Scottish Education: Between the UK and the Nordic

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ABSTRACT
The (re)opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 cemented calls for small state self-management, particularly along Nordic lines, both to reflect the desire for independence and belief that small states prosper when aligned with similar jurisdictions. However, whether there is a 'Nordic education approach' is questionable. Further, this positioning assumes certain things about Scotland, 'The Scottish', and the Scottish education system. Rather than present Scottish education as *aligning* with *Norden*, it is better to identify pushes and pulls between northern countries and internal/UK factors. This paper examines educational exigencies: pushes and pulls from the Nordic countries and the UK.

Keywords: *Nordic dimension, Scotland, education*

Historically, and contemporarily, the *Nordic Model* has received international praise for its approach to society, politics, and welfare (Childs, 1936; Heidar, 2014). The veracity of this approach is widely debated; some argue it never was (e.g., Mjøset, 1992); others question its current relevance (Bengsston et al., 2014). Assumptions about politically stable, relatively similar states underpin 'Nordic Exceptionalism' through identifiable features: high taxation; well-funded, far-reaching welfare systems; strong cooperation across representative democratic societies; institutional service centralisation; and state friendliness (Berg, 2021). Esping-Andersen (1990) maintains that in the Nordic countries social, political, cultural and economic structures are oriented around state provision, not that of the market or a reliance on familial support and

wealth. Ljiphart (1968) defines the Scandinavian system as centripetal-consensus with three, implicit elements: political (compromise, social consensus, corporatism, and social engineering); welfare (high taxation and high spending); and citizenship (activist, participatory and egalitarian) (Bengtsson et al., 2014). Apocryphal or not, for many, the 'Nordic myth' is referred to and even revered as an example of successful government. However, contemporary operationalisations of the Nordic Model differ from the welfare heyday of the 1930s to 1970s. Importantly, this period offers definitional features for present-day commentary on middle ways between Anglo-American capitalism, the socialism of the pre-1990s Soviet Bloc, and current left-wing governments such as in Venezuela, and is often gazed upon by those who seek to, perhaps, situate contemporary state mechanisms within EU contexts. Accordingly, New Labour's 'Third-Way', touted as non-ideological and pragmatic, and health system mechanisms in countries such as the Netherlands, also seem to provide resonance here. However, it should be remembered that shifts in global political alignment and markets challenged the 1970s Nordic approach and engendered international scrutiny of the social and cultural liberalism of countries such as Sweden.

Even though the Nordic approach resonates historically, the approaches to government, education, and society have altered radically between Nordic countries and internally over the past fifty years. For example, Swedish marketplace principles enacted through its free-school system differ significantly to Finnish school organisation. Politically, Bengtsson et al. (2014, p. 179) note 'remarkable dissimilarities' between constituent countries.

It is now worth asking whether *the Nordic* is a political, social, and cultural *idea* (or *myth*) or fact. Perhaps, this question is immaterial: even if it is a myth, the strength of Norden's normative projection lies in its influence over other jurisdictions. As a Sorelian social myth (Ryner, 2007) 'Nordic welfarism' offers not an opposition to 'true reality', but an immanent image collectively mobilising sufficient pressure to realise its vision. Alternatively, *the Nordic* may present disjointed, unrealistic, and untried organisational tropes that fail to solve intractable social, political, economic, and cultural problems. For Scotland this is important. Since 2007, Norden has been positioned as a model for Scotland's future. The Scottish National Party (SNP) hold up Norden as the fairest example to run Scotland for egalitarian, communal, and fiscal matters.

It is this referral I will consider, through education policy. First, I identify origins for the UK Union and Scotland's links with *the Nordic*, before examining, since the Scottish Parliament's (re)opening, changes in Anglo-Scottish relations. Second, I identify SNP referencing outwards to Norden for examples of successful 'small-state' action. Third, I show how this influences Scottish education policy; how *Nordic* and *Scotland* are subject to 'mythical interpretations' due to readings centring on expanding similarities and exigencies. I finally note how Scottish education policy supports such referencing and how this has shifted Scottish education away from 'Down South' (England) towards Nordic 'myths'.

The Act of Union and Scotland's northern links

The continuing importance of the 1707 Act of Union, which combined Scottish and English parliamentary jurisdiction, notes an ever-changing present that recognises and amplifies the event's importance. It can be argued that throughout the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, 1707 was often a footnote. Arguments for or against political union were evident, but for most and until the last few years of the 20th century, 1707 ceased to be a socially defining feature.

The Act finalised over 100 years of attempts to harmonise relations between England and Scotland. The Act of Union *occurred*, but writing has shifted both interpretation and presentation. Identifying origins for the Act is not without contest. Most commentators cite late 17th century attempts to establish a Scottish colony at Darien in Panama as the catalyst here (Young, 2007). Often cited as 'forced', due to financial and fiscal matters and a desire to strengthen military might, the Act needs context. Conjoining the English, Irish, and Scottish crowns in 1603 and the subsequent favouring of English commercial interests set the scene for Darien. Indeed, such actions were seen by the Scottish Parliament of the day as encroaching on Scottish independence and sovereignty.

The additional burden to Scottish finances resulting from the *English Aliens Act* set the scene for the Act of Union as an outcome of political manoeuvring, fallout from Darien, and contests between different Scottish groups and their relationship to the English court (Riley, 1969). The Act of Union was a political necessity for England and a commercial one for Scotland, but was perceived, alternatively as either a base betrayal of Scotland or an opportunity for Scottish deliverance and rebirth (Ferguson, 1964). For many it was an inevitability that enabled Scotland to retain her soul even though she had lost her parliament (Ferguson, 1964). The Act necessitated the closure of the Scottish Parliament and the transfer of decision-making to Westminster, forging the United Kingdom.

While England and Scotland prior to the Act of Union might appear as well-acknowledged and historic states, geographical, political, religious, and monarchist contestations had altered the make-up of the constituent parts of the UK for centuries. For example, the Orkney and Shetland Isles were, until 1472, part of the kingdom of Denmark and Norway (Barnes, 1984). Their transfer as Scottish territories resulted from the inability of the King of a recently unified Denmark and Norway to pay the previously agreed dowry upon the marriage of his daughter to James III of Scotland. First Orkney, then Shetland were offered as protection in lieu of payment. Further, language highlights similarities between Norden and Scotland: forms of Norn were spoken in Shetland and Orkney until the 19th century and were similar in sound, composition, and intelligibility to Faroese and Danish. Scotland's past is, then, bound up with Nordic history, languages, and culture.

Such history concludes that Scotland sits between pulls to its southern borders and northern neighbours. Historically Scotland had favourable terms with many countries deemed enemies of England (e.g., Bonner, 2002). Geopolitically, this should be

unsurprising; for centuries monarchs and governments endeavoured to forge political, social, cultural, and economic links. Further, not all countries laud economic neoliberalism or subdue national history, society, and culture to grow economically and homogenise national experiences. Pointedly, history notes that local and national matters play out intercontinentally and globally; and how these matters play out is not always straightforward.

Scottish-English relations

Scotland's shifting relationship with England demonstrates contrasting calls for independence and support for the union. In 1979, Scotland's devolution referendum proposed by *The Scotland Act* (1978) led to 52% opting for devolution. This equated to 33% of the overall voting population. The Act was subsequently repealed by the 1979 Conservative administration. This Thatcherite government opposed devolution but proposed that special treatment of Scottish business be allowed in Parliament. Following Tory success in the 1987 UK election, increased dissatisfaction with previous change led to a Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC) consisting of political representatives, local authorities, churches, and voluntary organisations. *A Claim of Right for Scotland* (Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, 1989) proposed an assembly/law-making parliament in its final report, *Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right* (Campaign for a Scottish Parliament, 1996).

The Westminster election of New Labour in 1997 significantly altered views towards and governance of constituent UK parts. The 1997 Scottish referendum required a simple majority in favour of (re)establishing a Scottish Parliament: 74.3% voted for devolution and 63.5% favoured parliament holding tax-varying powers. The Scottish Executive (re)convened on 12th May 1999 and set the scene for a parliament of equals, making a difference for all, based on civic duty. Certainly, the parliament chamber in *Holyrood* was built as a horseshoe with Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) all facing the Convenor to foster collaboration and respectful dialogue and debate. Further, to reduce the chance of overall control by any one party, MSPs are voted in via the D'Hondt system.[1]

The first administrations (1999 to 2003 and 2003 to 2007) were governed by Labour/Liberal-Democrat coalitions. In 2007, the Scottish National Party was the largest Holyrood party but short a majority. It governed under a loose working association with the Greens but often relied on Conservative votes to pass legislation. From 2007 the Scottish Executive was informally renamed the Scottish Government; formal recognition followed in the *Scotland Act* (Scottish Government, 2012).

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1   The D'Hondt system allocates parliamentary votes according to a party-list. For elections, voters rank their preferences, and this is used to allocate constituency Members by 'first past the post' and regional list MSPs using proportional representation.

At the 2011 Holyrood elections, the SNP won an overall majority. They won support across Holyrood for an application to the UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition for a Section-30 Order legalising a vote on Scottish independence. Held on 18th September 2014, 55.3% chose to remain in the UK. Voting pattern analysis suggests some age differentials: over-55s were more likely to support the Union; those under 55 tended to vote otherwise. Further, 16-to 25-year-olds more often voted no to independence, a narrative since challenged. There also seemed to be some class-based distinctions, with 'working class' voters, and those in less affluent areas being more likely to vote for independence; indeed, the west of Scotland generally returned more *Yes* votes than elsewhere, except for Dundee (Mooney, 2015). Religion also seemly predicted voting patterns, but levels of material wealth may obfuscate such analysis. Significantly, there was a substantial increase in support for independence following the referendum's announcement. The percentage publicly supporting independence was approximately 23% in 2012. A YouGov poll days prior to the vote suggested support therein stood at 51%.

In the 1970s, the SNP was a peripheral minority party connoting negativity towards the anglicisation of Scotland and Scottishness. England was presented as 'the Other' and curbs on 'non-resident' ownership of land and take-overs from foreign investors were proposed. Then, SNP manifestos highlighted British State failings and how these positioned Scotland as an exploited province (Leith, 2008). Importantly, such rhetoric shifted throughout the 1980s, when residency, not ethnicity, was posited as reason enough for citizenship. Independence continued as a focus in the 1987 SNP manifesto, but anglicisation was replaced by overt attacks on the Conservative Party as anti-Scottish (Leith, 2008). This renewed focus shifted Scotland from a historic footnote in the UK, to Scotland as a forward-thinking, 'independent' country. Residency became promoted as constituting Scottish identity: all who live in Scotland were 'in this together' in the 1997 manifesto.

In the 2001 SNP manifesto, 'the Other' was presented through cartoonish depictions of 'the homogenous political establishment'. This, and a significant emphasis shift towards *Scotland* rather than *Scottishness* reshaped 'identity' to include those with a country affinity: Scotland the place (Leith, 2008) with a history and culture, separate to England. This has continued since the millennium and now centres on Scotland as an independent nation with distinct social, cultural, and political Discourses (cf. Gee, 2012). Indeed, at Holyrood, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon stated,

> Scotland is a diverse, multicultural society … I take the view that anybody who chooses to live in Scotland – whether they and their families have been here for generations or whether they have come to Scotland very recently – is home. (Sturgeon cited in Wilcock, 2021, np.)

Independence drives are now expressed via political statements that shift foci away from ethnicity and history towards inclusivity and shared future intent (Leith, 2008). Challenges to 'Englishness' relate to Scotland's status within the UK as manifest

through Westminster provision. 'London control' features prominently, not to situate the 'English Other' but to emphasise geographical and political distance which neither the UK nor federalisation can overcome. Scottishness is a distinct civic categorisation. Scotland is open to the world and invites all. Here, UK constitutional matters present barriers to the creation of a thriving nation-state. Even current devolution arrangements are challenged, for although they seemingly offer agency, such *vocal empowerment* fails to reconcile how vernacular embodiment is constrained between romantic and postmodern registers of authentic and simultaneous claims to cultural rootedness and semiotic autonomy. The UK container ascribes myriad political, cultural, and social constraints on Scottish observance, not least through media representations of SNP policy 'failure', the 'absurdity' of independence, and Westminster-driven political arguments supporting: a denial of 'permission' for another referendum (endorsed by the UK Supreme Court); that the 2014 referendum was 'once in a lifetime'; that Scotland survived the Covid-19 pandemic due to UK financial aid; and that Scotland's desire to re-join the EU could not be realised upon independence. As Hames (2013, p. 204) writes,

> Conceiving devolution as a granting-of-voice on these terms, I argue, tends to re-inscribe the containment logic of 1970s UK centralism, releasing/locking Scottish cultural production into reified postures of 'representation' which leave uncontested the constitution of representative power.

Devolved representation adopts a hegemonic form that shifts modes and acts of representation away from challenges to political Westminster elites, and instead addresses modes of representation as 'fixes' to the argument of reduced democracy. Effectively, devolution (re)legitimates Westminster systems and assumptions to make them more palatable to Scottish opinion. The description of Scotland as 'North Britain' by media commentators such as Massie (2012) implicitly denotes continued support for Scotland as a (minor) constituent part of the UK. For those antithetical to Scottish independence, the rise of the SNP manifestly identifies a cultural form divorced from calls for the breakup of the UK.

> The SNP's ascendancy is not, however, simply a matter of politics. On the contrary, it is a cultural phenomenon and cannot sensibly be understood without conceding this. That's one reason why support for the SNP at Holyrood elections outstrips support for Scottish independence. Voting SNP is, for many Scots, a matter of cultural declaration more than it is an endorsement of the promises published in the SNP's manifesto. (Massie, 2012, np.)

Scotland and the Nordic Myth

While seeking to distance England/UK from Scottish matters, the SNP has deployed the Sorelian Nordic myth to motivate for what Scotland might become and that for which Scotland currently stands. Its normative status derives both from description

(that which Scotland *is*, that which the Scottish people *are*) and projective branding (the observance and deployment of the Nordic myth). Both legitimate and mobilise independence by appeals to egalitarianism and inclusivity and the establishment of a similar vision for the future: a political, social, and cultural viability for independence.

Significant independence support though, is more recent. The creation of the British Welfare State following the Beveridge Report (1942) led to increased support for the UK, significantly due to improvements to the living conditions and democratic rights of all (Jackson, 2020). Significant changes to this social contract during the 1980s and 1990s profoundly effected the Scottish psyche due largely to Thatcherite 'managed decline' of 'the North' and reduced influence countries other than England had on UK policy. The 1988 *Claim of Rights* marked a watershed in Anglo-Scottish arrangements; its statement that the Union had always been '… a threat to the survival of a distinctive culture in Scotland' sowed the seeds for a devolved Parliament. Scotland presented as a small country with a non-hierarchical desire for self-determination, hitherto denied by the Union/British Empire (Jackson, 2020).

This view evidences in shifting SNP positions from mildly Eurosceptic through the 1960s and 1970s, to Scottish independence *in* Europe from 1987. This reflects shifts in SNP definitions of Scottishness from ethnicity to civics and global calls for post-war decolonisation. During the 2016 Brexit debate and following, Scotland took an alternative view to leaving the EU than did Wales and England (62% of votes in Scotland were to remain, with every council area returning a remain majority). UK governance elided Scottish calls for differential powers (Arnott, 2017); Westminster promoted Brexit as a 'UK-wide decision' albeit one that respected the unique case of Northern Ireland and contrasts Scotland's treatment. The Supreme Court ruled that the UK Parliament must be consulted about any Brexit deal but made no undertaking to consult administrations in devolved UK regions. That Scotland is positioned as 'Other' to rUK[2] presents problems for any devolved government; such administrations are expected to adhere to EU law. For education this is problematic.

Brexit implications for Scottish education policy and wider issues of Scotland's position in Europe/the UK adds to an increasingly contested and complex policy environment. Uncertainty is expected to define social policy development in the years to come. Countervailing Discourses exist between the promotion of a 'Nordic model', and adherents to the UK, alongside social, political, economic, and welfare Discourses which position Scotland both as a country with potential for independence and a constituent part of the UK.

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2   rUK often refers to the remainder of the UK (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). rUK has also been used to describe 'Rump UK', which may refer to the previous definition, but is also used pejoratively to describe England as the only remaining country 'in the UK' once Wales and Scotland are independent and Northern Ireland reunifies with The Republic of Ireland.

Wrapped up with SNP European rhetoric is an ever-increasing alignment between the SNP and matters Nordic. This accelerated from the 1970s with the discovery of oil in Scottish and Norwegian waters. Oil provided significant leverage for the SNP, who determined it belonged to Scotland and should be used to establish a sovereign wealth fund along the Norwegian model. Such arguments were geographical (it is Scotland's oil), political (wealth from this can be used to reduce democratic deficit), and economic (Scotland is no longer 'too wee and too poor for independence'). Coupled to increasing commitment for social democracy, SNP leaders promoted Scotland as a serious economic power, in tune with social, cultural, economic, political, and international obligations.

Commentary on matters Nordic offered further support. The 2007 SNP election victory was partly due to such emphasis, but also the collapse of Labour as Scotland's controlling party, and continuing antipathy/hostility towards the Conservatives. The collapse of Ireland's economy following the 2008 financial crisis furthered SNP commentary on the Nordic Bloc, even though Iceland itself had equally suffered. Prior to the 2014 independence referendum, the SNP as the leading voice for 'Yes', highlighted the successful wealth, health, and well-being of Nordic populations because of their small-country status and independence (Scottish Government, 2013). This was followed by *All Points North: The Scottish Government's Nordic–Baltic Statement* (Scottish Government, 2017). Welfare changes at the UK level, such as the limitation of Child Tax Credits to only the eldest two children unless subsequent births can be proven to have resulted from rape, have furthered calls for an independent Scotland aligned with Nordic equality, egalitarianism, and fairness.

Key here are questions as to the veracity of projecting outwards. The model espoused by supporters of independence is probably a smorgasbord of historic interpretations, cultural tropes, romantic social visions, political norms, and economic selection. This is not to suggest these are redundant or superfluous, rather they reflect a normative construction for what independence supporters hope Scotland will become, allied to an observable 'reality'. Other platforms and actors, such as *Nordic Horizons* also promote such visions for Scotland through deployed Discourses (after Gee, 2012); consideration of the embeddedness of language in society and social institutions enacts 'specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities' (Gee, 2012, p. 152). Discourses are ways of recognising and enabling recognition in multiple ways and concern enactment and recognition: socially accepted association in language and other expressions of thinking, feeling, etc.; the various ways we use tools, technologies, and props so that we might identify ourselves as a member of a socially meaningful group to signal that we are filling a social niche in a recognisable fashion (Gee, 2012, p. 158). Enculturation into social practices through scaffolded interaction with others, masters Discourse (Gee, 2012, pp. 167–168); hence behaviour becomes meaningful only against the Discourse, or a set of complementary or competing Discourses that '… can "recognise" and give meaning and value to that behaviour' (Gee, 2012, p. 190).

Scottish education, the UK, and the Nordic region

Recent developments in Scottish education note policy as a product of prevailing Discourses, other Discourses of which they are a member, and counter-Discourses that seek to orient alternatively. Since 1999 Scottish social policy Discourses, of which education is one, seem to evidence divergence between Scotland and rUK (and in particular England) (Scott & Wright, 2012). While it is tempting to construe such moves as uniform, there are contrary positions for devolution/independence and their relationship with the Welfare State. On the one hand are suggestions that devolution offers opportunities to enhance social democracy while counter-Discourses proffer that further moves to independence would lower levels of welfare provision (Scott & Wright, 2012). While it is easier to discern separation between English education and welfare policy for example, doing so in the Scottish context, while not impossible, is more difficult. As Scotland's state schools, except one, operate within local authority control, in contrast to the quasi-private separation of state and education in England, welfare and social policy operates as a container for education policy. The development of the Scottish Parliament, alongside acknowledgement of shifts in political positioning, notes three prominent political-educational Discourses for Scotland and Scottish education policy as contained within social policy matters.

Education and 'Otherness'

Since 1999, successive administrations have sought to emphasise a pre-existing educational distance from administrations in England (Watson, 2010). Scottish welfare policy reflects a collective ideology (Scott & Wright, 2012) with inclusion as a systemic central good with education at the fore; many argue that devolved government is the best way to meet identified social justice goals (Scott & Wright, 2012). Attendant drives for education to contribute to addressing poverty and social exclusion have become markedly 'Scottish' since 1999, with increased blame attributed to Westminster for failure (Scott & Wright, 2012). Certainly, the focus for Scottish education policy has been structural rather than based on the responsibilisation of the individual, and associated language positions Scotland as enterprising and competitive, able to hold its own on the world stage. Indeed, since the early years of devolution, Scotland has been constructed as a 'happening place' (Mooney & Poole, 2004, p. 459) where: social welfare is organised differently and specifically; welfare language differs from rUK; and there is greater commitment to social justice. The veracity of this is debatable, for while *Scottishness* now frames policy there is no consensus on what *Scottishness* means (Mooney & Williams, 2006). Foregrounded are myths about Scotland and the Scottish people, part of which is that there exists a democratic, egalitarian system (Raffe, 2004), committed to the collective, and social justice working (Mooney & Scott, 2012). A counterpoint would suggest such views are simply meritocracy wrapped up in Scots vernacular.

It is possible that general support for public services, with education a key actor therein, is higher in Scotland, with less-discernible desires for private or for-profit

systems of delivery. Here, Scotland stands as a bastion of public service; depoliti-cisation through the outsourcing of services has not occurred to any great extent. Moves from traditional hierarchical, 'top-down' development projects and institu-tions towards more fluid, open power structures both prompt and are prompted by personal, professional, and institutional changes and so go some way to conferring agency (Williams, 2004).

Education and devolution

Central to Scottish administrations since 2007 are three orientations for policymaking (Sanderson, 2011). *First, a shift to policy co-production with local government.* In 2007, the minority SNP administration described a concordat with local government to deliver a more collaborative agenda (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2007). This interdepen-dence between layers of government has been used by subsequent administrations to build trust and credibility between policy 'makers' and wider policy actors. As Arnott & Ozga (2012, p. 149) note, the government 'presented governing discursively as co-dependent, based on partnership, and negotiated, thus turning their minority position into a source of strength.'

Second, recognition of the potential for greater experimentation. SNP policies often marked clear departures from New Labour/Conservative target setting regimes. Although often drawn into Holyrood and media debates about the relative position of Scottish education, especially student outcomes/attainment, there has been con-certed effort to shift Discourse away from student credentialisation as the barom-eter of policy success towards measures such as positive school leaver destinations and the proportion of those over 17 entering higher education. Here, policy expla-nations note matters such as discipline, leadership and, pedagogy (Adams, 2022) as describing the distance between Scotland and rUK and the ways in which they cite successes in other, smaller, nations, most notably the Nordic and Baltic states. However, following the Covid-era and various constitutional crises arising from challenges to both Westminster and Holyrood power, such experimentation might be waning.

Third, the importance of evidence and analysis is emphasised. From 2007, atten-tion shifted from micro-managing education delivery to improving performance, thus requiring a strong evidence base upon which performance could be measured (cf. Sanderson, 2011). To understand better the impact of education policy explana-tions viz wider outcomes, evaluation strengthens its potential to inform future policy development and resource decisions (Sanderson, 2011). A shared agenda contrasted with previous central-surveillance techniques. The project was 'distinctly Scottish' and socially democratic, with fairness married to wealth as a definition (Arnott & Ozga, 2010). Central to Scottish Government efforts was the desire to raise overall standards and reduce attainment gaps between the most and least deprived people in the Scottish community (Arshad et al., 2007). The National Improvement Framework (NIF) for education (Scottish Government, 2015) began this process by focussing on markers

for the improvement of education systems, processes and outcomes (see https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/national-improvement-framework/ for further details).

This drive for renewal seeks to highlight structural elements under which inequality prospers. This scene-setting of overtly politicised matters such as poverty through their co-location at government and community levels sits in opposition to the individualising tendencies of English measures and highlights the interconnectedness of various social policy-matters North of the Border. For example, drawing on the twin aims of demonstrating competence and moving towards independence, successive Scottish administrations noted the contribution education makes to social justice, not just as a means for economic prosperity but as vital to the latter's contribution to a better society for all. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2012, Alex Salmond, the First Minister, argued that some things are more important than that to which mere budgetary pressure can allude. Despite this, some argue that 'learning for labour' and the drive for an education system that is subservient to the economy increasingly characterises the UK educational landscape; while differences remain, policy in all four jurisdictions is guided by broadly the same set of principles. In 2004, Mooney & Poole noted that 'institutional and language differences do not in themselves necessarily indicate that the underlying social relations of welfare are different' (p. 470).

However, language does not reveal all; what should take centre stage are Discourses called in to support positions that serve as meaning makers for Scottish education. Tensions were notable in Scotland's response to New Labour's late 1990s/early 2000s education policy focus on improving standards and performance through *target setting* and *competition*. Although muted, the Labour administration in Scotland sought to do similar. However, competitive market principles between schools, teachers, and pupils played a much lesser role in Scottish affairs, and English performance management systems and such testing regimes were not adopted north of the border (Arnott & Ozga, 2012). These New-Right measures were significantly resisted by the Scottish policy-making elite (Paterson, 2003). Further, the Scottish Parliament provided opportunities to revive ideas of the contribution education might make to social capital and Scottishness (Allan, 2003).

Education and independence

Independence is ubiquitous in Scottish politics. Despite observing that economic prosperity and social justice sit in uneasy tension, as gains in one might be construed as lapses in the other, there remain two mutually reinforcing aspects of Scottish education policy Discourse. *First, the economy*. Competitiveness is referenced 'outwards' by comparison with other states in terms of globalised economies. The SNP positions Scotland to other, small, democratic states. Modernising nationalism is extolled through inward and outward referencing of educational, social, and public policy. Such references to states such as Norway and Finland create '... an imaginary ... of Scotland that has a particular character' (Arnott & Ozga, 2010, p. 340). Referencing 'inwards' distinguishes Scotland from England via inclusive strategies to address inequality

and fairness through public provision, while positioning outwards to small democratic states signals democratic need and accountability (Arnott & Ozga, 2009). In effect, economic goals are mobilised to reduce social inequalities and reduce educational attainment gaps (Arnott, 2017). An example is the Scottish Government's Arctic Connections policy framework (Scottish Government, 2019), which examines possible gains through Arctic research and development with countries that have geographical relationships with the Arctic. For education, this has meant work such as funding to examine the function and form of *Arctic Pedagogy* for Initial Teacher Education (ITE).[3] Referencing 'inwards' alludes to how Scotland has the ways and means to ensure it can remain competitive through harnessing natural talent. Arnott and Ozga (2010, p. 347) view this as the use of 'modernised nationalism' whereby 'nation', as already implicit in much education Discourse was mobilised through a

> … simultaneous process of 'inward' referencing of ideas of fairness and equality, combined with 'outward referencing' which places Scotland in alignment with new comparators in education, mainly in the Nordic and Baltic states.

Second, flourishing: education's contribution to community, fairness, and inclusivity. As (Arnott & Ozga, 2010b, p. 93) note,

> Interdependencies between the layers of governance have been used by the SNP administration in its attempts to build trust and credibility with policy-makers and wider policy actors: they present governance discursively as co-dependent, based on 'partnership', and negotiated, thus turning their minority position into a source of strength.

The education agenda seeks agency at individual, local, and national levels. In the 2007 to 2011 minority administration there was focus on the Early Years, international comparisons of performance, and a reframing of higher education policy. From 2007, economic imperatives were referenced to note education's role in politicising and delivering *fairness* and *social justice*. In December 2007, the Cabinet Secretary demonstrated this when signalling education's economic contribution to addressing poverty and societal problems (Arnott & Ozga, 2012). Focus shifted to the 'whole child' rather than educational uplift via schooling as a separate policy sphere. Education squarely sat within wider social policy matters implied through the *Index of Children's Wellbeing in Scotland*, *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC), and the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act* (2014). These noted the need to identify and address outcomes for children and young people more widely than simple education performance statistics. A shared idea of education as socially just and fair was invoked, referencing inward to the social democratic 'reshaping myths of Scottish education' (Arnott & Ozga, 2009, np.) as a mechanism for the redistribution of resources.

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3   Grant awarded to the New Northern Pedagogies Group for work on Arctic pedagogies.

The Christie Commission (2011) reported ways to tackle social problems robustly. Concerned with the delivery of public services, it called for new ways of working across the welfare sector. This drive for radical powers for Scotland gives succour to the line that the distinctive Scottish approach to welfare (including education) would be more deliverable if the Scottish Parliament had full, independent powers. Realistically, fiscal pressures will likely continue to command attention even with additional revenue raising abilities.

Since 2011 four key factors have influenced the Scottish education policy landscape (Mooney and Scott, 2012): a maturing of the institutions of devolved government; changes in UK government from a centrist New Labour position to a Rightist Conservative one; the post-2008 economic crisis; and SNP majority/minority governments. Until 2007 nationalist and union discourses tended to run in parallel (Arnott & Ozga, 2010b). At this juncture, political framing shifted to independence through consideration of the processes of achieving independence: the promotion of the kind of country an independent Scotland would be in a globalised world (Arnott & Ozga, 2009). Ascherson (2010 cited in Mooney and Scott, 2012) noted how the Scottish political landscape altered dramatically following 2007 and subsequent global financial crises. In effect, Scotland held faith in a public service state, free healthcare and prescriptions, school meals, university education, and free public transport for the elderly. This honouring of the contract between citizen and state seems decidedly Nordic, Sorelian or not. However, devolution has not led to welfare state expansionism for neoliberal retrenchment still holds sway and limits scope for devolved administrations to depart well-trodden paths (Mooney & Scott, 2012). Prior to the independence referendum, the SNP deployed the Discourse of deficiencies in devolved power to tackle economic and social matters (Arnott & Ozga, 2010b). Associated education policy framings have been a key feature of SNP minority governments since and crucially locates its strategic choices. Political Discourse that *crafts the narrative* of an independent Scotland has arguably become even more significant throughout ongoing existential UK crises. Throughout the independence campaign, education was clearly at the fore. The 'Yes' position posited independence to achieve a truly great education system, replete with high performance and free at the point of delivery for all up to and including first-degree. Educational Discourse acknowledged that provisional access depended on the location for problem manifestation rather than a comprehensive appraisal of assessed needs. The argument was that this needed to end and that the systematic targeting of social (and in this educational) resources should take place.

Conclusion: Scotland and the Nordic dimension

For many, the Nordic region holds alluring and perhaps mythical qualities. How Scottish independence positions *Norden* contests Anglo-American capitalism, and here education has a role. If such references note a view of Scotland's northern neighbours that may be 25 years too late, and if Nordic countries are disinclined to welcome Scotland (Wooldridge, 2014), it is difficult to demur that the SNP's desire is to

become a significant member of the Nordic Council of Ministers (Scotland's Future, 2013). Scotland's egalitarian ideals are often heralded as benchmarks for how an independent Scotland might enact education policy along Nordic lines even if a 'Nordic education approach' is mythical. This view persists despite data from the *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey* (Curtice, 2013) showing a mixed picture for welfare spending and reform. Support for increased education and health spending exists, whereas support for increased unemployment benefits is held in less esteem. Notably, responses came from a polity subject to UK levels of spending and welfare rhetoric. People in Scotland may be more attuned to redistribution, but successive Westminster Discourses and UK media observations overtly suggest that alternative UK administrative organisation is undesirable or even to be avoided at all costs.

Education headlines the independence/union Discourse. Countries benchmark other states though reports such as the OECD's PISA and note how global features pervade national education policy decision-making. UK adherents mostly reference England, but for independence supporters, Nordic states provide significant, independent-state comparisons. This is pertinent given the supposed egalitarian, equality, and welfare focus of Norden. Ironically, such visions imbue the Nordic region with a mythical educational homogeneity while similarly promoting significant shifts from (weaker) forms of Anglo-American capitalism towards a Sorelian Nordic educational nirvana. Notably, England has been keen to adopt Swedish, free-market educational enterprise through free schools, while Scotland has not, contrasting heavily with espoused homogeneous egalitarianism and welfarist Nordic doctrines towards which Scotland leans. Similar contrasts can be made between Norway and Finland, where the former retains strong central control, while the latter devolves decision-making to educational professionals and unions. Further, primary school attainment tracking, largely absent across the Nordic region, increasingly forms a significant part of the Scottish educational context (Andersen et al., 2007). Education as a contributor to the UK-welfare state became much reduced throughout the 1980s as education became aligned with economic success in a drive to reduce welfare spending as well as shift the political and social narrative towards individual responsibility. In contrast, Nordic education and welfare generally seem to coalesce, with the former not judged as a mechanism for reducing spending on the latter, but to redistribute and ensure opportunity (Oftedal Telhaug et al., 2006).

Whether Scotland's education vision can ever be aligned with a Nordic model (mythical or otherwise) is unclear. Independence political vision has redistribution, inequality reduction, and democratic engagement at its core, and in this regard, it may be that Scotland emulates Norden; indeed, for many in the independence camp, there is a strong desire to operate a 'Nordic style social democracy'. Reliance on separation from the UK is far removed from the here-and-now, however, but whether Scotland can emulate its northern neighbours within the UK is not solely an educational matter. For example, Scotland has few private schools and except for one, all state schools are controlled by local councils. The realisation of an educational vision is obviously

more than just for nurseries, schools, colleges, and universities; contained herein are discussions about welfare, taxation, immigration, etc., all reserved to Westminster. Further, Brexit casts a long shadow over the realisation of Scotland at the heart of Europe. The dismissal of a different position vis-à-vis the EU positions Scotland differently to areas of the Nordic region such as the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland, all of which have 'subsumed' status to other Nordic states. Westminster effectively views Scotland as a vasal state whereas the above 'parts' of Finland and Denmark respectively are conferred with status that permits them EU engagement on their own terms (Gethins, 2021). References to Scotland's Nordic neighbours may well continue; quite whether this is warranted as an expression of the region or whether they represent a mythical representation remains to be seen.

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