NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION NORFOLK DISTRICT

EDUCATION REPORT MARCH 2021

RACISM WORKSHOPS

Students can learn about race issues in Norfolk with the help of a pioneering project led by a seaside theatre. The online zoom workshops – looking at race and Black history, including key figures in history – are being run by Rewriting Rural Racism, an Arts Council funded scheme created and curated by young performers from Sheringham Little Theatre.

The sessions hope to spark discussion about “colour blindness”, white privilege and how people identify themselves as well as getting youngsters to think about the challenges of growing up as an “incomer” – which can be made all the harder by other people’s attitudes, actions and language. Ashton Owen from Norwich and Tilda Fassih from Sheringham – both from mixed race backgrounds – are delivering the hour long interactive workshops for schools in North Norfolk and Great Yarmouth.

The pair are also shooting a series of short films highlighting the story of migration in the county stretching back to prehistoric times, the Viking and Norman invasions, medieval Dutch “strangers” and wartime refugees. There will be resource packs available for teachers. The project is due to be completed by April. If interested in the workshops email: Debbie@sheringhamlittletheatre.com

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GERM: GLOBAL EDUCATION REFORM MOVEMENT

Information gleaned from “Teachers Undefeated” by Jon Berry

It has five features:

Standardization – relies on an education system which is outcomes based. It achieves this through testing, league tables, target setting and inspections.

Core Subjects – which makes testing easier and leads to a hierarchy of curriculum subjects

Low risk ways to reach learning goals – so there is a narrow focus of learning especially for exam subjects

Corporate Management Models – schools become self-governing entities which leads to target setting, performance management schemes and productivity analyses

Test based accountability policies – these can result in a variety of malpractices to ensure success. This tends to thwart the creativity and individuality of teachers and hampers their ability to address a subject imaginatively.

HOW DID GERM UK COME ABOUT?

It developed as a result of the Education Reform Act 1988 under Margaret Thatcher’s government. The National Curriculum that it advocated led within 30 yrs to OFSTED. It created LMS (Local Management of schools), open enrolment, standardized tests, league tables, inspections and gave schools the chance to opt out of LA9Local Authority)control. All this was done with the idea that teachers were not doing their best for their pupils and that educational standards were not high enough. Yet teachers enter the profession in order to enhance students’ chances in the real world of work. It is a child centred approach and they see education as emancipatory.

This is not the vision of government which regards the market as the driving force. There has to be measurable outcomes for assessing productivity. So we have PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). Institutional success, job security and working conditions are dependent on the need to” produce”. The resulting degrading of learning to achieve this government approved success has resulted in the constant tests that we now find within the education system. School Leaders insist upon the tests as the government requires it and it makes schools look good in the League Tables.

GERM has created methods of accountability, scrutiny and micromanagement that can be counter-productive in the lives of teachers and can hinder the best management of schools. Teachers have always accepted accountability based on an education system that endeavours to suit and meet the needs of the child. However, Corporate Management Models need to scrutinize production, outcomes and practices. This has resulted in OFSTED, Lesson Observations and the Learning Walk.

OFSTED’S role is an inspectoral one based on the view of education as a marketable commodity. Schools need to produce results and the rate of production needs to be measured, inspected and compared to others. (The competitor Schools). OFSTED relies on a narrow and limited amount of real evidence on which to base judgements. These affect performance related pay and lead to unsound date driven decision making.

 OFSTED works on the theory of the “perfect lesson” as if such could ever be replicated. Yet, as teachers know, every class, teacher and lesson is unique. Lesson Obervations are the “in-house “method of scrutiny and control. Formulaic rules have to be followed for start/finish of lessons and lesson objectives and summary statements on the whiteboard may also be required. The Learning Walk is another aberration – this is spot checking by management that there is compliance with the mechanically applied teaching indicators and expectations. If done, the tick list is complete!

The book trawl another controlling mechanism to check that school marking schemes are being followed. Too often it frustrates teachers into controlling the amount that pupils produce!! Such standardized procedures are a low risk way to achieve narrow learning goals. This standardisation of education has narrowed the curriculum (Core Subjects) and leads to a less rich educational experience for the students.

The globalized, marketed world of neo-liberal education tries relentlessly to make education a commodity and private good. The government wants to show that expenditure has good value. So schools are inspected and children tested so that the required data can be produced.

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