpose of elementary schools was to give working class children manual training and elementary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic – the basics. Primary and secondary schooling are not so much phases of the educational career marked by age but parallel pathways with different end points (in both senses of duration and employment) for different strata of society.

The most salient distinction between primary and secondary at this early point in the development of mass education in England was not one of age but rather of curriculum, status and clientele. Although a few elementary school pupils gained scholarships to continue their education at secondary schools secondary education was the preserve of the expanding middle and lower middle classes preparing their children for public service, commerce or the professions, while the public schools continued to be the preserve of the upper middle and landed aristocracy which prepared their children to rule (Simon 1969 Ch. VII). The new industrial middle class fought to establish a higher quality secondary system by reforming the Grammar and minor private schools. At the same time there was a campaign to raise the quality of the ‘great’ public schools (NORWOOD REFERENCE?).

The practice of dividing pupils into different age phases within each of these parallel systems was also becoming well established. The larger elementary schools often organised pupils into an infant department from 5 to 7 (or sometimes 8) and a senior department further separated into boys and girls. The new private boarding schools and the older public schools had, partly for reasons of safeguarding the younger boys, developed separate preparatory stages or even separate schools before entry to the main school at 11, 12 or 13. Some employed "dames" to care for the youngest students, often housing them separately. In the latter half of the 19th Century the age of entry to private boarding schools was typically set at 12 or 13 thus excluding the younger pupils which contributed to the rise of independent preparatory schools for young boysⁱⁱⁱ.

The development of the elementary school system

Following the 1870 Act, Acts in 1876, 1880, 1891 and 1893 gradually raised the age at which pupils left the elementary school to 13 and the elementary schools began to develop a practical and vocational curriculum for the older pupils. This provided an alternative to the grammar schools which began to lose students and therefore revenue. Equally significantly,

the development of a form of ‘secondary’ education in the elementary schools began to blur the distinction between the pathways.

The 1902 Education Act, masterminded by Morant, focused specifically on reinforcing the divide between elementary and secondary education (with the former confined to the education of younger children) and access by transfer from the elementary school on the grounds of fitness and merit. As Lawson and Silver put it,

The most far-reaching effect of the 1902 Act was its influence on the structure of elementary and secondary education...[Morant’s] view of elementary education was based on a strong sense of social hierarchy. He and Balfour had ‘similar middle-class educational values, similar doubts about the abilities of the masses’. By defining the board schools as strictly elementary and then bringing them into a relationship with the newly strengthened grammar schools, Morant (and with him Gorst, Balfour and Webb) defined also a strictly class relationship to be tempered only by the introduction of a formal system of transition from one system to the other. (Lawson and Silver 1973 pp371-372)

The principle of socially segregated schooling was from the beginning accompanied by the principle of controlled transfer of a few poorer but deserving children to the more prestigious pathway. Although the proportion of elementary pupils gaining access to the secondary system was always a minority it became a significant minority. After 1902 secondary schools under the control of Local Authorities typically offered 30% of free places to elementary school children who passed a scholarship examination.

The Fisher Education Act of 1918 made secondary education compulsory up to age fourteen and enabled higher elementary schools serving children over the age of 10 to become state funded central^{iv} or secondary schools. But, as late as 1938 most children (the poorer majority) continued to attend the same elementary school until age fourteen. Between 1918-1939 elementary and secondary education were separate but unequal ‘systems’ of education.

Elementary schools

...operated at a level very considerably below that of the secondary schools, which had their own, more generous code of regulations, involving better buildings, equipment, and higher salaries for the teachers.

(Simon 1999 p 28)

Different professional identities

The categorical, material and symbolic distinction of elementary and secondary education created communities of shared interest and solidarity. It led for example to distinct organisations to look after the interests of the different teaching communities^v. It was also fertile ground for the development and adoption of distinct professional identities, educational ideals and practices.

In the early part of the twentieth century the theories and educational philosophies of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Tolstoy, Montessori, Dewey and Freud inspired the development of new ideas, ideals and practices that sought to provide education variously based on learning by doing and democratic principles of the self-government of pupils and that attended to the creative and affective as much as the cognitive development of the child. There was also an emphasis on the importance of recognising the distinctness of education in the early years. Although there were examples in the private and publicly maintained secondary schools of the development of what was later to be called progressive practice it was more enthusiastically taken up in the elementary schools. As Lawson and Silver put it:

The new methods were attractive to inspectors, teachers and parents concerned about the education of young children; educational methods based on creative effort, self-regulated learning and a variety of informal techniques seemed more and more to fit both the well-publicized theories of the psychologists and the possibilities of the Elementary school. They were resisted at the level of secondary education, which was more firmly wedded to academic courses, formal teaching and examination requirements.

(Lawson and Silver 1973 p 401)

In subsequent years inspirational practitioners such as Marion Richardson, Robin Tanner, A.L. Stone, Susan Isaacs, Edith Moorhouse, and Sybil Marshall exemplified ways of educating young children with a common curriculum that made full use of the expressive arts.

While the curriculum of the secondary school was typically delivered by different subject teachers the predominant practice in elementary schools was class-teaching where a teacher was responsible for all aspects of the education of a group of children over a school year. The teacher was necessarily a generalist and, drawing on the thinkers and practitioners cited above, the practice and professional identity of the class-teacher was justified and invested

with educational value. The tradition of the class-teacher, in a subtle interaction with gender discourses, tended to emphasise a pastoral identity together with knowledge of child development, and a claim to expertise in teaching reading, writing and mathematics.

The 1944 Act

The division of compulsory education into two stages – Primary for children between the ages of 5 and 11 consisting of an infant stage (5 to 7) and a junior stage (7 to 11), together with a secondary stage (11 to 14^{vi}) - was recommended in the Hadow report of 1926 but it was only implemented after the 1944 Act.

The policies and enactments between 1870 and 1944 were accompanied by vigorous debate between politicians, the labour movement, educationalists and the general public (Simon 1969 and 1999; Lawson and Silver 1973). In the lead up to the 1944 Act some radical grass roots organisations – trades councils, certain local Labour parties, Communist Party branches, some local NUT associations and Cooperative organisations (see Simon 1999 p 204) - argued strongly for the establishment of common (comprehensive) schooling and the abolition of the privileges of private education. The more conservative minded resisted these proposals while recognising that some form of free, compulsory education for all from five into the teenage years was necessary.

The 1944 Education Act renamed what was already the typical organisation of children between 5 and 11 years in the elementary system as infant and primary stages but the reform of education for children from 11 was new. Access to education well beyond the age of 11 was no longer restricted to pupils who gained a scholarship or were able to pay. But, it was access to differentiated educational pathways. There was to be secondary modern or technical schooling for the majority and grammar schools for the minority. The latter provided an academic education deemed suitable as a preparation for entry to the professions while the former provided a more basic and vocational education for those destined to work as manual labourers, skilled tradesmen or housewives.

While being widely welcomed at the time the 1944 Act can in retrospect be seen as a consolidation of the educational and social privileges of the middle and upper classes in line with Robert Lowe's sentiments eighty years earlier. There was no reference in the Act to the 'public' schools and the fee paying sector in general thus preserving them as a separate

pathway for the most affluent and it strictly controlled access to the grammar schools through a selective process which appeared to give equality of opportunity but in effect favoured children from middle class homes.

The significance of the 1944 Act can best be appreciated, as Simon put it (Simon 1999 p159) as part of a hegemonic whole which functioned to maintain a stratified society whose parts were the theory of fixed quanta of intelligence; the design of a tripartite system to accommodate the different 'types' of children for different occupations; the restriction of places at grammar schools to the 'top' twenty five percent; the inferior positioning of secondary modern and technical schools; the sense of failure and consequent demoralisation visited on the majority of children; and the legitimisation of selection by means of a meritocratic discourse.

Primary schools did not select their intake and were therefore, in this sense, relatively comprehensive^{vii}. This, and the distinctive kinds of professional identities that had been developing, might have led them to embrace the incipient 'progressive' practices but the pressure of preparing for the selection exam more decisively determined the mission and the internal organisation of the primary years. It encouraged the practice of categorising pupils according to their likelihood of passing the selection exam and then allocating them to different streams. In 1962 most primary schools were streaming children and the great majority of teachers considered it to be best practice (Jackson 1964). The 'progressive' educational practices that had been developing tenuously in the elementary schools were all but eliminated in most primary schools.

Post-1944 and the Plowden Report

In the years following the 1944 Act the debates about common, or comprehensive, education continued. The Conservative Party remained strongly in favour of the selection of pupils for different types of secondary education. Left wing thought was more divided. The more radical members of the labour movement strongly advocated common (comprehensive) schooling, but the Fabian Society strongly denounced this position when it was temporarily adopted by the defeated Labour Party in 1951 (Simon 1999)^{viii}. But shortcomings of the selective tri-partite system became more evident. The psychological justification for rigidly distinguishing types of children at an early age and the accuracy of intelligence testing were

severely questioned, and new economic and sociological critiques of the continuing class divisions in English society were developed (Simon 1953; Floud, J., Halsey, A.H., Martin, F.M. 1956; Vernon 1957; Halsey et al 1961). Significantly the social base of the opposition to selective schooling widened with added political pressure from the growing number of parents in professional or managerial occupations many of whose children failed to gain access to the grammar schools. As a result there became established wide popular and professional support for abolition of selection at eleven in favour of a comprehensive secondary system. The Labour party stated in their manifesto for the 1964 general election that:

Labour will get rid of the segregation of children into separate schools caused by 11-plus selection: secondary education will be reorganised on comprehensive lines.^{ix}

Antony Crosland, Secretary of State for Education from 1965 to 1967 moved to implement this promise with a circular to all Local Authorities requesting them to submit plans for comprehensivisation in their area. The primary schools, or more accurately the idealisation of 'progressive' primary practice, gained a complex symbolic significance in this debate. Despite the fact that the progressive ideals described earlier had not penetrated deeply into actual primary classrooms (Jackson 1964; HMI 1978; Galton et al 1980) primary schools became symbols of good practice. Maurice Kogan, secretary to the Plowden committee, was able retrospectively to describe the context of the early sixties in the following terms.

There had been perhaps twenty or thirty years of triumphant progress by primary schools in which it seemed that all that was good was happening through them...A powerful humanitarianism seemed to suffuse the best of primary schools. To the visitor they seemed unbelievably good in their relationships between adults and children, able to elicit powerful interest on the part of pupils, and yet still be highly productive in work that was both creative and skilful. (as quoted in Simon 1999)

The Plowden report influentially articulated this view. Entitled *Children and their Primary Schools* it was published in 1967. In line with academic thought on child development, and following Hadow (1933:141) Plowden argued that primary children learned not primarily through the transmission of facts but through a teacher facilitating their learning by the skilful provision of a rich variety of learning opportunities in a stimulating environment^x. Further, it opposed the practice of setting and streaming, and instead adopted an extreme pedagogic individualism.

'Individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class, however homogeneous it seems, must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention' (Plowden 1967 para 75)

This method of education included an emphasis on children collaborating in groups and the importance of creative activities such as dance, painting and expressive writing. At the same time the need to learn the skills of literacy and numeracy and for teachers to evaluate the progress of each child was reemphasised. The role of subjects as a useful method of organising and thinking about curriculum was acknowledged, but the nature of young children's learning meant that the curriculum needed to be planned not on the basis of subject content to be delivered but as a web of knowledge and skills acquired through an integrated encounter with an environment designed for learning. Flexibility of internal organisation was needed to facilitate different group work and the ability of a child to follow their interests. The abolition of the eleven plus and the move to comprehensive secondary schools would remove the constraints of preparing for the selective test at 11 and enable this progressive practice to flourish (Plowden 1967 para 412).

The report attempted to raise the status of primary in relation to secondary schools. It endorsed the practice of organising young children under a generalist class-teacher and cast good primary teachers as leading practitioners. It implicitly critiqued the opposite - a subject led curriculum that was transmissive in style, undifferentiated at the individual level, that categorised children and allocated them to streams and in which teachers adopted a strongly didactic role. It cast primary school practice as a model of good pedagogy that should not be restricted to young children because it was suitable for at least part of the secondary age range. It therefore not only challenged the principles on which the selective secondary system was based but also the typical ethos and pedagogy of secondary (particularly grammar) school practice. Social differentiation by means of distinct educational pathways would become more difficult to achieve.

The report not only recommended a change in the relative symbolic status of secondary and primary schooling but also a material redistribution of resources. I noted earlier that between 1918 and 1939 the secondary sector was better resourced than the elementary schools. Plowden noted similar differences in 1963 (Para 1104 p 405). The report's final recommendation, directed explicitly at local and central government, stated:

All unnecessary and unjustified differences of treatment between primary and secondary education should be eliminated. (Plowden 1967 Recommendation 197 p 482)

The ‘progressive’ primary philosophy and practice that had earlier begun to be championed in elementary schools and had been endorsed by the Hadow committee came to stand for a more egalitarian, inclusive and effective education. The enhanced symbolic capital of the (idealised) primary school, together with the groundswell for comprehensive education, stood as an implicit criticism of the social privileges delivered to a minority in large part by the educational system. The selection to grammar schools was the most obvious target of arguments for comprehensivisation but, with its rejection of the internal differentiation of streaming, Plowden also challenged the legitimacy of the default means by which differentiated schooling might be delivered in a comprehensive system.

Backlash: the Black papers

The Black Papers (Cox and Dyson 1969a, 1969b, 1970; Cox and Boysen 1975 and 1977) were a series of collections of papers edited by two Literary scholars Brian Cox and A.E Dyson and, later, with the headteacher and Conservative MP Rhodes Boysen. They were initially a response by university academics to the student disturbances and trade union activism of 1968. They found an explanation for the unjustifiable behaviour of students in the mistaken educational practices and policies of comprehensive^{xi} and primary schools. They aimed at restoring a proper social order through a call to arms (the title of the first publication was *Fight for Education*) and the weapons were arguments in favour of elite culture, rigorously selective examinations following disciplined subject study; streaming; and a celebration and facilitation of difference and excellence rather than equality and mediocrity. At the time, because they seemed so much against settled professional and popular opinion, they appeared to have little effect on denting the robust consensus against selection and in favour of Plowden’s vision of primary education. But they provided powerful resources for indignation and polemic that were to be successfully deployed in future years to project ‘progressive’ primary practice and ‘all ability’ classes as intellectually untenable and morally reprehensible. The mission of primary schools should be to concentrate on the ‘basics’ in preparation for more advanced subject study in the secondary school. The themes that they articulated have played a large part in reducing the symbolic capital of primary teachers and

‘progressive’ practices in comprehensive secondary schools in favour of streaming, selection and grammar school pedagogy, including subject teaching.

In the difficult economic and political times that followed in the seventies the momentum towards comprehensivisation was slowed and the ground was prepared for the Callaghan government to begin the process of directly challenging professional practice and opinion leading, in 1988, to the introduction of a national curriculum and the moves to marketise education. Before considering their impact it will be useful to reflect on the recurring motif of ‘the basics’.

The assertion that it is part of the primary school mission to teach ‘the basics’ can mean different things. It can be seen as laying crucial cognitive, affective and moral foundations and therefore as the most important phase of education. Both Hadow and Plowden saw it this way as early years experts do today (Alexander 2010). Such a view encourages considerable respect for primary teachers and the job they do. It can alternatively be taken to contrast the teaching of simple content and general unsophisticated skills with teaching advanced and more complex and precise subject specific concepts. The imputed simplicity of content can, in turn, be taken to support the further assumption that teaching ‘the basics’ is easier and that primary school teachers require less expertise and fewer educational qualifications^{xii}. Or, as in the grammar school system, the preparatory function may be emphasised implying that the main purpose of the primary stage is to prepare for the secondary stage. This tends to cast secondary teachers as privileged clients, legitimises their views as to what preparation should entail and threatens to position primary schools as fulfillers of their needs. In past and current educational debate these meanings are in complex interplay and can variously be deployed to position primary and secondary schooling in relation to each other.

The national curriculum

The Education Reform Act 1988 had a major impact on the mission, practice and organisation of Primary schools (Galton et al 1999; Alexander 2010). It was a landmark in a process, starting with the Black Paper polemics and given official momentum by Prime Minister Callaghan’s Ruskin speech in 1976, whereby politicians appropriated the right to determine first the content to be taught and what would count as success and then how teachers should teach. It imposed a statutory duty on schools to teach the national curriculum

as laid down by the Secretary of State for Education. It was designed by subject groups and conceived in terms of content (both skills and facts) and measurable outcomes – what should be taught, learned and assessed with the integration of learning a second priority. It was a different model to that advocated by Plowden which was deemed to be too difficult for all but the most exceptionally skilled primary teachers. While the national curriculum applied equally to secondary and primary the impact on the latter was greater because of the disjunction with previous primary school practice and the class-teacher system.

The dynamic for a narrowing of the curriculum was ironically built in as the requirements emerged from the subject groups; it was impossible for primary teachers to give equal time or importance to all of the subjects. There was, therefore a reinforcement of the focus on ‘the basics’ or ‘core subjects’ of English (reading, writing, and speaking) and Mathematics. Today attainment is tested only in these subjects at the end of primary school (Key Stage 2)^{xiii}. The other subjects were in practice relegated in importance with time spent on them drastically squeezed. This moved primary practice even further away from that idealised in Plowden and nearer to the notion of the primary school’s mission as restricted to delivering attainment in the basics in preparation for the secondary phase.

It also put centre stage the problem of how to reconcile the implicit demand for subject expertise with the generalist class teacher system. This dilemma continued (and continues) to be a focus of debate and concern. In 1992 Kenneth Clarke as Secretary for Education commissioned a report entitled *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: A discussion paper*, DES (Alexander, R. Rose, J, Woodhead, C. 1992) which explicitly addressed this issue. The following passage illustrates the subtly tendentious nature of the debate - it restates the attack on ‘progressive’ primary practice, links it to the debate concerning subject teaching and staff expertise, and reinforces a deficit view of primary teachers.

Over the last few decades the progress of primary pupils has been hampered by the influence of highly questionable dogmas which have led to excessively complex classroom practices and devalued the place of subjects in the curriculum. The resistance to subjects at the primary stage is no longer tenable. The subject is a necessary feature of the modern primary curriculum. It requires appropriate kinds of knowledge on the part of the teacher. However, the extent of subject knowledge required in order to teach the National Curriculum is more than can reasonably be

expected of many class teachers, especially but not exclusively in the upper years of Key Stage 2. (Para 3.2)

Although the report recommended that teachers should use their judgement in choosing from a range of different ways of teaching, it constructs the generalist primary teacher and the class-teacher system as a problem. I am not here concerned with the pedagogic effectiveness of these different curriculum models but only with the effect on the relative positioning of secondary and primary teachers. In this report ‘many’ primary teachers are thought not skilful enough to deliver a complex integrated curriculum nor specialised enough to provide a sufficiently rigorous subject based one. It is significant in terms of relative prestige that neither secondary practice nor the capacities of secondary teachers have been subject to the same level of critical debate^{xiv}.

Prescriptions .

Although control of the national curriculum, marketisation, high stakes testing and a punitive inspection regime manifested distrust of both secondary and primary teachers there was a significantly different level of intervention in primary schools. The National Literacy and Numeracy strategies introduced in the first two years of the New Labour government elected in 1997 applied only to primary schools and sent the clear message that primary professionals could not be trusted to deliver what was needed. The national strategies prescribed how lessons should be structured and conducted minute by minute (DfE 2011). Although the strategies were eventually abandoned prescription has not ended. The Conservative led coalition government elected in 2010 has sought to make primary schools adopt synthetic phonics as the privileged method of teaching reading.

Following the heyday in the late sixties when primary schools and their teachers were celebrated, the sustained attack on the prestige and autonomy of primary schools, beginning with the Black papers and culminating in the Numeracy and Literacy strategies has, together with the echoes of the subordinate role of the elementary system, and their mission to teach only the basics, and the development of different professional identities and practices, had the effect of positioning primary schools subordinately to secondary schools. The process consisted of the imposition of a detailed national curriculum and an accompanying valorisation of a subject led pedagogy and organisation; an insistence that the mission of the primary school was to transmit the basics as preparation for secondary education; and the

questioning of the effectiveness of primary professionals to fulfil that mission thus legitimating tight prescription.

The Cambridge Primary Review

In 2006 in response to what they saw as the politicisation, polarisation and poor quality of the public debate about education and ill informed policy interventions Robin Alexander and a team of collaborators launched an unofficial review into the present condition and future of primary education in England – the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR). Their final report was published three years later. The scope and depth of its evidence, careful analysis and measured conclusions make it the most comprehensive and authoritative enquiry into English primary education since the Plowden report of 1967. It is likely to inform a high quality public debate for some time to come^{xv} and I cannot discuss it in detail here. My more narrow concern is to consider what role it plays, if any, in the relative positioning of primary and secondary schools.

In general, while the review was critical of some deeply embedded practices of primary schools (notably the class-teacher system), it reasserted the importance of the primary age phase. It stressed the need to respect the professionalism of primary teachers. More radically it challenged current key policies as they relate to primary education recommending for example the abolition of league tables, a fundamental change in the form and uses of assessment, and more control over the curriculum by teachers and their local community. It provided evidence of the ineffectiveness of the narrowing of the focus to the ‘basics’ of literacy and numeracy, and argued for a broader and more balanced curriculum. Its analysis seeks explicitly to counter the ‘discourse of derision’ and the negative myths about primary education some of which I have traced in the sections above.

Warned of these authoritative challenges by the wide media coverage of the interim reports the incumbent Secretary of State for Education Ed Balls commissioned his own review under Sir Jim Rose designed, it was widely suspected (Wilby 2008), to deflect criticisms of current policy. The Rose Review (RR) was a more rapid affair than the CPR, narrower in scope and explicitly barred from considering any ‘*changes to the current assessment and testing regime*’.(Remit letter Annex A: Rose 2009).

Also claiming to be independent it was published just prior to the final report of the CPR. While it laid emphasis on the distinct importance of the primary stage (para 5), on the need to provide a vibrant curriculum with a broad base of experience (para 7), and be as much about process as content, the high stakes assessment regime and the emphasis on the 'basics' were not discussed. It asserted, like the CPR, the continuing importance, together with integrated topics, of subjects and the essential knowledge, skills and understanding they represent. It did nothing to change the conception of primary schooling as merely a preparation ground for secondary education.

Discussion and Conclusion

The CPR bemoaned the over simplification of educational debate conducted in terms of some familiar oppositions – process versus content, subject-teacher versus class-teacher, caring versus educating. But, these binaries have variously been the means by which professional communities on each side of the primary secondary divide have defined themselves. Further they have become embroiled in the articulation of rival visions of society and the role of education in achieving those visions. The attempts by the CPR and others to rehabilitate the status of primary schools in relation to secondary schools is, as the CPR acknowledges, entangled with these past uses and abuses such that their arguments inevitably have political meaning. For example, being a generalist class-teacher is an enduring identity that continues to be celebrated by primary teachers. (Forrester 2005), and official valorisation of subjects and the construction as a 'problem' the 'lack' of subject expertise has the potential to effect a reduction in their capital relative to their secondary peers.

In the broad sweep of political and social struggle the subordination or celebration of primary in relation to secondary has been an aim of different social alliances deploying a range of familiar themes. Policy debate today resonates with associated themes and motifs (Gove 2013). This socio-historical analysis has sought to better hear and understand those varied meanings. The fact that, as a result of this history, primary schools are currently less well endowed with symbolic and material capital than secondary schools may also help to assess the possible implications of some current policies. For example the role of local government in relation to their local schools is changing radically. The local authority has less power and schools, represented at the local level by their headteachers, are in direct negotiations with each other as new clusters and alliances, forums and roles are created as part of the

reconfiguration of local structures. Those players with greater material and symbolic capital will have more and better opportunities to secure advantageous outcomes from these negotiations and encounters. Our analysis explains part of the reason why primary schools and their headteachers will start with a handicap in relation to their secondary peers and why we are likely to see secondary headteachers in the most influential positions whatever they turn out to be in each locality.

More importantly perhaps is the critical distance that this analysis helps us achieve on the terms of current political debate about education in general and the place of primary schooling in particular. If criticism from parents, educationalists and the public at large about the current effect of education policies on young children gathers pace, or connects with wider criticisms of the neo-liberal consensus, it may be that primary schooling becomes once again the Achilles heel of government policy towards schools as the bearer of a different version and vision of education and society.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Lowe was Vice-President of the Committee of the Council on Education in Lord Palmerston's ministry from 1859 until 1864.

ⁱⁱ Quoted in Simon (1969) p355-356 from R.Lowe, (1867) *Primary and Classical Education*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Boys' Preparatory Schools* <http://histclo.com/app/history.html>

^{iv} These were free schools that were more vocationally focused than the grammar schools and taught more advanced work than the basics of the elementary schools. They were forerunners of the Technical schools in the later tripartite structure introduced by the 1944 Act.

^v The National Union of Elementary Teachers was founded in 1870 from which the current NUT emerged. In 1884 the Association of Assistant Mistresses (AAM) and in 1891 the Association of Assistant Masters (AMA) were formed to represent secondary school teachers. These merged in 1978 in what is now called the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. A similar age phase distinction exists between the National Association of Headteachers representing the majority of primary headteachers and the Association of School Leaders. Although the former accepts membership from both phases the latter is exclusively for secondary headteachers.

^{vi} With the clear intention of raising this to fifteen as soon as possible.

^{vii} This does not mean that any particular school actually educated the full range of children in their classes. We may assume that informal mechanisms such as residence would (as now) have led to socially differentiated intakes and there was a parallel fee paying preparatory sector which continued to offer a socially segregated 'primary' pathway for the most affluent.

^{viii} Simon refers to the editorials to Political Quarterly, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, January/March 1952 and Vol. XXIII, No. 2, April/June 1952.

^{ix} Labour Party Manifesto 1964 General Election <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab64.htm>

^x I have avoided 'informal' versus 'formal' because this opposition can minimise the extensive planning and organisation that such facilitation requires.

^{xi} The complexity of the debate is illustrated by the fact that Boysen was a strong advocate of comprehensive schools run on traditional rather than progressive lines.

^{xii} For example it was not until 1970 that Primary school teachers were required to have a university degree.

^{xiii} Science is also considered a core subject but is not tested at the end of Key Stage 2.

^{xiv} There has of course been much denigration of comprehensive schools but the target has been discretionary attitudes such as expectations rather than fundamental aspects of curriculum organisation.

^{xv} It planned and is now implementing a dissemination stage designed to engage with policy makers and practitioners. See the CPRT website <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/index.php>