USES AND ABUSES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION: THE RELATION OF PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND FROM 1870 TO THE PRESENT

John Coldron
Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

Background
There is a pervasive sense that primary schools and staff have lower standing than secondary schools and teachers. They seem to have less capital than, and are subordinately positioned in relation to, secondary. For example there have been detailed and highly prescriptive interventions by central governments to affect primary school practice but not the same intensity of intervention in secondary. And primary schools get less funding per head. These and other significant differences are in need of examination and explanation.

Focus and methodology
I look at the history of the relation between primary and secondary schools in England and how they have been defined in relation to each other. I begin with the invention of the distinction as marking different and parallel systems and how and why this transformed into different age stages of schooling. Using Tilly's approach to durable inequalities the analysis considers what different problems at different times the distinction has been used to address.

Findings
From its inception the divide has been used as a sign for different versions and visions not only of educational practice but also of wider ideals and political purposes. Primary and secondary schools, and their characteristic practices, have been variously celebrated or derided. The term primary schooling as used by Lowe was intended to denote an inferior parallel system of elementary education, implemented in 1870. But it also provided a basis for the development of an alternative version of education. The task of maintaining class divisions passed in 1944 to the new secondary school sector with primary practice determined largely by its preparatory role. Following a brief period when an idealised notion of primary schooling was championed, subordination continues to be effected through forms of pedagogic discourse and prescription of practices.

Analytical framework and contribution to knowledge
No new historical facts are presented but the story is retold with a focus on the positioning of primary and secondary schools to each other in terms of relative prestige or the possession of symbolic capital and how the distinction has been used as part of wider political purposes. The socio-historic analysis identifies a case of durable inequality and gives critical distance on current policy, and helps understand how institutions might be positioned in local school fields as local competitive arenas are being reconfigured.