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## The Examiner : James Booth and the origins of common examinations, by F. Foden

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against the "real world" schools. Ironically, though its language and erudition make it difficult to access, this book could well be used to generate such reflection. There should be more room within the coherent theory to allow for further debate between the humanists and the materialists.

#### ENDNOTE

1. For instance, see my article "On equitable cakecutting" (Haynes, 1989) where I argue that Dawkins presents a case for funding more women in maths and science on the grounds of equity, but does not argue for more men in arts and education because he "sees" the problem of equity/equality through a lens of national productivity rather than personal rights. He is coherent and he can provide facts to back up his case, but still there remain other ways [perhaps less powerful] of construing the facts, and defining the problem.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Foden, F. (1989), *The Examiner: James Booth and the origins of common examinations*. University of Leeds Printing Service, Leeds, 1989, pp. viii + 221.

The use of examinations in the educative process has spread quickly throughout Western education systems since the time of their central role in the early development of educational opportunities in nineteenth century England. Examination change has been evolutionary and revolutionary in nature, involving a number of stages, individuals, institutions, catalytic events and chain reactions. Debate on their role has been virtually continual, at times fierce and sometimes productive. Teacher educators should be aware of this debate and its historical origins for during the past one hundred and fifty years examining has been at the very heart of the schooling process in Western society.

Examinations, their form and operation, have long provided issues of controversy in English schooling. A number of United Kingdom scholars have discussed the development and role of examinations. These include Sir P. Hartog and E.G. Rhodes' *An Examination of Examinations* (1936) and *The Marks of Examiners* (1936), J.L. Brereton's *The Case for Examinations: An account of their place in Education with some proposals for their Reform* (1944), G.B. Jeffery's *External Examinations in Secondary Schools* (1958), R.J. Montgomery's *Examinations: An account of their evolution as administrative devices in England* (1965), J. Roach's *Public Examinations in England: 1850-1900* (1971), R. Dore's *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development* (1976) and R. Macleod's (Ed.). *Days of Judgement: Science, Examinations and the Organization of Knowledge in late Victorian Times* (1982). In spite of their obvious significance and the attention paid them, these studies do not represent an over-abundance of historical research into the actual origins of English school examinations. Moreover, Foden in his book *The Examiner* correctly observes:

... educational historians have, for the most part, tended to lack a proper focus for their treatment of examinations, and their accounts of how they came to have a significant role in the education

system are often casual and inaccurate. Some quite respectable historians tend to make commonplace mistakes about the arrival and impact of examinations. (p. 112).

Examinations began to be woven into the fabric of the education system of Britain during the period (1852-1857) when James Booth was a member and later President of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, now known as the Royal Society of Arts. Once they were introduced into the English education system their use spread "like an epidemic disease" (p. 111). In his book, *The Examiner*, Foden endeavours to add to the history of education literature regarding the significance of examinations to the provision of education. He observes that in traditional educational histories the introduction of examinations;

have usually been treated as interesting addenda to other and more important developments, the initiatives of reformers, the foundations of new institutions, government reports and Acts of Parliament. Their organic significance in the whole system tends to be missed. (p. 111)

The book is both a biography and a history of the origins of examinations. It traces the major events in the life of James Booth, an energetic Irishman, who was foremost in setting in motion the process whereby examinations formed a critical role in English education. Foden devotes separate chapters to the various stages of the life of Booth and intertwines the history of the origin of public examinations conducted by the Society of Arts around his central character. The chapter headings illustrate this intermingling of biography and examination history. The first four chapters are biographical with titles such as Trinity Graduate, Irish Emigrant; Mathematician, Teacher; Priest and Industrial Educator followed by six chapters on the history of the origins of examinations. The final two chapters complete the biography of Booth.

The book should be required reading for those interested in the history of assessment. It has many features that recommend it to educational and social historians. The technique of

interweaving examination reform with the biography of James Booth and biographical portraits of other nineteenth century reformers makes the book both interesting and readable.

Inherent in the technique, however, are distracting features. The chapters on the first examinations conducted by the Society of Arts are crucial to an understanding of the process whereby non-statutory bodies were instrumental in setting the examination agenda, and thereby determining the curricula of large sectors, of nineteenth-century British education.

The book contains references and end notes that cannot be ignored by serious researchers of the history of nineteenth examination procedures. This work also has merits as a social history based on its treatment of the web of personalities involved in the institution of common examinations. The book is thoroughly researched and written in a clear writing style.

Other historians may be prompted to follow the leads indicated by Foden, and produce detailed studies of assessment change. They would thereby assist in redressing an imbalance in educational histories and fill in the gaps in the historical knowledge of examinations. For example, one area which requires detailed study is the role of religion in examination reform. Few, if any, studies on the role of religion in examination reform have been produced. In Australia, however, religious differences were not insignificant to examination change. Foden hints that religious intolerance in England may have been a relevant factor in the origin of common examinations (pp. 106-107; 165). This factor needs to be thoroughly researched.

There are, of course, weaknesses. Biography, while it is attractive and enhances the readability of the book, is too weak a technique to carry the historical sections. The life of James Booth is not sufficiently diverse to stand alone. To overcome this lack, Foden introduces numerous personalities into the story. Booth, the central character, is often placed on the sideline as the roles of numerous other players are discussed. The reader is left floundering in an attempt to ascertain and evaluate the role of these newly introduced participants. This criticism is lessened somewhat by the belated inclusion of an appendix which includes pen portraits of over thirty members of Foden's 'Web of Connection'.

Those with a knowledge of British social history will find little difficulty with the work. Others

will find it advantageous to familiarise themselves first with the characters in the appendix and then turn to the main study armed with Foden's 'Web of Connection' concept. Notwithstanding the appendix, there are obviously too many players for readers with an acquaintance of nineteenth century English society to identify clearly. Others will be confused.

The reader is sometimes left with the impression that in some sections 'Booth' and 'common examinations' are dropped into the text to remind the reader that the theme is not Booth's acquaintances and others, who assisted in the introduction of the Society of Arts common examinations, but rather it is 'James Booth and the origin of examinations'. These historical chapters of the origin of examinations cannot stand alone. If the biographical sections are removed only the history of the Society of Arts in examination formation over a mere four year period remains. Foden has written two monographs: a biography of James Booth, the other, the origin of English examinations.

Examination reform is both a process and systematic phenomena, taking place over time and involving the linking of various events, individuals, organisations and social factors. While it is recognised that the influence of social change on educational reform is not the focus of Foden's work, he nevertheless fails to depict adequately the socio-educational context of the period under review. He concentrates more on the contribution of personalities rather than on social and economic influences. However, a few more sign posts are necessary throughout the study.

To review the book from its own perspective, the writer achieves his objectives. He has presented a thorough study. His sources are intelligently and thoroughly pursued. It should be essential reading for all scholars interested in social history, in particular, the history of examinations. Foden criticises educational histories for lacking a 'proper focus for their treatment of examinations' (p. 112). He cannot be accused of standing under his own criticism for he presents the reader with a 'proper focus' and provides fresh insights. For this his publication is recommended to educators at all levels who wish to gain an insight into the origin of the examination phenomena.

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