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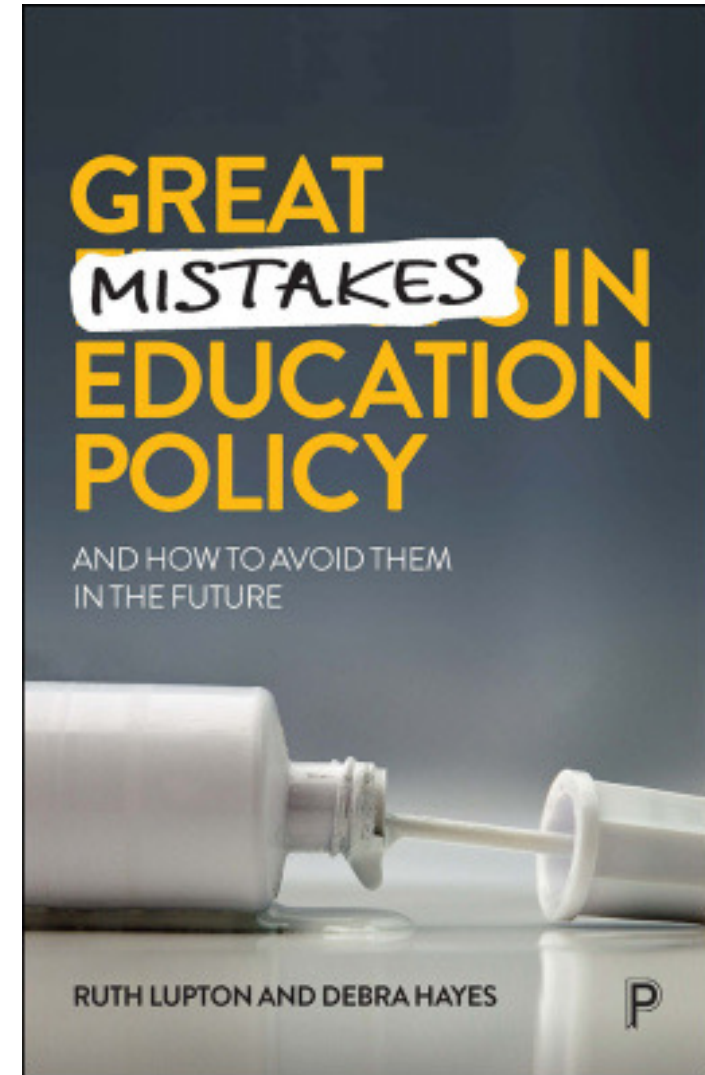**5th October 2021**

Great Mistakes in Education Policy:
and how to avoid them in the future

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The point of the book

- Take a long term view (40 yrs ish) – a period of deep/deepening economic and social inequalities
- **Ask some simple questions: have policies made education better and fairer?**
- Draw on many types of educational research.
- **Cut through** the mass of evidence, claims and counter claims
- And so try to **support the building of consensus on some big issues**.

The central propositions

- England's current system has **three big problems**:
  - Overemphasis on tests/narrowed education
  - Divided school systems that work for some but not for others
  - Too much of teachers' time spent on the wrong things

- These limit schools' capacity to **meet 21st century challenges** <u>and</u> **serve all children and young people equally.**

- **Policies work least well in the areas and schools where they need to work best**

- This is the result of **five big 'mistakes'**
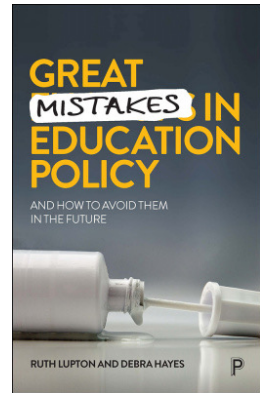
Five big mistakes

- #1 Turning to the market
- #2 Letting test scores drive policy
- #3 Over-prescribing teachers' work
- #4 Misunderstanding educational inequalities
- #5 Leaving education out of education policy-making

Embedded over time, compounding each other, baking in inequalities.

These are the roots of the problems we face now.
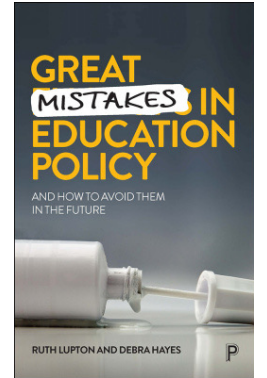
Leaving Education out of policy-making

- Education policy is not sufficiently informed by deep knowledge of education.

- Four changes have made matters worse:
  - Paradigm convergence: GERM (testing, standardisation, competition)
  - Upscaling/centralisation of decision-making
  - Policy space is more dispersed & more crowded, & more attentive to bite-sized chunks of knowledge.
  - Greater reliance on quantitative research: education economics/'what works'. Not enough attention to knowledge of practice

- **Policy is about 'managing the ordinary present' (Laidi). Lacking a 'progressive imaginary' (Lingard)**

- Leaves us with a narrow range of policy solutions (tweaks?)
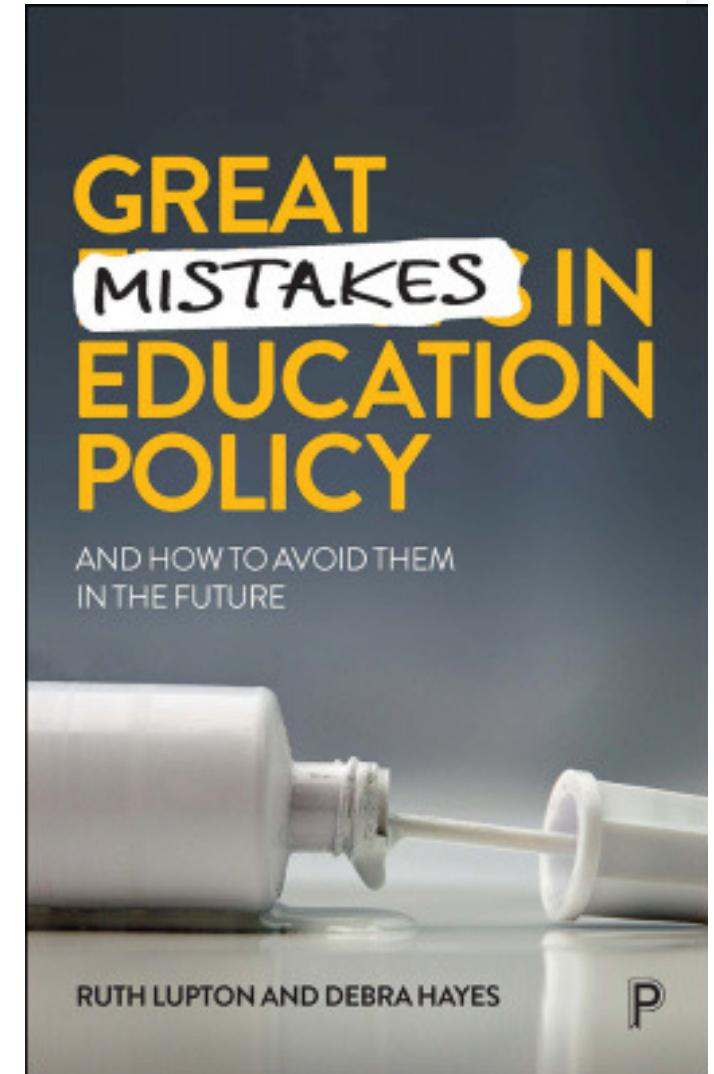
How to avoid policy mistakes now
A different state of mind

- Look back as well as forward
  - Recognise the big mistakes
  - Drop the fear of being seen as old fashioned (Lister 2000)
  - Acknowledge current policy 'fantasies' (Clarke 2020)

- Make space for Utopian thinking (Levitas 2013)
  - IROS (Imaginary Reconstruction of Society) facilitates: "genuinely holistic thinking about possible futures"
  - "for those who still think that utopia is about the impossible, what is really impossible is to carry on as we are"

- Drop crude binaries, build consensus and pool knowledge

Things that should be on the agenda

- A **wider vision** of education
- '**Education for all**' at the centre of system design
- **Cross-government strategies for more equal childhoods**
- **More redistributive funding** – not just a 'premium'
- Systems for **collaboration not competition**
- An **intelligent accountability system** that doesn't distort educational aims and purposes
- **Multiple** ways to improve practice and outcomes: supporting the **professionalism** of leaders and teachers.

GREAT MISTAKES IN EDUCATION POLICY

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM IN THE FUTURE

RUTH LUPTON AND DEBRA HAYES

How to avoid policy mistakes in the future

- A mechanism to build consensus and weight behind current commissions and reports – **defragmenting the policy space**.
- Building **greater depth of policy knowledge**: long term civil service roles; processes of consultation and deliberation, & so on
- **Promoting teacher and 'expert' research further up the evidence hierarchy**: and making time for teachers to do it properly
- Developing **better scrutiny processes**: independent evidence and scrutiny bodies
- International collaborations for **deep learning from other countries**
- **Spending research funds more broadly**: not just 'what works

Now is the time to be bold, recognise the big issues, and find ways to work better together

Thanks for listening