

PRIME MINISTER

9 July 1987

Education : Lessons from America

*We must follow
this up
now*

The visit of the Secretary of Education, William Bennett has proved a great success. Apart from individual meetings and a joint TV appearance with Kenneth Baker, the seminar and dinner at the CPS were also greatly appreciated.

I believe that his style, speeches, publications and tactics contain important lessons for us in winning the education debate in this country.

1. 'What Works'

Everyone I have met who has read What Works (especially the issue on Educating Disadvantaged Children) has been impressed with them. Yet I suspect that these publications are unknown to many Chief Education Officers, local education officials, teachers and lecturers in teacher training colleges in this country.

Secretary Bennett will be delighted to produce a single volume for use in countries other than America - so that we can all share their experience and in particular the success of certain schools in educating under-privileged children.

If these volumes were distributed to all CEOs, head teachers of inner city schools, etc, they could be an important catalyst in the UK situation. The evidence they provide will force our opponents on to the defensive, as the US is

widely acknowledged to have more experience than us in tackling inner city problems.

2. Visit by selected US heads and teachers

The publication of such a volume would be greatly helped if it were to be linked by a visit from some of the teachers who are mentioned as successes.

Once again if we focussed on educating under privileged children, such a group of US heads and teachers (some of whom would be black) could make a real impact in places such as Brixton, Hackney, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol etc. We could use it so that

- (a) the opposition is put on the defensive,
- (b) heads and teachers who have been quiet are encouraged to speak out,
- (c) we can show in a practical way that our methods work,
- (d) we can make this event very attractive to the media.

3. Joint UK-US Education Conference

The focal point for such a visit might be a joint UK-US one day conference. (During my time as an academic I organised a number of highly successful conferences with the US Embassy) Secretary Bennett and Kenneth Baker could be keynote speakers and the audience should consist of

Chief Education Officers, educationalists, heads and senior teachers and education journalists.

We could at this stage introduce discussion of good British schools such as John Loughborough and the Oratory, Brompton.

4. A British Version of 'What Works'

We need a British version of 'What Works'. Successful schools need to be celebrated and held up as examples which others can follow.

We cannot rely on the HMI to produce this: because of their constituency, they would have to hedge anything they said with too many 'ifs' and 'buts'.

But we do need people to identify the schools and we need a vehicle for publishing the results. One possibility might be if Kenneth Baker were to do it through his special adviser. Another might be for it to be done via the CPS. Yet another might be through an independent trust. The publications would be practical and very British.

5. Visits by British teachers to US

Through the US Education Department it would be good if we could encourage a UK/US charity to send UK teachers for a short visit to the US, focussing on inner city schools.

Conclusion

In the early seventies many of us faced an uphill task in trying to sell "monetarism" and refute "Keynesianism". It was an enormous challenge and I believe it was achieved in no small measure due to American support (e.g. visits and writings from Friedman, Brunner and Meltzer, Alan Walters' US connections etc).

We now need to set in train a similar assault on the citadel of the "New Orthodoxy" of contemporary education.

I believe that your support for initiatives such as these, although small, could nevertheless be the crucial factor in changing the climate of debate and gaining acceptance for our policies.

BH.

BRIAN GRIFFITHS