RE-VISIONING COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLING: FROM EDUCATION FOR THE FEW TO EDUCATION FOR ALL.

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In a contemporary educational landscape, characterized by a steeply unequal hierarchy of educational provision, and surrounded by growing economic inequalities that translate into hugely inequitable educational opportunities (Dorling 2010), the English educational system is moving further and further away from a socially just model of education (Francis and Mills 2012). Comprehensive schooling was once seen as a socially just solution, but comprehensive schooling in the 21st century has become very different to how it was envisioned in the 1960s and 70s; a pale shadow of the democratic, socially just system its early proponents fought for (Franklin and McCulloch 2007). Over the last two decades both external and internal constraints on comprehensivisation have intensified (Reay 2012). Externally, the growth of privatisation within state education in the form of free schools and academies has added to the damaging impact of the private sector (Ball 2009). Internally, regimes of testing and assessment, and practices of setting and streaming have further undermined the comprehensive ideal. This paper details the current unjust state of play, before outlining some of the ways forward that might help to restore social justice to the heart of state schooling.


