

*Politics and the Primary Teacher* by P. Cunningham. London: Routledge (2012). Pp 144 (pbk) ISBN 978041554959.

The book is aimed at primary school teachers and students in teacher education with the mission to convince practitioners of the political nature of education and, in particular, of primary teaching. It explores the political dimension of a series of educational topics: the curriculum, citizenship, pedagogy, the workforce, audit and inspection, local accountability and democracy. The book benefits from a focus on primary education, distinguishing it from those books on policy which attempt to cover the whole range and phases of education. Another feature is the reference to policy across the UK, rather than the exclusive focus on England, and there are some interesting comparisons between England, Wales and Scotland.

Many students come to education and teaching with little prior knowledge of, or indeed interest in, politics. They are, of course, largely products of the 1988 National Curriculum which excluded the teaching of politics or the social sciences in maintained schools. Chapter 1 offers a clear introduction to those with little previous knowledge to the nature of politics, policy and the role of the state with a helpful explanation of the politics of the different parties. The second gives a lengthy historical presentation of educational developments alongside the social and political events with a helpful chronological table. The chapter emphasises the original and ongoing role of religion and the Church in the development of education. Each chapter on the different topics similarly benefits from a strong historical and political analysis, together with up-to-date accounts of developments under the 2010 Coalition Government.

The strength of the book is the detailed historical analysis of national policy in each of the topics. It is intended to raise the political awareness of teachers and is largely successful. The chapter on the curriculum is particularly powerful, demonstrating the political nature of knowledge and teachers may well be surprised to learn of the politics of pedagogy. The story of successive governments' control of teacher education is well done.

As a text for those studying education as an academic discipline there could be a stronger analysis of the economics of government policy. In the final chapter on looking forward, there is a brief reference to neoliberal politics. However, there is little explanation of the nature of the neoliberal economic thinking which underpins the 1988 Education Act and subsequent legislation to create the commodification and marketisation of education. This, surely, has been, and continues to be, the mainspring of the education policies of all the governments since Thatcher: if schools and teachers are forced to compete with each other, quality will be improved.

The book is a valuable source for teacher education and education studies, giving a highly readable introduction for those with limited knowledge of politics. Occasionally

Cunningham is a little too parsimonious with references which would benefit the serious academic student. For example, 'In 1963 a report on higher education recommended the introduction of BEd degree courses, beginning in 1967' (p.17). The report was the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) which revolutionised the whole of higher education as well as teacher education should surely be known to all students of education.

Committee on Higher Education (Robbins) (1963) *Report*. London: HMSO.

Stephen Ward, Bath Spa University.