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## The Quantitative Dystopia

Readers will be aware that I define education as the expansion of your awareness of human possibility.

If this definition is accepted, it quickly becomes apparent that the agenda of powerful vested interests is anti-educational, and in quite specific ways.

We live in a curiously regressive and puerile age of enchantment with the quantitative.

The quantitative enchantment means that, instead of actually assisting the unemployed to find work, outsourced bureaucratic structures measure success according to the number of appointments kept, interviews and courses attended, and so on.

The usefulness and relevance of the appointments, interviews and courses, however – the things that actually matter to the people supposedly being helped – can be measured only in qualitative terms, so they aren't measured at all.

Focussing on the irrelevant quantitative has the advantage of making it the fault of the unemployed person if s/he does not attend some futile appointment or fails to find work.

Our policy-makers consider it self-evident that people exist solely to become economically productive units, so single parents cease to be eligible for parenting payment if their child or children are over eight years old. The thinking here appears to be that a child over eight can let him or herself into the house and make a snack while waiting for Mum or Dad to get home from work.

The indifference to a child's welfare implied by the policy is breathtaking. For cynicism it is on a par with the policy of closing institutions for the mentally disabled on the grounds that the closures allow the residents to integrate with the community. The facts, of course, are that, for many mentally disabled people, being

'integrated' with the community is equivalent to throwing someone off a cliff and telling them to fly. The money made by selling the land and buildings of the former institutions to developers has nothing to do with the policy, of course.

A new phenomenon in our universities is to move books off-site, allowing only postgraduate students to order certain titles, while moving 'high-demand' material (i.e. prescribed undergraduate texts) on-line. This is presented as making 'learning resources' accessible independent of location. The reality is the sacking of library staff and the annihilation of the physical library space where all thinking students have spent many of their most profitable hours exploring and thinking.

But exploring and thinking can't be measured in quantitative terms. Salary savings, on the other hand, can.