

FAIR AND EQUAL EDUCATION

An evidence-based policy manifesto
that respects children and young people



SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
SOCIAL JUSTICE

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
**RACE, ETHNICITY
AND EDUCATION**

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
SEXUALITIES

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
**YOUTH STUDIES AND
INFORMAL EDUCATION**

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP:
**PRACTITIONER
RESEARCH**

Foreword

This Manifesto emerges from the work of six of BERA's Special Interest Groups, or SIGs as they are usually called. The six SIGs that came together to undertake this work responded to the call from BERA to find innovative ways of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Association during 2014.

The task they set themselves was to review a wide range of research carried out by BERA members and others with a view to drawing together the implications for policy relating to the experiences and the rights and responsibilities of children and young people. They have also been stimulating debate through a very active blog.

As we approach the UK General Election in May 2015, this group has prepared a Manifesto setting out an agenda for a fair and equal education that has the interests of children and young people at its heart.

All too often we may criticise politicians for not paying sufficient attention to research findings. Here we have a document that can help everyone to be better informed in the crucial arguments about how the lives of our young citizens are being shaped.

So, while this Manifesto does not aim to represent the position of all BERA members, it does identify key issues for debate and develops arguments on the basis of a wide range of excellent research evidence which is documented in both the detailed Endnotes in this publication and in further reading on BERA's website. We are indebted to the SIG convenors and members who contributed to its development.

Please use the Manifesto and respond to it during the weeks and months ahead!

Ian Menter
President, BERA

Children and young people are entitled to an education that has their best interests at heart, and develops their personality, talents and abilities to the full. Fair and equal education recognises differences in children and young people’s experiences, interests and backgrounds and ensures equality in access and provision. Over the last 40 years, evidence from educational research has told us about the extent of inequality. It has also told us how to make education more equal and fair:

- We need to raise all children and young people’s educational attainment to high levels, while promoting and developing their non-cognitive outcomes, including health and wellbeing.
- We need to ensure children and young people have equal access to a stimulating and enriching curriculum that balances academic knowledge with opportunities to develop creative expression and practical skills.
- We need high quality schooling that is equitably distributed (both between and within institutions), and accessible to all.
- We need to recognise that children and young people’s entitlement to good quality education extends beyond school to include early childhood, further education, higher education, work-based and vocational learning, informal learning and out-of-school activities.
- We need to encourage children and young people to form opinions about and participate in the decisions that affect them.
- We need institutions that are accountable to children, young people and the communities in which they live.
- We need to create a more equal, fairer and flourishing society where all children and young people feel included and have a sense of belonging in 21st century Britain.

By addressing these key areas we can achieve the kind of education needed to respect children and young people's entitlement to quality education. We recognise that the path to achieve such gains requires a long-term vision, including further research. However, to protect and promote children and young people's educational entitlements, the UK Government can take four immediate steps towards achieving the goal of fair and equal education.

We recommend that the Government develops policy which promotes:

01

Fair and relevant curriculum and attainment that leads to meaningful opportunities, like employment and further study.

03

Education that recognises and appropriately responds to the differences that make substantive differences in children and young people's lives.¹

02

High quality, research-informed professionals to work with children and young people.

04

Education that is developed and evaluated fairly and rigorously, and is accountable to children, young people, their families and the communities in which they live.

**How can the
Government take
immediate steps
towards fair and
equal education?**

01 Fair and relevant curriculum and attainment that leads to meaningful opportunities, like employment and further study

We want policy that:

- Does more to build and recognise children and young people's social and cultural capital – i.e. their non-financial resources such as qualifications, interests, understanding and social contacts.²
- Develops curriculum for children and young people that supports the democratic values of a diverse Britain – e.g. ethnically, sexually, religiously, linguistically, culturally diverse and differently abled.³
- Includes local curriculum and project-based learning that takes into account what children and young people want to know to complement a national entitlement.⁴
- Takes a longer term and broader view on what success means so that children and young people are valued for their effort as well as their long-term achievements within and outside formal education.⁵



02 High quality, research-informed professionals to work with children and young people

We want policy that:

- Builds a research-rich, self-improving education system that recruits, develops and retains the best practitioners.⁶



- Enables professional education for pre-service and in-service teachers that makes them aware of the hidden ways in which inequalities of 'race', ethnicity, gender, class and fixed ideas about ability play out in the classroom and affect the outcomes of children's learning.⁷



- Increases return on the investment in teaching assistants who support children and young people's participation in education, by including them in sector developments in professional education, and providing them with recognisable career pathways.⁸



- Provides training for frontline professionals in responding sensitively and confidently to matters of violence, extremist views, mental ill-health or other stresses that impact on the lives of children and young people.⁹



- Values youth and community workers as allies in developing informal learning in schools and beyond schools.¹⁰



03 Education that recognises and appropriately responds to the differences that make substantive differences in children and young people's lives¹¹

We want policy that:

- Supports all children's and young people's sense of belonging in 21st century Britain, including recognising and supporting the emotional and educational needs of children who have migrated and are refugees or asylum-seekers.¹²



- Funds targeted community-based education like language or sexual health classes and has funding that reflects the actual challenges for schools of supporting children and young people with complex and diverse learning needs.¹³



- Ensures all children and young people have access to alternative education if they are not catered for in mainstream schooling and that the educational entitlement of all young people designated by their schools as 'at risk' is monitored and reviewed.¹⁴



- Enables children and young people to develop respect for themselves and form mutually respectful social, intercultural and sexual relationships with others.¹⁵



04 Education that is developed and evaluated fairly and rigorously, and is accountable to children, young people, their families and the communities in which they live

We want policy that:

- Recognises that there is no advantage to private sector involvement in the education and services provided for children and young people, and that privatisation and consumer choice in the current education policy infrastructure is contributing to social inequality.¹⁶



- Promotes active intervention in all forms of discrimination against children and young people, including overt and implicit racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and religious intolerance and listens to the voices of all no matter what their background or the language they speak.¹⁷



- Reinigorates, properly resources and democratises local authorities and other public bodies so that they are equipped to support children and young people's access to life opportunities.¹⁸



- Is informed by research reflecting a broad view of what counts as evidence, where evidence includes knowledge formed from different types of research and practice and is used as a base to inform and guide more effective, fairer and ethical policy decisions for children and young people.¹⁹



Looking to the future

Putting in place these recommendations now will allow us to work towards the fairer and more equal society to which children and young people are entitled, and towards more equitable educational outcomes for all. We, the educational research community, in collaboration with the government and the wider public, commit to engaging in further national debate, inquiry and research to develop policies and practices that advance the best interests of children and young people. An agenda for going forward expands upon our recommendations.

Together we need to:

- Review government policies and professional practices that impact on children and young people examining their underlying assumptions about ability and the potential negative consequences of fixing ability and reproducing stereotypes.
- Support children and young people's full development by attaching greater priority to all children's emotional and physical lives, through promoting the development of their emotional literacy, resilience and their health and well-being.
- Reframe our understandings of 21st Century Britain that are more reflective of our globalised world. We need to promote inclusive notions of Britishness which enables children and young people from all ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds to affirm their identity as Britons.
- Challenge educational provision that prioritises commercial interests and marketisation, and conceptualises success solely in terms of employability to the detriment of children and young people's wider and longer-term educational and development needs.
- Proactively address all forms of discrimination in educational policy and practice, and beyond, to ensure issues such as racism, sexism and homophobia are addressed systemically as well as in terms of individual acts of name calling and violence.
- Prioritise fairness in education by ensuring government and policy makers forge greater constructive links with educators and use the full range of research to inform their policy making.

You can read more about the evidence that informs this policy manifesto here:

Respecting Children and Young People
<https://berarespectingchildren.wordpress.com>

And for a full list of references visit our reading list on the BERA website.
www.bera.ac.uk/project/respecting-children-learning-from-the-past-redesigning-the-future

Endnotes

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This document is the outcome of the BERA Respecting Children and Young People project.

The project is an initiative of six BERA special interest groups (SIGs) (Social Justice, Race Ethnicity and Education, Sexualities, Inclusive Education, Youth and Informal Education, Practitioner Research) who have since September 2013 consulted SIG members through meetings, online discussions, and posting on our blog.

