

# THE APPLIED EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH SCHEME: WHAT MIGHT THE IMPLICATIONS BE FOR LEADERSHIP IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION?

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## ABSTRACT

The overall purpose of this paper is to explore the leadership implications of research being undertaken in the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS). First, however, we discuss the tension between the perceived aims and purposes of applied research and the aspirations of researchers. This is followed by an exposition of the AERS projects and the models of leadership that seem to be emerging within them. Gunter's (2006) conception of knowledge production in the field is then used as an analytical tool, allowing contrasts to be drawn between the emergent models of leadership and the model favoured by the Scottish Executive. This contrast challenges the prevailing orthodoxy and may be regarded by policy makers as being unhelpful. However, in drawing the paper to a close, we argue that the questioning of certainty that research entails should be considered essential by policy makers if they are to discharge their leadership responsibilities.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper we take a tentative look at the possible implications of work being undertaken through the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) for policy and practice in Scotland, with particular regard for leadership. This is not a straightforward task because it involves consideration of values and educational purposes. This takes us into the debate about the nature and purposes of research and the relationship between stakeholders such as policy makers, educational researchers, education authority officers and practitioners.

From the outset, it is important to note that AERS is a collaborative enterprise involving a wide range of people with an interest in educational research. There may be a wide variety of viewpoints, perspectives and expectations of research. Applied research, by definition, involves issues and concerns related to current policy and provision and as part of the background to this debate it is important to keep in mind the policy culture and context within which AERS is set. Within this culture and context there are assumptions about educational purposes, and perhaps also about the nature and function of research in education, and these may not be shared by everyone involved in AERS.

Applied research is generally favoured by policy makers over more theoretical approaches, presumably because it deals with the demands of pressing policy issues and implies precision, action and decision. This view of research, however, conflicts with that of many academic researchers who adopt a position, as suggested by Nisbet (2005), that 'worthwhile research must start from a position of uncertainty' (p.40) and it is not easy to reconcile this viewpoint with action and decision. Husen and Kogan (1984) (quoted in Nisbet) examine the interplay between decision-making, which aims to be authoritative, and research, which involves questioning and generating uncertainty and argue that 'worthwhile' research findings generate further uncertainty that may not be welcomed by decision-makers. This leads Husen and Kogan to question whether it is in the best interest of national authorities to sponsor the generation of uncertainty. We return to this in our final remarks.

With regard to purposes, it is evident that the prevailing policy culture ensures that international discourses about modernization, performance management

and improvement are refracted in the educational policy texts produced by the Executive and by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Anxieties about underperformance in education in an increasingly competitive global economic environment continue to bring pressure to raise educational standards and the consequence of this anxiety is a heavy emphasis on performance management, quality assurance and improvement (SEED, 2006a; SEED 2006b). Within this discourse of accountability, leadership is considered to be of critical importance (SEED, 2006a) and what we try to do in this paper is consider the extent to which the work of some of the projects within AERS may have a bearing on policy and practice in this field.

Before attempting to do so we argue that we need to consider the political policy culture and the relationships between research, policy and practice. We then comment on how leadership appears to be defined by SEED and its agencies and refer to a framework conceptualised by Gunter (2006), which we later outline and use to locate the AERS projects that appear to us to have some significance for leadership. In outlining Gunter's framework we also consider the nature of research in education. We think this is helpful because after describing and discussing the possible implications of AERS projects with regard to leadership, consideration of utility and value and positioning projects within Gunter's framework provides a conceptual framework which allows us to analyse and interpret the implications of the orientation and potential findings of AERS projects with regard to leadership. We do this in relation to the nature and value of research, the expectations that different groups may have of research, the relationship between research policy and practice, and the relationships between policy makers, education authorities, educational researchers and practitioners.

#### AERS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE

The relationship between research, policy and practice in education has been a matter of concern in the UK and elsewhere for some time (Whitty, 2006). The introduction of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) represents an attempt in Scotland to address this concern because the rationale of the scheme aspires to strengthen the relationship between researchers and possible users. The scheme's specification indicates, for example, that AERS should produce knowledge that practitioners will find valuable and can engage with. This raises interesting questions about how knowledge is produced, the relevance and applicability of the knowledge produced and the kinds of knowledge that might be appropriate or of value.

Within the various AERS projects, individuals from universities, education authorities, schools and government agencies collaborate in producing knowledge. But although all may wish to produce knowledge that will be of value, all research within AERS is not action orientated and individuals may have different interpretations of what is of value. It is also possible that within each project different collaborators may be interested in different aspects of the research and some may be interested in different sites of analysis. Gunter (2006) suggests that some, for example, may be interested in policy making processes and the relationship between policy and practice, whereas some may be interested in exploring practice to gain better understandings in order to shape improvement. Others may be interested in the interplay between individual agency and organisational structure while others, yet again, may be primarily interested in the relationship between experiential knowledge and knowledge gained from empirical research and theorising.

As researchers and practitioners we believe that understanding knowledge and how it is produced is important, but this raises fundamental questions concerning who produces knowledge, who substantiates it and the impact new knowledge may have. Scotland is a small country and its education system can be regarded as an accumulation of organizations at different levels organised in 'nested layers'. The

'nested layers' metaphor (Purkey and Smith, 1983) emphasizes the relationships between actors at different levels in the system and these may facilitate or constrain how they interpret and enact their roles in relation to their work within AERS.

In considering the possible implications of the projects within AERS for 'leadership' we believe that we also need to think about power relationships and the prevailing political policy culture. In referring to political policy culture we are talking about enduring political attitudes and behaviours and deeply embedded assumptions about policies and practices (Lieske, 1993, cited in Febey and Louis, in press) and not party political affiliations. The concept of political culture relates more to the 'accumulated history of public discourse, repeated actions, and expressed preferences of groups' which help shape the context in which policy decisions are made (Febey and Louis, in press). Within the policy discourse in Scotland the rhetoric of 'partnership' permeates official documentation (Cowie and Croxford, 2005) and the power relationships involved are not always explicit. Citing Bourdieu (1988, 2000), however, Gunter (2006:202) reminds us that we should keep in mind 'how the 'doxa' (self evident truths) are structured in ways that hide the power structures that are doing the structuring' and that 'deeper enquiries into the exercise of agency in tension with the structures the knowledge producer is located within need to be explained'. This contextualizing of the paper adds layers of complexity to our discussion of the AERS project and leadership.

#### CONCEPTUALISING LEADERSHIP

The emphasis on leadership in recent policy documentation is interesting since it appears to be contested between different agencies and groups. Leadership is identified as an important area of interest in several policy and discussion documents published post devolution. A scoping exercise within project 3 of the School Management and Governance network has shown that it gets pronounced upon under the aegis of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (leadership development has been a focus for investment by the Hunter Foundation<sup>1</sup>), is given prominence in HMIe documents in the Ambitious Excellent Schools series and quality assurance documents such as *How Good is Our School?* (SEED, 2002), and is linked to the enterprise education initiative: *Determined to Succeed*, which comes under a different department within the Executive (Reeves, et al., 2006).

The concept of leadership is very much contested and debated in educational literature. By contrast, policy documents, intriguingly, refer to the significance of school leadership, and acknowledge its critical importance, but explore different conceptions of leadership. Concepts such as 'teacher leadership' and 'distributed leadership' attract some attention, but analysis of relevant recent HMIe documents (Reeves, et al., 2006) suggests that the transformational model, based largely on the work of Leithwood and his colleagues (1999), is the preferred model of the Scottish Executive and its agencies. Their preference, then, is for the model of leadership that has dominance in the English speaking developed world (Gunter, 2006).

The emergence of a dominant, or preferred, model of leadership for the Scottish Executive, however, conceals a much more complex reality because just as there are many conceptions and models of leadership, there are also different conceptions of transformational leadership and the role of transformational leaders in the literature. There are also different conceptualisations of transformation. Gunter's framework (2006) introduces four conceptualisations and in the final discussion we use this as an analytical tool which allows contrasts to be drawn between the models of leadership emerging in AERS projects and the model favoured by the Scottish Executive

The next section considers what the networks and projects have to say about leadership. Although this paper looks at the implications of the work of AERS for leadership, leadership is not the direct focus of any of the projects being conducted under the auspices of AERS. We look, therefore, at strands of work across the

different projects, consider how their work is conceptualized, and examine some of the initial discussions, or in some cases initial findings, of projects that appear to relate in some way to leadership.

#### AERS AND MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

In our consultations we contacted all of the major projects within the three networks of AERS: (1) the Learners, Learning and Teaching Network; (2) the School Management and (3) Governance Network and the Schools and Social Capital Network. These consultations consisted of discussions with key research personnel, in many cases one of the Principal Investigators, to discuss the work of the projects and identify any emerging themes or issues. Our discussion focused on three key areas:

- research already undertaken;
- themes, or issues, that appear to be emerging;
- next steps.

The discussions reflected the different stages of research achieved in each project and while it is too early in the life of AERS to report substantive empirical findings, with the emphasis so far being mostly on the conceptual research that has been undertaken, some of those involved were able to comment on the early stages of empirical research. In this section we discuss different conceptualizations of leadership in the work of three AERS networks and say something about the possible implications for leadership that seem to arise from both conceptual and empirical research being undertaken in specific projects.

This discussion is necessarily tentative, but it may have value in a number of ways: as early indicators of possible findings of AERS research; as a valuable mid-point insight (by no means comprehensive) into the progress of some of the AERS projects; and as an articulation of emerging key research themes in Scottish education – some already identified in academic discussions and confirmed by AERS, others newly emerging as a result of AERS projects. From these discussions it seems to us that AERS projects are doing more than research the climate of change and transformation within a new and rapidly changing post-devolution Scottish educational context, because, in some cases, they appear also to be helping to create a climate of change.

We noted in our earlier discussion that the discourse in official documentation concerning leadership in Scottish education appears to be dominated by the ‘transformative model’, the preferred model of the Scottish Executive. However, work within AERS suggests that this model is internally contested within the policy documents. Other models such as ‘teacher leadership’ and ‘distributed leadership’ feature in the policy discourse and, as a result, competing models of leadership emerge, albeit with unequal weighting. It is too early to say if this contesting of models of leadership in official documentation signals evolving cultural shifts in policy in Scottish education, but is logically consistent within the aims and operation of AERS that in researching some of the key areas of educational activity in Scotland (including many new initiatives), these conflicting models of leadership are emerging within the findings of the conceptual research undertaken in the first phases of major research activity within and across specific AERS networks and projects.

#### Leadership implications in the work of the School Management and Governance Network

Over the past two decades schools and education authorities have had to come to terms with performance management and increased accountability through

the publication of examination outcomes, target setting and self-evaluation using performance indicators. Schools and education authorities are now more accountable than ever before for the quality of education provided and project 1 in the School Management and Governance network is concerned with the implications of how school performance is measured and monitored.

Although policy-makers have seen performance management as a mechanism for putting pressure on the system to force it to improve across the board and also to address the persistent 'tail' of underachievement (Ozga, 2003) it is not clear that the assumption that accountability will lead to improvement is warranted. It is possible for example, to distinguish between systems intended and used to satisfy the demands of external accountability (Tymms and Albone, 2002), and systems designed for professional monitoring. Within the former, data are in the public domain and used to hold schools to account, whereas systems designed for professional monitoring provide data for professionals within the system to interpret and use to improve the system. This suggests that there are genuine tensions between official accountability systems and monitoring systems aimed at improvement. This distinction generates different mindsets: one which reduces trust, inhibits genuine self evaluation and encourages schools to conceal any problems they may have, and one which enables schools to find and deal with emerging problems.

Researchers in this project have argued that the limitations of using performance measures in an accountability system require to be better understood by the policy and practice communities in Scotland. It is important to think carefully about purposes and the intended and unintended consequences of performance measurement (Cowie and Croxford, 2005) because performance indicators can have a corrupting influence and tempt people to distort an indicator or adopt behaviour that may be contrary to the desired impact. A related factor is that any performance indicator is an 'incomplete measure of a complex process' (Wilson, et al., 2004:5), and performance indicators may encourage schools to focus attention on some parts of the measure and possibly neglect others (Wiggins and Tymms, 2002), or focus on what is relatively easy to measure or improve, rather than what is important.

Managing school improvement in Scotland is premised on subsidiarity, with decision-making, responsibility and self-evaluation devolved to school level. However, it is possible that this approach may be compromised if the link established between external accountability and the school's own evaluative procedures is too strong. Factors such as these focus attention on the role of the headteacher and on how performance measurement operates in schools. The next stage in this project will involve six case study schools and focus on: the utility of data within schools and examine how data is or can be used to promote institutional and pupil learning; how performance indicators influence school leadership and management practices, and how teachers, headteachers and education officers view the relationship between performance management, improvement and accountability.

Project 2 within the School Management & Governance network (Citizenship and Democracy) has examined competing models of leadership from the perspective of the models of leadership that emerge in current school policy implementation. This project has examined the ways in which policy is distributed and disseminated in schools and has found that competing models of leadership may be adopted at different times as school leaders respond to different forms of policy documents and assess the practical implications of policy documentation. Research in this project suggests that a common and accepted procedure for the dissemination of policy in schools does not exist and that the dissemination procedures vary from school to school. This raises questions about the criteria for the weighting and importance attached to documents as they are received in the school.

Headteachers appear to adopt a number of strategies for prioritising documents and deciding who is to receive which document and this raises further questions

about the delegation of responsibility for areas of specialisation (e.g. citizenship). The question of delegated responsibility can be prompted by expediency and a reaction to new initiatives in education. Those involved in this project consider the term 'delegated' leadership, rather than 'distributed leadership', to be appropriate here because delegated leadership is based on an understanding of a relationship between delegated responsibility with ultimate accountability to the hierarchical leadership. The project group argues that delegated leadership persists rather than a form of distributed leadership because of the lingering influence of a performance culture in Scottish education. Work in this project has identified a recent tendency in some policy documents to be less prescriptive and less concerned with performance and accountability and the suggestion is that this may lead to greater distributed leadership rather than delegated responsibility. A more distributed form of leadership, within a less prescriptive and performance orientated culture, it could be argued, would be more systematic and planned and would result in a more deliberate and systematic dissemination of policy.

In project 3 within the School Government and Management Network, the focus is on understanding the policy processes in Scottish Education with a particular focus on changes in school management and governance in Scotland since 1999, when education became the sole responsibility of the Scottish Executive. The focus is also on the effects of policy implementation in schools through a series of longitudinal case studies in six local authorities. The purpose is to provide practitioners and others with a situated account of policy related processes in order to develop greater understanding and encourage greater participation and debate in such processes. Work within this project is attempting to develop a detailed and situated description of developments within this area of policy both as a resource for other researchers and for practitioners with an interest in school management and governance and policy formation processes.

Although it is too early to comment on work being undertaken in the longitudinal case studies in the local authorities, these should provide some insight into the policy track that supposedly runs from national level, to local authority and then to schools and teachers and finally pupils. However, a policy analysis group within this project reviewed most of relevant documentation published between 1999 and 2005<sup>2</sup> in an attempt to clarify the field as a basis for designing strategies for a more rigorous investigation. Five key strands pertaining to school management and governance have been identified and these are being used to structure further investigation. The strands that emerged from this initial analysis were: teacher professionalism; workforce structure; quality assurance; curricular framework and leadership and management, with the theme of leadership and management running across all the strands, but having particular prominence in the Ambitious Excellent Schools series of documents published by the Scottish Executive.

Early work in this project (Reeves, et al., 2006) has identified the evolving nature of the discussion of leadership in Scottish policy formation documentation and although most of the documents can be defined as managerialist in terms of their use of language and their construal of the field, there is evidence of contestation over key terms and disagreement over the direction in which leadership and management and school governance ought to develop. The documents do not appear to speak with one voice, even when they use the same vocabulary, and within and between the various strands identified in the mapping exercise, disjunctures and inconsistencies appear in the documentation. Particular groups, or organisational/institutional mixes, are linked to particular 'topics'. HMIe, for example, has a very tight control over issues of quality assurance and is credited with sole authorship and preparation for publication over most of the key texts in the quality assurance strand. In contrast, the structure for conducting the National Debate on Education was much more ephemeral and the trail of documentation (Ambitious, Excellent Schools)

that followed from its deliberations shows an authorship that links more closely to politicians, consultant/advisers appointed into positions within the Executive, and philanthropic business entrepreneurs.

Reeves, et al. (2006), argue that more detailed analysis of documentation in the Quality Assurance strand (How Good is Our School? Self Evaluation using Quality Indicators 2nd edition (2002); Improving Scottish Education (2006a) and How Good is Our School? The Journey to Excellence (2006b) has surfaced 'semantic and ideological confusion' (Ball, 1994) regarding how professionalism, collegiality and leadership appear to be conceptualized. Their analysis reveals a discourse of involvement and empowerment, which implies power sharing, or at the very least, some form of interaction in formulating policy, in order to reach a shared understanding of policy and practices. Reeves et al. find little evidence of a practical commitment to the values and aims of the rhetoric, however, because the discourse sits within a hierarchical system, which is committed to a particular model of accountability. This suggests that there may be disagreements about the way in which the education service should develop. Future work in this project will focus on exposing these differences in order to encourage dialogue and debate about what constitutes 'school improvement', and what this means for leadership, management and school governance at all levels in Scottish education.

#### Leadership implications in the work of the Learners, Learning and Teaching Network

An example of different models of leadership emerging, in a practical way, as a result of a new initiative in Scottish education can be discerned in the Learners, learning and Teaching network project 1: Framework for fostering and evaluating communities of enquiry in the field of learning and teaching. This project has been examining how communities of enquiry are constructed and how they operate and one of the initial issues is that a new model of leadership seems to be required because a new model of learning is emerging through the communities of enquiry. The construction of a community of enquiry appears to present a challenge to traditional forms of leadership because it requires a model of collaborative leadership. A community of enquiry does not require a leader, but does require a facilitator, and so work in this project raises further questions concerning the exercise of power and power relations where leadership is collaborative. Researchers in this network argue that through 'natural variations' in contexts and practices changed ways of working can be evaluated. The linking of established communities of practice, a side-effect of the work being undertaken in this project, has the potential to develop a better understanding of the processes and influence of collaborative leadership.

Work being undertaken within the Learners, learning and Teaching network project 2 is examining how teachers learn, the varieties of learning and learning contexts and how these are related to continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Some of the key issues that are emerging include: the types of CPD that are available, the type of learning they privilege and the types of CPD privileged by different stakeholders. Underpinning all of this are different, and often competing, conceptions of professionalism and effective learning. One of the challenges to emerge for leadership will be the understanding required of these variables and the ability to help plan and implement staff CPD profiles.

Project 3 within this network is examining how teachers and children view learning, and, in particular, P1 and S1 pupils in three major sites. One of the aims is to increase the amount of research that is explicitly focused on children to add to the very limited body of knowledge of research on children, especially young children, in Scotland. This research is expected to challenge school leaders to reflect on the perspective of both teachers and children. One implication that this project has for leadership is the need to allow teachers time to be open to the preferences of

children in the learning and teaching process and to be more open to listening to what children have to say. It is acknowledged that, in one sense, this is already occurring and colleagues working in this project have found that teachers of P1 and S1 have a huge regard for the children they teach and have a great commitment to pastoral care, with staff at all levels being very open to children's problems. However, there seems to be less certainty about there being a comparable openness to children's voices and opinion in relation to curriculum and policy, suggesting that there may be a dichotomy between the set of values associated with the caring teacher and the values associated with curriculum development, pedagogy and the voices that are allowed to be heard in these discourses.

#### Leadership implications in the work of the Schools and Social Capital Network

Interesting examples of the possible challenges that may emerge for leaders as a result of AERS projects can also be identified in the three inter-related projects of the Schools and Social Capital network. The overarching aim of research in this network is to help schools to work more effectively with pupils who are most at risk of exclusion by using ideas deriving from the concept of social capital. Researchers in this network define social capital as 'the 'social glue' that holds people together in families and communities and gives them a sense of belonging' (Catts and Ozga, 2005:2) and have developed a set of school social capital indicators that schools may use in a number of ways. The range of research questions being addressed across several initiatives suggest that work within this network will not only enhance our understanding of social capital but also enable leaders to gain deeper insights into the complexities of schools and the relationship between social dynamism and effectiveness.

These initiatives include, for example:

- work focused on the effectiveness of strategies to tackle inequality;
- how appropriate resources may be mobilized; identifying what has been learned from research into social capital and schools;
- exploring the impact of indicators of social capital on professional practice;
- models of professionalism and the growth and exchange of social capital;
- the characteristics of positive learning environments;
- the organisational, pedagogical and cultural conditions under which social capital is built;
- the nature of the interaction between learners and the learning community;
- the extent to which greater integration and inter agency working offers opportunities for building social capital among learners;
- the impact of social capital on educational achievement;
- the impact indicators of social capital have on professional practice;
- the models of professionalism that teachers and others may hold and the extent to which they support the development of social capital;
- factors that enable and inhibit the development of social capital in networks and the kinds of professional formation and development that best support the growth and exchange of social capital.

However, the implications of work being undertaken in this network for leadership may extend beyond gaining deeper insights into the complexities of schools. If social capital is a useful concept and it enables people to develop capacities, then this has

implications for how leadership is defined and practiced. Many of the ideas about social capital have their origins in the work of Putnam (2000) who comments on how important trust is if people are to work together in pursuit of shared objectives, and about how the development of trust and the support people provide for each other in networks helps develop positive attitudes to the institutions and relationships that constitute civic community (Catts and Ozga, 2005). Questions such as the extent to which social capital can explain or change outcomes at different levels in the system, and how social capital may be used to shape or extend thinking about schooling, the community and the education system are informing the thinking of researchers in this network, and these questions clearly have a bearing on how leadership is conceptualized at all levels.

#### DISCUSSION

As indicated in our earlier remarks, leadership is not the direct focus of any of the projects being conducted under the auspices of AERS. The projects do not focus directly on issues such as leadership responsibilities, the evaluation of leadership initiatives, the competencies required of effective leaders and leadership practices, or the impact leaders have on outcomes or approaches to leadership. It is therefore not possible to provide evidence to inform relevant policy development and practice with regard to improving leadership or delivering change in leadership practice in schools in a direct way. Our review, however, suggests that AERS projects do deal with topics and issues that have implications for policy and practice in relation to leadership at all levels in the Scottish Education system and are helping to create new understandings of the dynamic of school life and the roles of stakeholders in schools that will also impact on leadership.

In this final section, we use Gunter's framework (2006) as an analytical tool to locate and examine the implications for leadership that are emerging in the work of AERS projects and compare these with the model of transformational leadership that seems to be preferred by the Scottish Executive.

Gunter outlines a framework which illuminates four positions, or conceptualizations, of transformation: Understanding meanings; Understanding experiences; Working for change and Delivering change. In each conceptualisation there are different knowledge claims and concerns and this highlights the complexity of the knowledge claims underpinning 'transformational leadership'. The four conceptualisations are summarised below.

Understanding meanings is remote from any action that the knowledge claims may propose. This is where Gunter locates philosophical approaches that problematise, play around with ideas and ask questions about meaning. Research focused on exploring the experiences people in educational establishments have of leaders, leading and leadership is placed within Understanding experiences. Although this kind of research is also distant from the action, it is undertaken with a view to improving practice. The remaining two conceptualisations are ideological, dependent on political commitment and are much more action orientated. Gunter locates critical and axiological approaches within Working for change. Studies located here attempt to problematise where power resides and question what the exercise of power means for leaders, leading and leadership. Such studies challenge established power structures in order to generate better ways of living. Gunter sees Delivering change in terms of stimulating change and evaluating its impact. Research that can be located here asks evaluative questions (to do with the impact leaders and leadership may have on organisational outcomes), and instrumental questions (questions focused on the kind of leadership thought to be needed to secure effectiveness and improvement).

One common theme that seems to be emerging in the work of AERS networks is the importance of relationships. Work undertaken so far within AERS suggests that hierarchical models of leadership are being challenged, with the language

of 'distributed' and 'collective' leadership emphasising the collaborative nature of emerging models of leadership. AERS projects have surfaced conflicting and changing conceptualizations of leadership, reflecting perhaps different assumptions about educational purposes and improvement, and emerging tensions as new initiatives in schools begin to create new cultures.

Work being undertaken within the auspices of AERS considers the policy context and the respective roles and responsibilities of both national and local government. Our review of this work suggests that the issues surrounding knowledge production and application are complex and wide ranging. Individual schools and education authorities are complex social systems and what seems to be emerging is that current conceptions of what leadership involves and of how policy is derived and implemented are too simplistic and hierarchical and take insufficient account of the complexity of the social interaction within schools and between schools and education authorities. How leadership is conceptualised, the relationships between those involved, how headteachers construe these issues and relationships, and the interaction between headteachers, education officers and the HMIe are all critical, because the meanings that relationships, policies and processes have for headteachers and teachers will influence how they behave and what they do.

This suggests that there may be a need to consider how meaningful partnerships based on trust may be constructed and developed within the education service. Such partnerships would need to go beyond the shared involvement of the inspectorate, education authorities and schools in the application of the same set of indicators in a system of quality assurance, and be combined with a less prescriptive approach and less emphasis on a performance culture. We believe that the work of the projects within AERS has the potential to influence policy and practice and the policy culture. AERS projects can open up a dialogue about organisational frameworks that would allow new models of leadership to be explored and exercised and acknowledge the right and responsibility of schools and local communities to be involved in formulating policy at all levels. This dialogue would involve discussion of issues surrounding control, status and the distribution of power and influence and would have implications for more distributed, collaborative, democratic (Woods, 2005) and sustainable (Hargreaves and Fink, 2005) forms of leadership.

One of the interesting outcomes of our review is an insight into the relationship of the longitudinal AERS projects to the common perception of funded research — a perception that the main concern is on positivist approaches within the scientific — experimental paradigm (Nisbet, 2005). Within this paradigm, knowledge claims are concerned with 'what works' or rather what variables constitute the leadership behaviours and skills considered necessary to transform schools. Work within this conception of research may be positioned within Gunter's Delivering change category (Gunter, 2006) and may sit comfortably with the policy priorities of New Labour (Whitty, 2006) and the SEED emphasis on evidence-based policy and impact. However, few of the AERS projects ask direct evaluative and instrumental questions focused on what may need to be learned and done in order to secure and demonstrate improvement, particularly with regard to leadership. This may be disappointing to some stakeholders but, from some research perspectives, an instrumental view of research may be interpreted in narrow and mechanistic ways (Ball, 2001; Gewirtz, 2003; and Whitty, 2006) and have less of a long-term influence on attitudes and practice than other types of research (Nisbet, 2005).

Although the main concern of projects within AERS is to improve practice and support teachers, most projects take a much broader view of 'what works' and can be located within Gunter's Understanding Meaning, Understanding Experience and Working for Change positions. This conceptual contextualization is very helpful because it supports the view that if teaching is to become a research-based profession then the professional literacy of teachers must involve more than instrumental

knowledge. A variety of models of research are therefore essential if an evidence base is to be built that will help everyone involved to deal with the complexities of rapid change (Whitty, 2006).

A critical perspective is required in a research-based profession and many of the AERS projects we reviewed question prevailing assumptions about the nature of leadership and exercise of power. Some of this work is ideological, critical and axiological and reflects the effects of policy on practice, and some of the work explores practice in ways that may have consequences for policy. Work of this kind questions the extent to which activity is worthwhile and examines the practical implications of what is effective in working for change. Because this kind of research problematises the location and exercise of power and asks what happens when power is exercised, it can be located within Gunter's Working for Change position and not within the position labelled Delivering Change (Gunter, 2006).

The contrast between Working for Change and Delivering Change in relationship to leadership exemplifies and helps to explain the common perception that the relationship between government policy makers and education researchers may be one which is based on 'mutual misunderstandings' (Whitty, 2006:160). Perhaps policy makers may regard the challenges presented by some of the work within AERS as irrelevant or unhelpful, or even oppositional (Whitty, 2006), and these mutual misunderstandings may, at times, lead to a polarisation between policy makers and education researchers. Our hope would be that improved communication through involvement in AERS networks will lead to better understanding of different perspectives, assumptions and expectations among all the individuals and groups associated with AERS. Perhaps one of contributions of AERS project will be to create stronger links and understanding, not only between universities and the other sectors, but also among researchers and between policy makers and education researchers. If these hopes are to be realized engagement with AERS networks and projects will continue to require open, sensitive, transparent and sustained processes of meaning making if knowledge is to be co-constructed and joint learning facilitated.

'Worthwhile research' may lead to the generation of uncertainty (Husen and Kogan, 1984) but the responsibility to look further ahead, well beyond practical concerns about implementation, is a key aspect of educational leadership (Brown, 2002). Through exploring links between theory, ideology and practice in their involvement in projects within AERS, policy makers, educational researchers, education authority officers and practitioners are being engaged in debate about issues that have long term significance. Our hope would also be that engagement in the process of knowledge production and the eventual outcomes of AERS will encourage people to regard policy formation as an area where there are opportunities for participation and the exercise of agency and that this will help counter passivity and compliance on the part of the teaching profession (Humes, 1999). This is the context in which the conceptualisation and exercise of leadership is truly relevant and could have optimum effect.

#### NOTES

1. The Hunter Foundation was founded by Tom Hunter, a prominent Scottish businessman.
2. Most of these publications were issued by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). Some documents published by the Executive emerged from an identified agency such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education whilst others were the product of consultative or specialist working groups such as the National Ministerial Committee for Continuing Professional Development. A much smaller proportion of the material was produced by other bodies such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Education Institute for Scotland.

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