

The depoliticisation and politicisation of Scottish Education

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This paper discusses the ways in which Scottish education policy is currently both depoliticising and politicising education. In Scotland, UK, drives to ensure quality education are afoot. Two recent missives from government seek to both deploy data as a means to observe and drive improvement, and release head teachers and the like from the 'shackles' of collective control. Whilst the former has already occurred the latter is currently being enacted. This governance review seeks to shift responsibility for key areas of education away from the collective responsibility of local authorities to the individual responsibilities of schools and school leaders. This governance shift seeks to release such individuals from the political machinations that exist in local government so that they might better enact policies to drive up improvements in test scores and so reduce the gap between rich and poor. In one sense, then, they are an attempt at the politicisation of education: they attempt to obviate the need for democratic control from the locality and shift this to the site of the individual school. However, concurrent with this it is evident that such moves are reminiscent of changes in educational governance seen in England which, despite the rhetoric of 'freeing up' school leaders, have actually in many ways ensured that other groups have control of the agenda alongside missives from central government. In this respect they are attempts to depoliticise education; the alterations seek to shift control to the centre under the illusion of increased agency for school staff.

The paper uses positioning theory to examine the ways in which language and action are deployed to sell such moves; the paper examines the Discourses (Gee, 2012) that abound in the drive to improve education through the alteration of roles at the local and national level. It outlines the changes that have come into force as well as consultations undertaken. It notes the positions held by those currently in national government and the ways that they have outlined and justified their proposals. In summary it signals the ways in which the depoliticisation of education is being enacted whilst at the same time it demonstrates the ways and means by which Scottish education is being politicised.

Keywords: Scottish Education; Politics in Education; Depoliticising education

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