



BOOK REVIEW

Education in Britain. 1944 to the present. 2nd Edition

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Book Review

Education in Britain. 1944 to the present. 2nd Edition

Ken Jones

Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press (2016) pp296, Hardback£60

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Reviewer: Dr Rachel Shanks, University of Aberdeen

How we got to Gove and Curriculum for Excellence.

I was sceptical when I looked at the title 'Education in Britain' but as Jones explains, using the term United Kingdom, like Britain, is problematic if not also an oxymoron these days. He explains in the introduction that as the four nations or countries of the UK become more dissimilar with devolution it is still important not to atomise our experiences but to remember to consider the totality in which we are located.

Having gone to school in Northern Ireland, studied and worked as a university lecturer in England and Scotland I know, first-hand, some of what is covered in the book from 1979 onwards. To begin with I found the approach of general information, mainly to do with England and then separate parts dealing with differences in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales slightly off putting but as I read on I understood the usefulness of finding out all the different layers of policy, legislation, action, inaction and reaction in the different time periods in the different parts of the UK/Britain. I feel that the similarities and differences between school, further and higher education in the four nations are explained well with a great deal of information on how the policies and politics differed from before 1944 and in the different eras which followed. Jones divides these periods into post-war settlements, a questionable golden age, followed by expansion, experiment and conflict, the Thatcher years ('The Watershed: Conservatism and Educational Change'), 'New Labour: The Inheritors' and then austerity ('Crisis and Opportunity').

I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone who works in education or is researching it so that they can understand how and why it has developed into what we have now. To understand how Gove was able to change English school education so radically and why the four countries, which can appear so different, are still caught up in the same arguments and divisions as each other. My one complaint is that in keeping the book to under 300 pages there is not the detail on the three smaller nations so there is not enough information on Curriculum for Excellence for example. However, this is a minor fault in what is a most useful addition to my bookshelf.