

Education, history and democracy

BERA History special interest group

Launch event

UCL Institute of Education

Wednesday 6 July 2016, 2 pm to 6.30 pm

Room 728, UCL IOE, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H
OAL

Register at <https://www.bera.ac.uk/event/education-history-and-democracy>

Free for all members of BERA and of the History of Education Society (£5 for student non-members, £10 for non-student non-members)



This is the launch event for the newly established BERA History special interest group. Please do join us to celebrate this launch and to help us plan for the future. We welcome all who are interested in history and educational research, for example the history of education, biography, life history, the history curriculum and representations of history in schools and informal educational settings.

The seminar for this event is on the theme of Education, history and democracy. This is an opportunity to discuss the powerful theme of democracy in relation to education and history with our keynote speakers, marking also the centenary of John Dewey's Democracy and Education (1916).

You are warmly invited to join us for tea and coffee to introduce the SIG, informal talks and discussion, and a reception.

2.00pm – Registration, tea and coffee

2.30pm – Gary McCulloch – Introduction and opening discussion

3.00pm – Lori Beckett – Lost histories of poverty and schooling and the idea of policy activism

3.30pm – Hsiao-Yuh Ku – In pursuit of democracy: Shena Simon and the reform of secondary education in England, 1938-1948

4.00pm – Steven Cowan – Why does John Dewey matter in 2016?

4.30pm – BERA conference and future plans

5.00pm – Reception and departures

You are welcome to join us after the event for an informal meal in a local restaurant.

You may also be interested in the summer conference of the International Centre for Historical Research in Education (ICHRE) at the UCL Institute of Education on Thursday 7 July – details and registration link as follows:

Please see this website for full details of the

papers: <https://ichre.ioe.ac.uk/events/conference/> or

contact ioe.ichre@ucl.ac.uk for information and to register.

[Outlines of keynote talks and bionotes of main speakers](#)

Lost histories of poverty and schooling and the idea of policy activism

Lori Beckett

In current schools policy, continuous across governments, there is ready identification of disadvantaged students according to official designations like free-school meals (FSM) and 'Pupil Premium'. This is at least some recognition of low socio-economic status family background given parents/carers' low incomes or receipt of welfare benefits. Much rides on these designated labels in England's current neoliberal performative system of schooling, especially in regards national benchmarks, floor targets, testing and results, high-pressure policy- and time-pressures on so-called 'failing' schools, often the butt of scorn and blame. This is particularly acute in view of the Cameron Conservative Government's 2016 White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, which includes a

proposal for full academisation of all schools by 2022 and which intends to consolidate a self-improving system free from local authorities.

This presentation will facilitate an exploratory discussion of these designated labels, the strategic place they hold in schools policy-making and what they mean for everyday life in urban schools in socially disadvantaged areas. It begins by looking back to the C19th and Bradford Independent Labour Party's long fought campaign against infant mortality, and for nursery schools, council houses, and free school meals, and returns to the present era with its sanctions that favour the principle of school markets over the principle of local government and its work of democratic public administration. It considers life history and narrative approaches to the storied accounts of free-school meals, now a compensatory measure that once marked working peoples' fight-back over time. The intention is to inform schools policy in regards child poverty, given arguments about post-welfare state policy for market-based action in contradistinction to an interventionist and democratic state. The hope is to address the challenges currently facing school Heads and teachers to provide worthwhile and meaningful schooling experiences for students marked by poverty and cumulative multiple deprivation.

In Pursuit of Democracy: Shena Simon and the reform of secondary education in England, 1938-1948

Hsiao-Yuh Ku

Shena Simon (1883-1972), a leading English socialist and educationist, devoted her life to bringing the ideal of 'equality of opportunity' into the English educational system in pursuit of a democratic and just society. Especially in the 1930s and 1940s, she actively participated in a wide range of debates, calling for the reform of secondary education. This paper explores the continuity and changes in Simon's reform proposals in relation to her democratic ideals from the appearance of the Spens Report (1938) to the publication of her book, *Three Schools or One?* (1948). In addition, since Simon's visits to the Soviet Union, the USA and Scotland helped shape her democratic ideals and discourses on reforms, her international and comparative perspective is also emphasized here. The evidence in this paper shows that Simon's democratic ideals, in particular her ideal of 'equality of educational opportunity', not only featured English democracy but also acted constantly as a solid foundation for her reform proposals. Her ideals also helped to explain the dramatic change in her attitude towards comprehensive education in the postwar years in England.

Hsiao-Yuh Ku completed her PhD study at the UCL Institute of Education in 2012. She is currently teaching as an assistant professor at the National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan and, in the meantime, working on her book about democratic discourses and educational reform in England in the 1930s and 1940s.

Why does John Dewey Matter in 2016?

Steven Cowan

Steven Cowan will raise a number of issues about the benefits of reading and seeking to apply some of the ideas developed by John Dewey. Steve will argue that despite Dewey's status as a key educational philosopher, much of his work deals with ways that ordinary people with a concern for learning, can act in order to foster a sense of community and democracy. As neo-liberal thinking

is increasingly challenged, might it be that Dewey's reputation can undergo a transformation as people seek a more humane approach to the teaching of the coming generation?

*Steven Cowan is a lecturer in education at the UCL Institute of Education. In 2012 he completed a PhD on the growth of public literacy in eighteenth century England at the Institute of Education, and he has published a number of articles and books including (with Woodin and McCulloch) **Secondary Education and the Raising of the School Leaving age**, and is editor of a recent edited collection, **New directions for education in China**.*