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CONTENT

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Social inclusion and leadership in education:
An evolution of roles and values in the English education system over the last 60 years

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Abstract

This article reviews the changing relationships between education policies and their links to social disadvantage and conceptions of school leadership. The argument is that definitions of leadership evolve as the assumptions underpinning the relationships between society, the economy and education institutions change. The article draws on the case of English education policy developments over the last 60 years, and places debates about school leadership against a set of changing relationships between the state and the institutions of the market. Defining a good school leader very much depends on ideas about the core school functions as well as dominant ideas about how these functions relate the institution of the school to major social and economic structures.

Education and disadvantage: A social and educational problem

The relationship between social advantage, disadvantage[1] and education[2] has been well documented and has provided social policy with a conundrum that is difficult to solve. It represents one of those really entrenched problems that seem to defy the attempts by governments to deal with it. How successive governments have decided to conceptualise the problem – as something that needs social transformation and the re-ordering of social arrangements (Jones 2010), or as something to be tamely managed for its worst effects – reflects their political/social approach to it, but it also determines what kind of school leadership has been conceptualised as the most appropriate for dealing with the particular definitions of the problem. This paper draws on developments in England that offer an interesting case study of policy reform of schooling that has at times been explicitly and deliberately connected to policies concerning poverty and social inclusion. Leadership debates and the ways they have shifted in the post-World War II period reflect the dominant ideas about public sector management as well as ideas regarding the modernisation of education and welfare systems more generally. Similar trends are of course observed at the European level, with (particularly) Scandinavian countries introducing new public management

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techniques in an attempt to "renew" the governance of education systems (Arnesen & Lundahl 2006, Lindblad et al. 2002, Moos & Miller 2003). The increased popularity of education discourses on parental choice, institutional competition, benchmark-driven performative regimes and new forms of teacher professionalism and leadership, are all increasingly international trends that find distinct national manifestations in most European systems. However, the scope of this paper does not include a review of the international context. Instead, it aims to present one national case to illustrate the form these debates take in a schooling context that has been considered as possibly the most radical in Europe in its approach to reforming education along neo-liberal lines.

I track three successive periods of policy[3] in relation to the above problematic. In each period I examine: (a) the normative assumptions that shape education policy and its links to social disadvantage (Popkewitz & Lindblad 2000); and (b) the emerging role for school leadership in each period. Ideas about what the role of school head-teachers /leaders should be inform the ways in which disadvantage is addressed within school leadership practice (Raffo & Gunter 2008). Methodologically, it is difficult to establish causal connections between the two. It would also be naïve to try to do so since this would entail an over-simplification of the factors that give rise to a political and social construction as complex as "leadership". Accordingly, the approach this article takes is one of connecting policy shifts in relation to education and disad-vantage and emerging models of school leadership that tend to dominate particular periods of schooling history. These two arenas are not understood as being distinct and separate, even though institutionally there are clear demarcation lines. Rather, the sphere of "policy" and the sphere of "school practice" are linked with discourses that define issues of purpose, and issues of ethics. Leadership functions as the con-necting thread between these two spheres since it is often required to bridge the two through the role of school headteachers in mediating policy to practice, localising national policy, and interpreting reform at the classroom level. In this respect, even though particular policy choices do not *determine* the nature of leadership, they set the parameters within which only certain leadership styles are possible or desirable. There is, of course, always scope for individual mediation of policy, reaction or resist-ance. But the discursive constraints of policy mean that there are distinct incentives (and disincentives) for headteachers to pursue particular courses of action in their school and locality.

1944–1960s: Identifying the intractable problem of disadvantage and education – education for social control and for social reform

This early period in education policy refers to the decades between the end of World War II and the 1960s, when the development of a universal, expanded and highly differentiated education system was linked closely to questions of educational equal-ity and social justice. In particular, the period after the war saw the establishment

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in Britain of a welfare state based on a "political consensus"[4], which translated into an educational settlement based on a partnership between central and local government, administrators and professionals. Politically, this period was characterised by conservative views (the Conservative Party was in power from 1951 to 1964) which emphasised the need for controlled welfare and educational reforms in order to maintain the social *status quo*[5]. The implementation of education policies was entrusted to the local government (the Local Education Authorities, LEAs) and to teachers and headteachers whose professional judgement was seen to be politically neutral as they were "quasi" civil servants (Lawn 1987).

School headteachers were part of a bureaucratic machinery responsible for the delivery of education reforms, together with their colleagues in the local authorities. It was a period when teachers were granted what Ozga (2000) called a "licensed" form of professionalism by a state that exercised "indirect rule" on teachers by promulgating a professional ideology of cooperation with the state (p. 16). In that context, school "leadership" was equated with "administration" within professional and technocratic parameters (Dale 1989). Teachers and headteachers enjoyed considerable autonomy in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, on the assumption they would not disturb the hierarchical and elitist schooling landscape in which selective grammar schools and exclusive private schools were setting the standards of quality. According to Bogdanor, it was also a system that worked only because a "small number of interests were involved whose rank and file were content to defer to elites and could therefore, be relied upon to act sensibly" (in Dale, op. cit. p. 101). Nevertheless, the partnership between central state and teachers should not be over-estimated. Teachers and headteachers had workplace autonomy, although they had very little power or control over their occupational group[6]. Still, workplace autonomy was seen as important by teachers in their collective perception that they were partners in transforming the lives of individual children through education:

> The promise of equal opportunity, of social justice, of economic efficiency and of talent utilisation was to be delivered through the agency of teachers in the state system of schooling and the mode of delivery was professional autonomy (Grace 1987:213).

There was a "moral energy for change and a belief in the connection between education and democratic culture", while the status of teaching and of "headship" within the profession came from pedagogy and from an ideology of self-regulation (Gunter 2001:22).

Even though this was a very conservative and elitist period of schooling in its organisation, the selectivity of pupils at an early age, and nature of the curriculum, along with the relative autonomy of teachers and headteachers gave rise to debates about equality and the role of schooling in achieving a more socially just society. Ideas about social justice were not uncontested or uniformly expressed, but education

research in the tradition of "old sociology" preoccupied with the eradication of social class (mainly) inequalities was fairly dominant in certain political circles, academia and schools (Shain & Ozga 2001). Influential research studies that emerged from the London School of Economics (Halsey et al. 1980, Health 2000) highlighted the connections between socio-economic background and education destinations, in a schooling system that primarily reflected and reproduced patterns of advantage and disadvantage rather than challenging them. This genre of research was politically important for the introduction of comprehensive schooling in 1965 (a long standing request of teachers' organisations) that drew on egalitarian arguments supporting the end of institutional selection of pupils for grammar schools at the age of 11. Yet the patchy and uneven introduction of such schools throughout the country, and the continuation of systems of streaming and setting by ability within comprehensive schools, meant that the structural change that organised teachers and the Labour Party were advocating was largely superficial (Benn & Chitty 1996, Jones 2003). Social advantage and disadvantage would continue to be reflected in educational outcomes with unrelenting persistence.

In the 1960s progressive ideas were gaining dominance and the abolition of the 11+ examination (in many but not all parts of the country) were having significant effects on primary schools in particular. Increasingly, equalising access to secondary and later to higher education was not seen to be enough. Research in the 1960s that attempted to understand the relationship between education and the systematic under-achievement of the working class and the poor was drawing on explanations of deprivation of the disadvantaged. The focus shifted from the "old" to "new" sociology of education (Whitty 1985), the micro-world of the classroom but also the family/home setting, while the influential Plowden Report that came out in England in 1967 (on *Children and their Primary Schools*) promoted the idea of "cultural deprivation" caused by poverty (coupled with poor mothering and poor language stimulation). The Report was important because it was the first attempt by an official document to deal with the relationship between poverty and education, and the consequences of this relationship for schools and the level of resources necessary to deal with it (Glennester 1998). Even though the report was severely criticised for promoting a deficit model of working class culture and family life (Lee 1987), it was seen at the time as very significant in: (a) redefining the meaning of equality of opportunity by arguing for positive discrimination to favour schools and children in areas of social disadvantage; (b) reorganising not just learning, but also the relationships between schools, families and communities; and (c) prioritising the "social" as the primary goal of education (Jones 2003). The 1960s were characterised by high levels of diverse provision in different parts of the country, a patchy picture of progressive reforms and more traditional structures coexisting in an uneasy mix (ibid.). Thus, even though comprehensive schools were introduced in 1965, the selective grammar schools still existed alongside them.

In this period (and up to the early 1980s), the coordination of schools was characterised by bureaucratic forms of organisation, welfare-driven in purpose, and led by headteachers who (overall) were "socialised within the field and values" of schools (Gewirtz 2002:31). As an ideal type, headship in that period was operating within contradictory and dominant discourses. On one hand, there were the forces of political and social conservatism, as expressed by the official ideology that expected headteachers to tow the line and not disturb the balance of the differentiated secondary school system. Curriculum experimentation in the new comprehensive schools was often taking place although, as Benn and Chitty (1996) argue, most comprehensive schools and their headteachers were suspicious of "progressive education and democratic management, choosing instead the good old-fashioned 'tight-ship' with a captain firmly in charge" (p. 293). On the other hand, a great number of teachers and headteachers (although by no means the majority) were increasingly identifying their educational and social role through ideological commitments to strong versions of equality of opportunity, social transformation, collegiality and professionalism understood as features of a bureaucracy. Social problems to do with poverty, sex and racial discrimination, and the perceived disconnection between schooling and its social context were addressed in many parts of the country by innovative (and in a few cases radical) teachers as local curriculum diversity and experimentation were possible (Jones 2003).

The last phases of this period of education were characterised by unsettled forms of school organisation, a serious challenge to the social and educational differentiation through the end of universal selective schooling, and increasing experimentation within schools with innovative and progressive forms of knowledge and pedagogy. What many teachers and headteachers had experienced as positive outcomes of their professionalised and relatively autonomous work identity were reversed rapidly in the following decade when the central state reasserted control over the profession and reverted to more "direct" forms of control and practice (Ozga 2000). In terms of the definition of headteachers' roles, this had profound implications for their capacity to act in innovative ways – including the possibility to pursue radical forms of change in the curriculum or pedagogy, but also for their forms of accountability that, up to that point, were defined along professional bureaucratic lines.

1970s–1980s: Education for competitive advantage and economic growth

The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of human capital theories in education policy and their dominance in questions of system design and institutional leadership. A radical shift in thinking about links between education and the economy, the stronger centralisation of control of education, and the introduction of market principles and practices in the organisation of schooling were all prominent features of this period's education policies. The progressive and relatively egalitarian ideologies of the earlier decades to some extent contributed to this shift by: (a) promoting the idea of pupil

entitlement to personal development and social mobility through education; and (b) producing research that criticised the role of schooling in the reproduction of class, gender and ethnicity based inequalities. Education as a private good was becoming a core theme of this period, while at the same time there were calls for education to contribute more directly and explicitly to the economy. This dual emphasis of education for private returns and the need to justify education's contribution to economic growth saw teachers and the school system to some extent as a problem that needed restructuring. The Black Papers of the 1970s reflected the rise and gradual dominance of the political right that argued successfully for an "economising" agenda in education which entailed, amongst other things, the reduction of professional power and autonomy, increased state control of the outputs of the system, and the strengthening of powers to the customers and consumers of the service (parents, industry, students).

The second set of important ideas that framed the educational discussions of the 1970s–1980s related to introduction of the principles of "the market" in the organisation of schooling, mainly those of parental choice and competition. Throughout the 1980s, the political pressure to reduce public expenditure made neo-liberal ideas and deregulatory policies feasible, led to the closing down of unprofitable industries and triggered debates on privatising previously national industries. The changing economy, increasing privatisation, reduced social protection and the decision to subject the welfare state to an organisation influenced by market principles had profound social and educational implications. In a climate of financial difficulties where public services were seen to be too expensive, inefficient and ineffective, the market was seen to be the best way of allocating resources. However, there was also a strong ideological element in the promotion of market-influenced organisation for the welfare state: people were seen to be overly dependent on the state and that was attacked as morally comprehensible. The "market" and the liberal ideas upon which it rests were seen to encourage self-sufficiency, personal initiative, individualism and self-regulation. They were seen as parts of a wider attempt to "modernise" public services, but also to modernise the relationships between individuals and the state. The notions of collective action and organisation were consistently attacked, and their power significantly reduced after the mass strikes of the first half of the 1980s. But the decade of the 1980s was one of mixed benefits for different groups of the population. At the same time as unemployment kept rising (accompanied by a reduction in social spending), there was significant material wealth for new groups, particularly new "entrepreneurs" and many people employed in finance. These groups provided significant political support for the policies of the Conservative governments that, as Jones (2003) points out, would not have governed for 18 years without such a constituency. Yet the social stress caused by these same policies was substantial with high unemployment concentrated in particular regions of the country, frequent strikes and inner city riots often rooted in racial politics in areas of economic disadvantage. New forms of poverty developed next to new forms of

advantage, leading to a considerable widening of inequalities between the rich and the poor (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1995).

Even though the education system was still publicly funded, provided by the state and heavily regulated by the Secretary of State for Education, the reforms of the 1980s introduced competition, the differentiation of schools and a profound change in the organisation and cultures of schooling. Since 1988, schools have had to publish the results of their tests of the National Curriculum, and be subsequently ranked in a "league table" on the basis of their performance. Parents (as the "customers" of the service) are encouraged to select a school for their child on the basis of this information. This creates strong competition for places in the "desirable" high performing schools. The financial autonomy given to schools meant that their income depended on the numbers of pupils they could recruit, hence the principle of competition became the most important driving force of the behaviour of both schools and parents. The advocated rationale behind this set of reforms was that parental pressure and choice would ensure that all schools and teachers would perform better and raise their teaching standards. The assumption was that low performing schools were badly managed, teaching was of poor quality, and accountability towards the parents and children was absent. Improving standards was the ultimate goal for individual institutions within a heavily regulated environment where performance was measured by inspections but also by market mechanisms (building reputation through league tables and the exercise of parental choice). The parameters for a new type of headteacher in this changing context were pretty clear. Heads of schools were not working within a bureaucracy anymore, rather in a heavily bureaucratic and centrally controlled quasi-market where lines of accountability were shifting and performance was evaluated with different benchmarks.

In order to understand the changes in discourse and policy in this period and how they impacted on the changing definitions of "leadership", we need to briefly review the types of research in education that the governments of the period favoured and funded. Following the publication of the book *15 Thousand Hours* (Rutter et al. 1979), School Effectiveness Research (SER) became politically dominant and highly attractive to politicians who were keen to offer solutions to the perceived problems of education. Aimed at school improvement, the research tried to systematically assess the impact of schools and teachers on the development of children – the assumption being that the outcomes of the education process are not entirely determined by parental background. The central message of the SER is that schools differ in their performance not just because of the different intake patterns of pupils, but because of their features as social organisations. It follows that the way schools are organised, managed and led became core issues that may determine successful educational outcomes. Despite the numerous criticisms of this genre of research as failing to explore the relationship between education practice and wider social inequalities and for emphasising almost exclusively the responsibility of schools for raising standards against the odds with

little or no help from the government (Goldstein & Woodhouse 2000: 354), the 1992 Conservative government set up a School Effectiveness Unit. This Unit, and its New Labour follow up Standards and Effectiveness Unit, were very keen to sponsor research that identifies successful education practice and breaks it down to its constituent elements. School "leadership" was identified as one of these elements and, since then, it has been seen as central to the policies of the 1980s and mid-1990s Conservative governments to improve school performance across the board. Responsibility for underachievement was placed at the door of poor (progressive) teaching and leadership which were seen to be preoccupied with the wrong things (social engineering) instead of high quality traditional standards. What mattered most in this new climate was not the socio-economic background of the children but the organisational aspects of the schools so what were needed were effective structures, standard operating procedures and a style of leadership able to meet centrally conceived education objectives. The bureaucratic form of headship previously in favour could no longer deliver the targets set by the government in terms of providing high quality service to customers. The change of terminology (from "head-teachers" to "leaders") signals a significant change in roles and responsibilities. From being in charge of developing curriculum and overseeing teaching, the new "leaders" were responsible for organisations that needed to respond to the marketplace, their governors and their clientele.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 and the various pieces of legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s that further refined the instruments of parental choice, institutional differentiation and competition required this new type of education leadership. In fact, as Ball (1990:153) argues, "the need for good management of schools" and other education institutions became an imperative, a new discourse in education that brought in many elements into the education sector that were imported from the world of business. Influential management texts of the period (see Caldwell & Spinks 1992) advocated the importance of "transformational leaders" to create the *Self-Managing Schools* of the future. The social democratic purposes and organisation of schools and the headship that accompanied this were now displaced by a quasi-market leadership style or, in Raffo and Gunter's (2008) terms, a delivery-focused leadership. The work of the new leader in education was informed by the break away from the old welfare-driven discourses of the post-war social democratic period (Menter et al. 1997). Leaders were now emerging from (and had to conform to) discourses of responsiveness to the education market and competition, while also driving for excellence in standards and leading their school to produce the highest quality outputs:

> For the new manager in education, good management involves the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set outside the school, within constraints also set outside the school. It is not the job of the new manager to question or criticise these aims and constraints. The new management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling – raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of at-

tendance and school leaver destinations – and is frequently articulated within the lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness (Gewirtz 2002: 32).

This new education leader was expected to draw on the School Effectiveness research to inform practice and school re-organisation. Engaging with research drawing on social theory and exploring the ways in which education policy or practice reproduces inequalities was not a priority. The emphasis was on adopting a positive approach where all problems were seen as solvable, an approach that would improve the performance of the school in the league tables. In the new glamorous era of the market, schools were led by transformational leaders whose aim was to follow the School Improvement agenda as defined by the School Effectiveness Research. This kind of knowledge privileged leadership practices that aimed at delivering high standards, almost always at the expense of competing schools. The inclusion of "difficult" children (in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity or disability) that would require additional resources from the school is clearly not helping such a delivery agenda. There are examples in the literature where this has indeed been happening, and where local authorities and individual headteachers have adopted a more critical stance on the "delivering effectiveness" objective taking the local social, economic and cultural context of schools into consideration (Thomson 2009). There is no doubt, however, that these critical approaches to leadership go against the incentives of the market place, and often against the success of schools in the league tables with all the compounding resources implications.

1997–2010: The fight against social exclusion through education

The political rediscovery of the links between poverty and education was certainly accomplished by New Labour that designed an ambitious programme for the eradication of child poverty. Social exclusion became public enemy number one. This was a political aim that brought a big wave of optimism amongst practitioners and researchers in education who were frustrated over 18 years of the earlier education policy and practice that neglected the connections between education success, social class background, and other forms of social divisions related to ethnicity and gender. The decade following 1997 was very "favourable to an egalitarian agenda" given the steady growth of the economy, the significant growth in real incomes across the population, and the political commitment of the new government to the goal of "equality" (Hills et al. 2009:341). The policies designed to address problems of poverty have had income redistributive effects with gains particularly for children in poverty, but they were not significant or sustained[7] and at best they stopped further inequality from rising[8]. The very disadvantaged groups did benefit from the economic and tax policies of that decade, but not enough to truly narrow the income gap between the top and the bottom, something that very directly mapped onto the picture of the education performance of the different socio-economic groups[9].

Education was particularly important for Tony Blair who linked it directly to questions of economic growth and social justice. Capturing the European Union term of "social exclusion" the government was in a position to redefine the "equality" agenda as one primarily concerned with transforming social attitudes and institutions, rather than seriously redistributing income from the wealthy to the less so (Levitas 1998). The political aim was no longer "equality of outcome", that was seen as neither desirable nor feasible since it would require a centralist prescription and imposition of outcomes, and the removal of incentives for excellence, but "equality of opportunity". Throughout the 1990s the government defined the meaning of equality in modern politics as "equality of opportunity", a view of equality of opportunity that is lifelong, comprehensive and intrinsically linked to economic growth. The argument, drawing on the discourse of globalisation, was that there is a need for an economic policy based on more "supply-side measures to enhance competitiveness", that full employment is a thing of the past, and that investing in human capital is the basis of a successful future "information economy" (Alexiadou 2002). Hence, what matters most in the new economy is the development of skills across the workforce. This version of equality of opportunity is seen to be the core underpinning idea of social justice since it leads to economic prosperity: "the most equitable solution is also likely to be the most efficient" (Brown 2003).

The second important version of "equality" in New Labour's policies was the adoption of the concept of "social inclusion" (Callinicos 2000). At the level of policy this is reflected in the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in the Cabinet Office in 1997. The government relied on two related sets of policies to deal with the issues. First, it drew heavily on ideas that emphasised "community" as the answer to the problem of disconnection, social exclusion and disintegration. Communities were seen as important in the production of relations of trust between individuals and the inclusive partnership-driven society, and in the generation of "social capital" (Bagley 2011). The creation of the "extended" and "full service extended" schools in 2002 represents such an attempt to build community-oriented institutions that bring families, communities and schools together (Dyson & Raffo 2007). Second, the New Labour government saw the answer to social inclusion primarily through achieving "employability". Brine (2002), Levitas (1998) and Lister (1998) have drawn out in detail the relationship between "opportunity" and "employability" in the post-1997 government policies. The overriding concern of New Labour with "social integration" defined mainly as the integration of people into the labour market has been criticised as a limited political and social project that defines "inclusion" and "exclusion" predominantly on the basis of paid employment (Levitas 1998). Since the traditional left concerns with policies that lead to full employment and aim at egalitarianism were seen to be no longer feasible, the key focus is on "promoting employability" and employment opportunities. New Labour's functionally-driven policies underpin their interpretation of social stratification, the relationship be-

tween "stakeholding" and "community", and the solutions provided to high levels of unemployment and poverty:

> All (New Labour policies) rely upon a belief that a morally acceptable social generation of 'motivation'—through the provision of 'opportunity'— can sufficiently fuel and satisfy 'aspiration' so as to inspire a renewed social order based on feelings of 'obligation' alongside those of 'responsibility' ... each show a conscious concern with order and norm. In this way it is presumed that the extreme inequities of a polarized society could be overcome with a concomitant attainment of 'social cohesion' ... order and norm thus relate to a process of exclusion and a superficial appearance of 'self-marginalisation' (Prideaux, 2001, p. 86).

In education, as well as in other social policy fields, New Labour's enthusiasm for individual responsibility for success and failure, and competitiveness, introduced by earlier Conservative administrations, suggest an acceptance of "the emerging hierarchies of privilege and opportunity that the operation of the market encourages and promotes" (Alexiadou 2002:80). They have retained and further refined the earlier period's emphasis on performance management and standards-driven curriculum, diversity of school types, and marketisation, all within a highly regulated schooling through regular and frequent inspections. What the New Labour governments contributed to this agenda was placing these goals within the context of reducing social exclusion. They reconfigured "educational opportunity" by placing the emphasis on high achievement by disadvantaged groups within a market context of social and educational differentiation. A bewildering range of: (a) new types of schools intending to increase diversity in the market place; and (b) programmes and projects, such as the Excellence in Cities initiatives, Sure Start, the Education Action Zones, Connexions and Full Service Extended Schools (FSES), Creative Partnerships, and many more, have all been designed to raise education standards in disadvantaged areas. All these initiatives have indeed produced a lot of additional resources in poor areas and in many cases there have been significant improvements among particular cohorts of pupils and schools. There are also initiatives that suggest a more "holistic approach" to education, such as the *Every Child Matters* agenda that emphasised the holistic nature of children's and families' needs, and the need for meeting these needs in an integrated way (Raffo & Gunter 2008:406, Thomson 2009). Nevertheless, despite these opportunities for pursuing the social justice agenda, the main features of the market structure, the "choice" and "selection" principles as they operate within schools, lead to a further emphasis on differentiation. This is a notion that is problematic in relation to the school as a "community", as well as the school as "part of the community" – however positively the extended schools and the *Every Child Matters* agenda have been evaluated, their capacity for addressing disadvantage is limited (Cummings et al. 2006).

School "leadership" in the New Labour period can be seen as an extension of the type of leadership promoted by earlier Conservative policies, one defined by the standards

agenda and a strongly performative culture within a marketised system of schooling. This type of leadership is also informed by school improvement and effectiveness research in order to ameliorate performance. The New Labour government put a lot of resources and attention into the creation of the ideal educational leader. In 2000 it set up the National College for School Leadership, renamed in 2009 the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Service (hereinafter referred to as "the College")[1]. The College exists to "serve school, children's centre and children's services leaders and to improve leadership through the highest quality professional development, strategic initiatives and by providing considered and informed advice to government" (NCSL website, 2010), and part of its role is to train headteachers in England who can acquire the National Professional Qualification for Headship. Plenty of resources can be found on the website of the College and a number of them are related to the Every Child Matters agenda and the Child Poverty Act of 2010. The recognition that poverty and disadvantage are a real issue within schools is clear. But the solutions offered through most of the documents and resources are consistent with the New Labour ideas that an emphasis should be placed on the development of:

– Higher ambitions for achievement amongst pupils, parents and teachers
– Localisation and partnerships between schools and other community agents for integrated services
– Vision and entrepreneurial engagement
– Enthusiasm and commitment to achieve higher standards even in the face of adversity.

The message of the College is strong that there needs to be reduction of centralised state action and an increase in the responsibilities and powers of schools. As Hargreaves (2010) suggests, this is necessary since "increased decentralisation provides an opportunity for a new vision of school improvement that capitalises on the gains made in school leadership and in partnerships between schools" (p. 4). This idea of the "self improvement school" necessitates a changing attitude and culture around schooling where "schools take ownership of the problems and reject the notion that the school itself can do little or nothing because it is somebody else's responsibility to provide a solution" (ibid., p. 9); schools capitalise on resources they can produce by collaborating with other schools; and where leadership has a moral purpose, and is characterised by selflessness, and the desire to contribute to the success of all schools rather than just your own. The notion of the "heroic"/ "transformative" leader is ever present, but it is now merged with the ideal type of the "distributive" leader who will be skilful not only in supporting teachers and drawing on their expertise, but also in cultivating the next generation of future leaders from amongst the ranks of junior teachers and middle managers.

The desirable characteristics for school leaders (drawing on personal charisma, and the right beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes) are promoted as important for the high performance of all schools (Barber et al. 2010). Interestingly, many of New

Labour's initiatives have required participating schools to be more outward looking (for instance, the Extended Schools), to be more flexible and innovative (for example, through Creative Partnerships) and to collaborate with other schools and partners (for instance, through Education Action Zones), although still within a strongly competitive framework. These initiatives placed additional and new demands on school leaders whose practice has to be localised at the same time as being oriented to a social justice agenda. There are many examples of success stories where schools have been transformed by exceptional headteachers (NCSL 2008). However, as Raffo & Gunter (2008) point out, "the evidence that the historical links between social exclusion, low educational achievement and limited life chances have been broken is hard to come by" (p. 406). For some commentators, the emphasis on the cultivation of "leadership" has been contributing to the lack of improvement of disadvantaged schools that have limited resources to devote to too many projects:

> (New Labour) persisted too long with a managerial approach to school improvement, focussing on improving leadership and pedagogy and largely neglecting the organisational demands that make it hard for schools in disadvantaged areas to improve (Lupton et al. 2009:88).

Despite the successes of New Labour in terms of dealing with disadvantage in education, the main criticisms of the Labour administrations refer to their enthusiastic embrace of the quasi-marketised system, and their systematic refusal to deal with critique and research that pointed out that diversity, competition and the market are working against social justice. New Labour always approached with deep suspicion any argument that would be set against the "choice" agenda. Their education initiatives aiming to break the link between social exclusion and education were many, and carried a lot of resources. Educational inequalities are now lower than they would have been if Labour had not additionally invested in and targeted disadvantaged groups/areas. But targeting resources in disadvantaged areas is not enough when the structural inequalities within which schools in such areas operate are not recognised:

> Ironically, (the government's) insistence that poverty should not cause educational disadvantage, and its focus on driving up academic standards through internal school improvements … has made it more difficult for schools to take a more rounded view and address the social and economic disadvantages that do hold children back (ibid.:88).

This neglect of the social context within which education success or failure is constructed is the manifestation of a deeply functional policy, neo-liberal in its assumptions, one limited in its capacity to produce a radical challenge to earlier established patterns of inequality. Achieving equality without social conflict and substantial resource redistribution is an illusion. Such an illusion has nonetheless been pursued by recent policy reform where we can observe a shift away from the "politics" of conflict towards an attempt "to secure a new educational and social

settlement, one that uses as its leitmotiv empowerment, social cohesion and inclusion as well as individual responsibility" (Avis 2007, p. 90). This context requires school leaders who manage the impossible task of combining market place success (against other less successful schools), inclusivity of all pupils (but with highly differentiated outcomes), and cooperation with other (competing) organisations. This model does not easily accommodate non-instrumental or critical approaches to school leadership, nor does it favour a localising focus for finding solutions to problems of local disadvantage. The external pressures for good performance in inspections and league tables and the penalties associated with the failure to do so radically restrict the potential for inclusive leadership that would seek critical engagement with socially disadvantaged children, parents and communities. This would require spaces within the curriculum to develop alternative and critical approaches to teaching and learning and a headship approach that is not defined by the demands of performativity of the marketplace.

Concluding Remarks

How school success is defined, and the norms that shape the direction of education reforms, are embodied in the way school leadership is conceptualised both as an organisational issue and as an issue of individual work and practice. What constitutes "good leadership" changes when educational success is re-defined from a period where the emphasis is on the "core relational work of teaching and learning" (Blackmore 2004, p. 286) to one where success is judged in performative terms, where league tables dominate and where differentiation (academic, and by association social) is rewarded. In this article, the example of the English case illustrates quite starkly the ways in which education reforms "embody" normative assumptions about social categories (in this case of the "successful" or not school leader), and how these reforms reflect wider discourses concerning social justice – as equity of access and participation in schooling (Bottery 2004, Lindblad and Popkewitz 2001).

Since spring 2010 there has been a new coalition government in the United Kingdom comprising the Conservative and Liberal parties. Their policies in education have been outlined in a very similar trajectory as those of the previous government, with an additional emphasis on giving further autonomy to schools from the local government, an approach that is likely to intensify competition among institutions for resources and for "good" pupils. Against the background of a serious economic crisis and a commitment to cut public spending, the government has been quite keen to suggest that "fairness" and "social mobility" are amongst its top priorities. In a speech by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg delivered in August 2010, he acknowledges the links between educational background and pupil outcomes as an unacceptable pattern that the government is committed to address. But, further in the same speech, the rhetoric on "how" the government plans to address these

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issues is not dissimilar to that of the earlier government, with the emphasis placed quite firmly on: (a) the non-economic dimensions of the problem and on the need to redesign welfare state objectives; and (b) changing the attitudes of parents from low socio-economic backgrounds:

> Tackling poverty of opportunity requires a more rounded approach. Welfare reform, for example, should be based on the need to improve people's lives, not just raise their incomes.

> A young person from a household in the top fifth of the of the income distribution is three times more likely to get 5 GCSE's between grades A and C than a young person brought up in a household in the bottom fifth. Our education policy is squarely aimed at reducing these inequalities.

> According to one study, the amount of interest shown by a parent in their child's education is four times more important than socio-economic background in explaining education outcomes at age 16 … … Parents hold the fortunes of the children they bring into this world in their hands. All parents have a responsibility to nurture the potential in their children. … … (Clegg 2010)

The National College for School Leadership, a product of the previous Labour government, is one of the few organisations the new government has retained and represents the quintessential forum for promoting and advocating a leadership model for the marketised and autonomous school of the future. The new government has committed itself to continue the rhetoric of an education policy for social inclusion (with the accompanied types of leadership), but also continues to promote measures that intensify the principles and practices of the market in education. It does not view the two as antithetical, as indeed they may not be, since their definition of social inclusion draws on a model of citizenship where individuals have the same right to participate in educational and social activities and they are free to move between the boundaries of social and economic spheres. Pluralism in types and forms of educational institutions is seen as a positive feature of the education market, and it is up to autonomous individuals to take advantage of their freedom to enter networks of voluntary exchanges. In this "specialisation paradigm" of social inclusion (Silver 1994), and in a meritocratic and competitive schooling system, responsibility for success is devolved to individuals and their parents, as the quote from Clegg clearly suggests.

The role of the state is seen as promoting a general good standard of education throughout, and the right incentives for competition in the school market place. Once these are in place, the role of the school leader is to use the assets at their disposal (resources, teachers, social capital of pupils, parents and the community, and most of all their own personality) to position their school in the best place possible in the hierarchy of schools. An "excellent" leader is one who will manage to use these assets to overcome the problems of disadvantage, and perform over and above expectations. However, this is already discursively put in terms of a vertical differentiation where

less excellent leaders and their schools will fall behind. In the policies of both the Labour governments of the 1997–2010 period and the current coalition government, this is an acceptable outcome that will lead to social inclusion as defined from within Silver's specialisation model.

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Endnotes

[1] In this article "disadvantage" is discussed in relation to socio-economic background. This selective focus was necessary because of limitations of space, but it also illustrates the author's belief that this form of disadvantage is more powerful in determining educational outcomes over other forms of social divisions (ethnicity, disability and gender). I nonetheless wish to fully acknowledge the significance of these in a differentiating education process.

[2] By "education" in this article I refer to compulsory forms of schooling. Again, limitations of space make it impossible to review post-compulsory sectors.

[3] This "periodisation" represents ideal types with fairly artificial chronological boundaries. Still, it is fairly well accepted in the academic literature as describing the changing relationships between the state and education policy.

[4] The notion of the "consensus" has been very much critiqued, particularly from the left of the political spectrum, as a fabrication of the ruling classes in an attempt to pacify the disadvantaged and to disguise the contribution of the state to the continuation of unequal distribution of resources across the social classes, and across racial divisions (Williams 1989).

[5] The challenge facing conservatism, according to Richard Crossman when writing in 1954, was "not to oppose public ownership or planning or the welfare state, but to use them ... to maintain the differences of wealth and status which are essential to stability" (quoted in Lawton 1994:25).

[6] During the whole of this post-war period, proposals to form a Teachers' General Council (in 1959 and 1965) were rejected by both Conservative and Labour Ministers of Education (Grace 1987).

[7] Even though by 2007 persistent poverty had fallen compared to the previous decade, poverty rates for certain categories of people (e.g. those of working age without children) rose (Department for Work and Pensions 2008). Children living in poverty in workless households represented around 16% of all children in 2009, while children living in poverty in working families rose to 2.1 million in 2010, the highest on record (Sources: Office for National Statistics 2009, Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2010).

[8] In 2007, the UK still had one of the highest income inequalities in the EU (as measured by total income of the richest one-fifth / total income of the poorest one-fifth). (Source: EU Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, 2009).

[9] In 2008, 11-year-old pupils eligible for free school meals (the proxy indicator of poverty in the English school system) were around twice as likely not to achieve basic standards in literacy and numeracy as other 11-year-old pupils. (Source: National Pupil Database 2009, Department for Children Schools and Families).

At age 11, 2009 saw the first rise in the proportion of children not reaching basic levels of numeracy and literacy over a decade. This rise was more pronounced among schools with a high proportion of children eligible for free school meals. Until 2009, these had been downwards trends, at least since 1996 (JRF 2010, http://www.poverty.org.uk/summary/reports.shtml).

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