

This article was downloaded by: [University of Birmingham]

On: 16 November 2014, At: 22:03

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Oxford Review of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/core20>

### Equality and Education: fifteen years on

H. J. Eysenck

Published online: 03 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: H. J. Eysenck (1991) Equality and Education: fifteen years on, Oxford Review of Education, 17:2, 161-167, DOI: [10.1080/0305498910170204](https://doi.org/10.1080/0305498910170204)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305498910170204>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## Equality and Education: fifteen years on

---

H. J. EYSENCK

In 1975, when the *Oxford Review of Education* published my paper on: Equality and education: fact and fiction, the stress on genetic factors in intelligence and personality, leading to great inequalities in achievement, which it incorporated, was still very much a minority view. The Black Papers on Education (Cox & Dyson, no date; Cox & Bayson, 1975, 1977), to which I contributed, spelled out a gloomy future for British education if current trends were not reversed, but the Establishment did not want to know.

Cox & Marks (1988) have discussed in detail how civil servants in the Department of Education tried to discount unfavourable results of well-designed studies which looked at the effects of introducing comprehensive schools instead of the former tripartite division into grammar, secondary modern and technical schools. Having found in a large-scale study of 350,000 pupils that standards in comprehensive schools were very poor, even as compared with secondary modern schools, Cox & Marks discovered that such results were not welcomed by leading civil servants, who proceeded to discredit the authors by preparing a highly destructive critique, based on serious errors on the part of the critics (as admitted by them later on). This critique was leaked to the press and to left-wing Labour spokesmen on education in the House of Commons; the authors of the original report were not allowed to see the critique! Libel action was ruled out because of the cost involved, and had it not been for a journalist leaking a copy of the critique to Cox & Marks, they would not have been able to refute the grotesque errors of their critics. Finally the critics apologised, and the Secretary of State rehabilitated the reputations of Cox & Marks. Their book should be read by all who might be tempted to believe what politicians, civil servants and the press have to say on matters of education!

What Cox & Marks had found, and what excited the civil servants in the Ministry of Education, and their allies in Parliament and in the press, to such blind vituperation and downright dishonesty, may be summarised briefly (Marks *et al.*, 1983). The researching showed that selective schools, taken together, obtained substantially better results than comprehensive schools, even after making allowance for social class differences. Their major contribution to the argument was a relatively good examination performance of pupils in secondary modern schools. Indeed, as Cox & Marks (1980) point out, "The DES now expect substantially better examination result from LEAs with selective schools than from LEAs with only comprehensive schools, even when other factors, including expenditure, social class and other social variables are held constant". Later reports (Marks & Pamian-Szrednicki, 1985; Marks *et al.*, 1986) arrived at similar conclusions: "Substantially higher examination results are to be expected for pupils in a fully selective system of schools compared with pupils in a

fully comprehensive system." This is true even when allowances are made for both high and low social class variables.

Looking at the ILEA in particular, and its comprehensive schools, it was found that not only did they do less well than comprehensive schools elsewhere in the country, even in other relatively socially deprived areas, but they did less well than the National Bench Mark for secondary modern schools which, unlike those in the ILEA, do not have the most able 25% of the population amongst their pupils. Detailed comparisons show that on average, pupils in ILEA schools of all levels of ability do much worse than similar pupils elsewhere, and that it is the least able pupils who suffer the most. As they also point out, whilst parts of ILEA are very socially deprived, others constitute some of the most wealthy and socially advantaged localities in the country, such as Hampstead, Highgate, Dulwich, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea.

Cox & Marks (1988) also make comparisons between English schools and schools in West Germany, Japan and elsewhere. They find that the average level of attainment for all pupils is appreciably higher in Germany than in England; thus attainments in mathematics by those in the lower half of the ability range in England appear delayed by the equivalent of about 2 years' schooling behind the corresponding section of pupils in Germany. Note that Germany has three different kinds of schools—the *Gymnasium*, the *Realschule* and the *Hauptschule*, each of which caters specifically for different levels of ability. In other words, the system of schools in West Germany has many similarities with the tri-partite system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools which Great Britain was aiming to develop in full before comprehensive schools made the achievement of this aim impossible.

With respect to Japan, similar dramatic differences have been found as in the comparison between West Germany and England. In particular, the average Japanese 15 year-old is better educated in mathematics and other testable subjects than the top quarter of British 16 year-olds who pass at 'O' level! The Japanese school system is of course highly selective at the upper secondary level, with a fairly continuous hierarchy of schools rather than the rigid division into different types. At the lower secondary level, the more uniform day school system is supplemented by the attendance of nearly half the pupils at evening or some day schools and by private tuition.

In spite of all these failures of the comprehensive system, would it not be true that it is favoured by both teachers and the general public? The answer, as Cox & Marks point out, is in the negative. As long ago as 1957, in an opinion poll specially commissioned by the Labour Party, it was found that the majority of the population were basically satisfied with the existing selective system of education, with only 10% thinking that selective education was socially undesirable. By 1967, another opinion poll showed 76% in favour of retaining grammar schools.

Majority opinion amongst classroom teachers was similarly hostile to the comprehensive change-over. An opinion poll in 1974, for the *Times Educational Supplement*, showed that 72% of teachers opposed the elimination of grammar schools, with only 26% of secondary, and 18% of primary teachers in favour. Three years later, in 1977, another TES poll asked teachers the same question and got the same result, 72% against.

Finally, in July 1987, an opinion poll found 62% of the population in favour of returning to a system of grammar and secondary modern schools, while another poll in October 1987 found 50% in favour of such a change. As Cox & Marks conclude: "Such remarkable consistency of opinion, over nearly 4 decades, in favour of a selective system of education, when set alongside the other kinds of evidence we have discussed,

suggest that more weight should be given in future to such informal evaluation of the effectiveness of different schools.”

So much for objective evidence. Even the very people who advocated and put into effect the system criticised in the Black Papers have had second thoughts. Neil Fletcher, the Leader of the Inner London Education Authority, wrote in *The Mail on Sunday*, on 4 March 1990:

The comprehensive dream, in the form we implemented it, has palpably failed. Fewer children from working-class backgrounds are making it to university than in the early 1970s. Romantics, like myself, as a young teacher in the 1960s, believed comprehensive schools would achieve an educational resolution to social engineering overnight. We were wrong. Too many inner-city comprehensives are no different from the secondary moderns in the premises many of them are now lodging.

Fletcher goes on to say that: “Demoralised teachers inevitably set low standards for their pupils. Low demanding expectations mean negligible levels of attainment by surly, unmotivated children.” Even Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools, many of whom have encouraged the very practices which have led to the poor results we are witnessing, admitted in their 1990 Report that a third of lessons are poor, or very poor, and that schools are failing millions of pupils. This admission of failure comes rather late in the day, but it is welcome.

Nevertheless, we should not forget one thing. As Dr Denis O’Keefe, Senior Lecturer in Education, has pointed out:

The inspectors have immense prestige but for years have thrown their power unambiguously behind every new fad, which has distracted our teachers and led to poor schooling . . . it is gross hypocrisy for them now to complain that the modern, child-centred mixed ability teaching they have fostered in the name of progress . . . does not work. What this report means is that the education establishment—teacher-trainers, inspectors, advisers, experts in the Town Halls and the Department of Education and Science—are trying to blame the teachers for the unforgivable state of our schools. This is both extremely cynical and deeply unjust. Teachers are not the originators of our troubles but, on the contrary, some of their principal victims. Teachers do not decide the way in which they teach. That is instilled in them when they arrive at the colleges and universities where they are trained; establishments for which HM Inspectors also have responsibility.

O’Keefe thus points straightforwardly at the teacher training colleges and universities as being responsible for many of our troubles. As he says:

The major problem with our teacher training is that it is still disastrously anti-intellectual. The colleges of education have a hatred of competition and a fierce scorn for intellectual standards. In their lecture halls you find the relentless cult of equality and of worship of a dream childhood, with total rejection of the pain and duties of the real adult world and a contempt for patriotism. Student teachers are told streaming is bad, and equality good. They are told competitive exams lead to elitism, that correcting grammar or spelling stuns creativity, and any whiff of competition demoralises pupils. Students learn that open-plan classrooms, with pupils in groups, are ideal

learning conditions; then they find when they get into the real world that the textbook ideal is a practical nightmare.

I have quoted in some detail some of the findings which demonstrate that what I had to say in my 1975 paper on equality and education, and what I joined many others in saying in the *Black Papers on Education*, was fully justified, and constituted a warning that was neglected by politicians and civil servants, to the great disadvantage of the children who went through our schools over the past 25 years. Cassandra-like, I felt at the time that all warnings based on scientific evidence would be wasted on politically-minded educationalists for whom ideology was more important than empiricism, fiction more acceptable than facts. It gives me little pleasure to be able to say: "I told you so". The harm is done, with millions of uneducated, practically illiterate and innumerate youngsters who are almost unemployable roaming the streets, making up the legions of football hooligans, and making Britain the laughing stock of Europe. A flourishing modern society needs well-educated men and women, prepared to take their part in a competitive world, knowledgeable and willing to work hard. What our educational system has produced, instead, is exactly the opposite; is it surprising that our industrial performance is so poor, that our rate of inflation is among the highest in European countries, that unemployment is much greater here than among our competitors, and that productivity is rising more slowly than in most European countries? There is a close correspondence between all these indices of national well-being, and the effects of education.

Cox & Marks (1988) have this to say.

First there is a great inconsistency of the heart of the arguments used to justify comprehensive re-organisation. In the early days of the policy we were told that comprehensive schools were needed because selective schools held back many pupils, especially those from the lower social classes. More recently, massive efforts, albeit unsuccessful as we have seen, have gone in for trying to show that the poorer average results obtained by comprehensive schools can be explained by the lower social class of their pupils. This inconsistency seems to us to bear on two important matters. First, it suggests the unfortunate but increasingly probable conclusion that the comprehensive revolution may have handicapped the education of the very people it was mainly meant to help. And second, if it suggests the elevation of social class into the central position, then the debate is mistaken. The crucial questions to ask about pupils and their education are surely not about what social class they come from, but rather about whether their abilities and aptitudes are being recognised and encouraged. The asking of the right kind of question has been frustrated for too long by a climate of opinion which has stressed equality of outcome before equality of opportunity, and which has displayed an obsession with social class and as a consequence neglect of individual differences. The result has been a near-taboo on the public discussion of differences in individual abilities and attainments. In future much greater attention may well need to be paid to assessing individual differences, and to devising policies which allow them to be recognised into assessing the effectiveness of those policies.

One important point that needs to be emphasised again and again in this debate is the need for objective assessment, prompt and detailed publication of results, and sophisticated analysis of changes that are taking place in school achievement. Most of those

who have been responsible for the debacle that is our modern educational system persistently refuse to institute monitoring of educational results, or to publish such results as may have been collected. I recall asking Mrs Thatcher why, when she was Minister of Education, she had not instructed her civil servants to collect such data. She replied that it had been one of her first directives, but that when she asked a year later to see the results, she found that nothing whatever had been done. It is this refusal to test educational theories in the crucible of actual scholastic achievement that is the most reprehensible aspect of this whole affair, and the experiences of Cox & Marks in collecting data which proved establishment ideology wrong illustrate the refusal of politically and ideologically motivated people to take seriously the outcome problem—if the results of a policy are disastrous, let us keep the result secret and continue the policy! Examinations are not perfect instruments for ascertaining achievement, but until something better comes along they are the only measure we have to estimate the success or failure of particular educational policies.

One may raise the question of why so many people who ought to know better have accepted the desirability of equality of outcome, rather than of opportunity, have rejected the use of intelligence tests, and the very concept of intelligence in their discussions of education, and have become critical of the contributions made by psychologists in the educational area. Snyderman & Rothman (1988) in their book on *The IQ Controversy: the media and public policy* have suggested that these views owe much to the misinformation and disinformation on these issues being disseminated by the media. They carried out a very large-scale investigation of the opinions of over 600 experts in educational and developmental psychology, behavioural genetics, and other relevant areas; they also looked at the way the same issues were treated by the newspapers, radio and television. Regarding the views of experts, they found

that those with expertise in areas related to intelligence testing hold generally positive attitudes about the validity and usefulness of intelligence and aptitude tests. These experts believe that such tests adequately measure most important elements of intelligence, and that they do so in a way that is basically fair to minority groups. Intelligence, as measured by intelligence tests, is seen as important to success in our society. Those within- and between-group differences in test scores are believed to reflect significant genetic differences; for within-group differences, a majority of the variation in IQ is felt to be associated with genetic variation. Finally, they support the continued use of tests at their present level in elementary and secondary schools, and an admission to schools of higher education. (p. 169)

Thus it is untrue, as is sometimes suggested, that psychologists like Jensen, Herrnstein and myself are mavericks advocating dogmas rejected by the majority of experts; quite the contrary is true. What I was saying in my 1975 article, and what Jensen, Herrnstein and others have been saying, is simply a statement of the majority view of experts familiar with the field.

Why then this public belief in the existence of a great argument among experts, and a rejection of intelligence and intelligence testing? As Snyderman & Rothman point out,

the news media ... present a very different picture of testing than that obtained from a community of expert opinion. By stressing the indeterminacy of a definition of intelligence, the limitations of tested ability, the ubiquitousness of test misuse, the inordinate control exerted by test-makers,

encouraged by their own tests, the news media has presented the reading and viewing public it has taught with an image of testing, one more consistent with the opinion of a disappointed test-taker than that of those who know most about tests. The views of the expert community are lost when Herrnstein, Jensen and Shockley, in addition to being frequently misrepresented, are cast as intellectual loners, in their defence of substantial heritability and validity of tests. Moreover, whether as a result of disinclination to clarify issues that would put testing and its supporters in a better light, or because of inadequate technical training, journalists have done a great disservice to their audience by portraying IQ heritability as an all-or-non phenomenon, and by confusing within- and between-group heritability, cultural deprivation and cultural bias, and aptitude and achievement. (p. 247)

Nowhere is the utter bias of the media in this respect shown better than in its treatment of the Burt affair. When Sir Cyril Burt was originally accused, on the basis of circumstantial and not very convincing evidence, of having fabricated some of the twin data on which he based his estimate of the heritability of intelligence, all the newspapers, not only in England, but also in the rest of the civilised world, carried banner headlines to suggest that this proved that heredity had nothing to do with intelligence. As Joynson (1989) has pointed out, the evidence is certainly far from conclusive that Burt did falsify or invent any data, and in any case of course his contribution is not needed to establish the point; the conclusion that heredity contributes something like 70% of the total variance to differences in IQ was already firmly established in 1941, long before Burt made any contributions to the field, and has since received a great deal of supportive evidence, even when Burt's contribution is completely omitted (Eysenck, 1979).

This treatment received by an outstanding psychologist, knighted for his contribution to education, should be compared with that received by a number of psychologists who have claimed to have been able to raise the intelligence of low-level children by up to 30 points through special educational means. These claims were widely published, particularly in the American newspapers and other media, but the facts of the situation were that they were all completely fraudulent! This did not lead to any prominent disclaimers on the part of the newspapers, or the television programmes, which had previously given publicity to these claims (Spitz, 1986). Readers and viewers would still be under the impression that the claims that had been made were perfectly valid! This illustrates well the one law for the rich, another law for the poor character of media treatment for psychological issues. How can we hope to persuade people to use psychological findings in the service of education when those who we are trying to persuade are being grossly misled by the media about the actual state of scientific knowledge? It is not my intention here to discuss the reasons for the misleading nature of the writings of journalists, or TV reporters; I am merely concerned to point out the influence such a misleading report has on the understanding of the wider public of the issues involved. In fact, there is no IQ controversy with a few mavericks advocating the importance of genetic factors, the relative accuracy of IQ measurement of intelligence, and the predictive powers of such measures for educational achievement. There is practically unanimity on these issues among experts; the alleged controversy arises because ignorant and often politically motivated people pretend that there is such a controversy. The book by Snyderman & Rothman should be compulsory reading for anyone believing in the existence of such a controversy.

In a sense this is a sad but not unexpected sequel to my 1975 article. It did not

contain anything that was novel or original; it simply pointed out the consequences of psychological facts that were firmly established, and agreed on by experts in the field from all over the world. The consequences of disregarding all we knew about intelligence, ability-testing, personality, etc., were predictable and predicted; they have been truly devastating as far as the education of our children is concerned. We may hope, but without much confidence, that the lesson will have been learned. Unfortunately, the same demagogues are still peddling the same remedies, uninfluenced by past failures and catastrophic deterioration in school achievement consequent upon the adoption of their methods. A return to sanity, so obviously needed, may be a long time a-coming; ideological and political preconceptions are not easily rooted out by appeals to reason, fact or consequences. That, too, has been known for a long time, and it must make one pessimistic about the future of education in this country.

## REFERENCES

- COX, C.B. & BOYSON, R. (1975) *Black Paper 1975: the fight for education* (London, Dent & Sons, Ltd.).
- COX, C.B. & BOYSON, R. (1977) *Black Paper 1977* (London, Maurice Temple Smith).
- COX, C.B. & DYSON, A.E. (nd) *Black Paper One: fight for education* (London, The Critical Quarterly Society).
- COX, C.B. & DYSON, A.E. (nd) *Black Paper Two: the crisis in education* (London, The Critical Quarterly Society).
- COX, C.B. & DYSON, A.E. (Eds) (nd) *Black Paper Three: goodbye Mr Short* (London, The Critical Quarterly Society).
- COX, C. & MARKS, J. (1988) *The Indolence of Office* (London, The Claridge Press).
- EYSENCK, H.J. (1975) Equality and education: fact and fiction, *Oxford Review of Education*, 1(1).
- EYSENCK, H.J. (1979) *The Structure and Measurement of Intelligence* (New York, Springer-Verlag).
- JOYNSON, R.B. (1989) *The Burt Affair* (London, Routledge).
- O'KEEFE, D. The Real Lessons to be Learned in our Schools, *Daily Mail*, March 9, 1990.
- MARKS, J., COX, C. & PAMIAN-SRZEDNICKI, M. (1983) *Standards in English Schools* (London, National Council for Educational Standards).
- MARKS, J., COX, C. & PAMIAN-SRZEDNICKI, M. (1986) *Examination Performance of Secondary Schools in the Inner London Education Authority* (London, National Council for Educational Standards).
- MARKS, J. & PAMIAN-SRZEDNICKI, M. (1985) *Standards in English Schools: second report* (London, National Council for Educational Standards).
- SNYDERMAN, M. & ROTHMAN, S. (1988) *The IQ Controversy: The media and public policy* (Oxford, Transaction Books).
- SPITZ, H.H. (1986) *The Raising of Intelligence* (Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum).

*Correspondence:* Professor H. J. Eysenck, Institute of Psychiatry, De Crespigny Park, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AF, United Kingdom.