

TEACHER LEADERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The modernisation of education in England is premised within policy texts on a hierarchy of organisational leaders from teachers through to the headteacher, and as such they lead and do leading in order to impact on learner outcomes within a marketised system. Alternatively policy in Scotland has a stronger sense of the public, and as such the teacher and their work with learners is being reformed in ways that are consistent with notions of consultation and development. The paper asks questions about the intellectual resources that teachers could draw on to develop their identities within a modernising system, and argues that teachers in England and Scotland would both benefit from work on teacher leadership located in pedagogic relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Attaching the label of leadership to the teacher can be read differently. It could be interpreted as a means of integrating teachers and their work into the organisation, and as such it could be a means by which the teacher is distanced from learners and learning. Alternatively, it could be the opportunity to examine the professional expertise of teachers and how they know about learners and learning, and so the role of leadership as a learning relationship within pedagogy could be recognised and enhanced. Both forms of teacher leadership are currently in play within the international literature but more emphasis and prominence is being given to organisational than to relational leadership. This paper begins by examining the context in which teachers in Scotland and England are currently working as they are located in far reaching modernising reform strategies in schools, and then goes on to focus on how teachers can draw on a range of models to support their practice. I argue that while the teacher as formal organisational leader is consistent with current remodelling reform strategies in England, there are other conceptualisations more consistent with learning both in practice and in the literature. Current research in Scotland shows an alternative form of modernisation where teachers are working in a context that values the social purposes of education, and as such policy seems to be more conducive to teacher leadership as relational and communal.

MODERNISING TEACHERS

The response of the UK state to the globalisation of economic production and capital is to fundamentally restructure public services. This is known as modernisation and it involves changes to the structure and culture of organisations, personnel and working practices (Cabinet Office, 1999). Osborne and Gaebler (1993) argue that industrial based bureaucracies have served their purpose, and in the current context “they are like luxury ocean liners in an age of supersonic jets: big, cumbersome, expensive, and extremely difficult to turn around” (12). Instead entrepreneurial governments are now needed that:

“...promote *competition* between service providers. They *empower* citizens by pushing control out of the bureaucracy, into the community. They measure the performance of their agencies, focusing not on inputs but on *outcomes*. They are driven by their goals — their *missions* — not by their rules and regulations. They redefine their clients as *customers* and offer them choices

– between schools, between training programs, between housing options. They *prevent* problems before they emerge, rather than simply offering services afterward. They put their energies into *earning* money, not simply spending it. They *decentralize* authority, embracing participatory management. They prefer *market* mechanisms to bureaucratic mechanisms. And they focus not simply on providing public services, but on *catalyzing* all sectors — public, private, and voluntary — into action to solve their community’s problems” (19–20, authors’ own emphasis).

The UK state has grown as a public bureaucracy, overlain onto and making inroads into, a monarchical infrastructure, and while it can be characterised as if it is permanent its legitimacy remains unsettled. This is largely because entrepreneurial practice has grown from the middle-ages, it remains strong, and continues to challenge and win victories against any form of statism, including social justice. As Osborne and Gaebler show in the tone and pace of their description, it seems that entrepreneurial government is normal and desirable. State provision of education is taking this on board, and as such the system must become more devolved, personnel must be incentivised, and the customer must have more choice (DfES, 2003). New Labour governments from 1997 have retained site based performance management inherited from the Thatcherite administrations, and have strengthened headteacher entrepreneurial leadership of the school as an organisation that must deliver national standards. Consequent contradictions are lived in the everyday work of teachers who have to provide evidence of impact but at the same time are required to be responsive to the market. Research in England shows that workload is a central feature in problems in recruitment and retention of teachers (Smithers and Robinson, 2003), and in particular it is overload of centrally determined curriculum changes and the associated evidencing of implementation that results in long hours and overwork (Thomas, *et al.*, 2004). Research evidence from Europe reported by Ozga (2005) shows that: “the changes associated with new forms of governance... have been experienced by teachers as increasing demands on them while diminishing their sense of direction, autonomy and agency” (209).

There are two trends underlying this situation: one of performance and effectiveness where teachers and their work are regulated through managerialism; and a second one of pedagogic and relational practice where the focus is on teacher development. Both of these trends are in play in England and Scotland, but it is out of the scope of this paper to undertake the type of strategic “home international comparison” over time advocated by Raffe (2000:1). This paper is not about examining pre- and post-devolution practice where policy making can be examined according to whether London policy is being adopted or adapted. Instead, it is possible to engage in “policy learning” (Raffe 2000:1) through examining the interplay between policy intensions and experiences. Ozga (2005), using theorising by Jones and Alexiadou (2001), argues that while there are global forces at work, there is a need to recognise that policy is both “travelling” and “embedded”. Hence while regulating educational purposes to deliver an economically productive workforce is travelling to and around the UK, it is also the case that local practice, culture and requirements are embedded, and hence mediate and possibly act as a barrier to how travelling policy is read.

Pertinent to this is how teachers in England and Scotland are facing modernisation of their work and the workforce. In England a major reform is taking place called *Remodelling*, and the official aim is to free teachers from bureaucracy in order to focus on the core purposes of teaching (NRT, 2003). What is driving this policy is a business model of the flexible employment and deployment of adults to teach children, and so time must be provided in the school day to plan learning and how non-teachers are to work with the children. The aim is to increase the role of support staff (e.g. bursar, clerical assistant) to not only take away bureaucratic burdens,

but also through the contracting of teaching assistants to deliver learning in the classroom. Teaching assistants will supervise a lesson if a teacher is absent. When combined with performance related pay, the teacher is disciplined into contractual conformity by having to calculate their value added in ways that are organisational through the efficient and effective deployment of other adults. The separation out of planning from delivery means that fewer teachers are necessary, and so the crisis in recruitment and retention can be solved. Remodelling is part of an ongoing trend in the deregulation of teaching, and it is based on a challenge to the profession as a 'provider capture' bureaucracy (Gunter, 2005a; Gunter and Rayner, forthcoming). While there is anecdotal evidence there is no systematic and independent research taking place (Gunter, 2005d). Official evaluations (Easton, *et al.*, 2005; Ofsted, 2004; Wilson, *et al.*, 2005) have focused on the functional implementation of the policy and the role of agencies in delivering the reform rather than on the meaning and experiences of policy engagement at local level (Gunter, *et al.*, 2006).

Ozga (2005) argues that in Scotland embedded mediation of travelling modernisation has "offered a revived public service partnership model of governance combined with new elements of public consultation and democratization" (209). She has also argued that "the modernisation programme was associated with inappropriate English priorities in education" (Ozga, 2002:335), and so it seems that a stronger unionised workforce, within a culture that values the public good, together with important differences in how devolution to schools operates, means that teacher participation in modernisation is potentially stronger due to consultation processes. For example, the instrumental nature of the NPQH compared with the more professionally orientated SQH illustrates the difference between the purpose of compliance in England (Gunter, 2001b) and engagement in Scotland (Menter, *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, comparison between the McCrone inquiry in dealing with the breakdown on pay negotiations in Scotland and the introduction of the Threshold in England by Menter, *et al.* (2004) shows that the crisis in Scotland was resolved through a development strategy in comparison to performance control in England. According to Menter, *et al.* (2004) the solution in Scotland was developed through a reaction to a crisis and was worked through with teacher representation. Whereas in England the approach was deliberate with a planned centralised intervention "which has treated teachers as the objects of policy" (210). So while change is taking place in the composition of the workforce in Scottish schools, there are guidelines on the deployment of teaching assistants that do not separate out design from delivery. The General Teaching Council for Scotland is very clear that their role is to undertake "tasks in the classroom which do not arise directly from the process of learning and teaching" and as such "classroom assistants do not work independently of the teacher, they work with the teacher and under the direction of the teacher" (Cited in Ozga, 2005:216). This is not only a statement on the expertise of the teacher, but also a fundamental understanding that the learning process cannot be Taylorised by conceptualising teaching as a series of isolated tasks that different people, with different training, and different (or even flexible) salary scales can perform.

Nevertheless, the Scottish system should not be characterised as wholly positive and the English one as being endemically fraught with difficulties, as it seems the process of implementation in Scotland has raised questions about cost and access, and in England things have run smoothly as teachers seem to have completed the Threshold paperwork and there has been no industrial action regarding the enhanced role of teaching assistants in teaching. While policy texts and aspects of the process show distinctive differences in tone and aspirations, it could be argued that in certain respects there shared practices. Current research into managerialism illuminates this in two ways: first, teachers in both nations show an embedded deference to hierarchy in ways that make the policy drive towards collaboration and development in Scotland problematic. For example, MacDonald (2004:415) argues that "Scottish

primary teachers may be agents of their own marginality” and while they have shown “passivity” in their response to disagreeing with curriculum change, their colleagues in England have been more selective in regard to adopting changes that fit with their professional beliefs (425–426). A second issue that commentators have raised is that while the continuing professional development framework may be more professionally orientated in Scotland, it is still located within a wider managerialist process that may be more moderate than in England, but the drive for coherence and performance still dominates (Patrick, *et al.*, 2003). For example, Purdon (2003) argues that the consultation process does not guarantee that teachers are listened to, and so “what might be perceived as apathy on the part of teachers in terms of contribution to consultation exercises is possibly a response to the feeling that there is little point in contributing if the consultation exercise is principally about demonstrating democracy in the process, and in reality has little effect on a pre-determined outcome (435). Work by Reeves (2005) shows that the interplay between travelling and embedded policy is generating contested understandings of professionalism, and she argues that within localised practice the realities of the Chartered Teacher Status showed the inherent structures that connect the endurance of hierarchy with the willingness to exercise power. It seems that teacher activism to build collaborative practice was stifled by role structures, and they needed both internal and external support otherwise: “the would-be charter teachers were reliant on their personal credibility and skills in securing the permissions and resources they needed to act” (11).

Given the globalisation of restructuring that is travelling to a system and the mediation of such packaged policy ‘brochures’ through embedded practices and values, it makes sense to ask a series of questions regarding the type of intellectual resources that are brought to bear on issues of selection and decision-making. For example, how and why do practitioners respond to and engage with contested models of professional practice that travel to them? What opportunities do practitioners have to engage in dialogue about practice and how it might develop? What is read and how does this support conceptual work? Underpinning this is the core question: what exists in current research to support teachers in their practice? In the next section of the paper I intend examining this question by undertaking a study of what we know about teacher leadership.

CONCEPTUALISING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The hegemony of headteachers as transformational leaders in the international literature has positioned teachers as followers of a vision of the school outside of schooling, and learners displaced from learning (Gunter, 2001a). Such a theory has travelled the world from its origins in north American business writing (see Bennis and Nanus, 1985), and is being widely promoted as preferred language and practice (see Leithwood, *et al.*, 1999). The consequences of the individual and individualising headteacher who inspires, influences and seduces others as a form of benign subordination means that organisational structure and culture have dominated the content and delivery of what is regarded as legitimate professional practice. Hence the work of teachers is to implement externally determined curricula and administer national tests, and complete paperwork to demonstrate such delivery. Such a model of professionalism needs teachers to become enthusiastic and skilled in organisational procedures of data handling and processing, and to have the capacity to constantly question what is being done and who by in order to be responsive and flexible to external demands for change. Teacher identity is shaped around planning, target setting, monitoring and evaluating. As such the teacher can be empowered without authentic power, and can be responsive with all the responsibility.

The dominant form of teacher leadership that is being developed in the literature is consistent with this teacher-proofing of learning, and enables hierarchy to be

sustained. Two major reviews of the literature (Muijs and Harris, 2003; York-Barr and Duke, 2004) show that the starting point by authors is primarily the organisational requirements of the division of labour. Leithwood (2003) defines two types of teacher leadership: (a) formal teacher leaders in regard to titles and job descriptions, and so a teacher leader is a head of department or year, and (b) informal teacher leaders who are on board "...by sharing their expertise, by volunteering for new projects and by bringing new ideas to the school" (104–105). The school is rendered tangible through the integration of the self with the expectations of what is officially good practice in regard to skills, behaviours and language (Leithwood, *et al.*, 2003). Such an approach is regarded as vital to the smooth working of site based management reforms (Clemson-Ingram and Fessler, 1997; Marks and Louis, 1999; Ovando, 1996). Furthermore it enables the impact studies needed to secure funding in a competitive market place (project bidding, pay awards, and customer recruitment) to operate. Considerable work is going into designing, trialling and requiring ways of measuring the impact of the headteacher and other teachers on student learning and in particular on differentiating the variables to be measured and the ways in which particular roles impact or mediate such impact (Leithwood and Levin, 2005). The lack of substantial and clear evidence to inform policy and practice has not stopped the advocacy of teacher leadership to deliver the effective and efficient organisation. As such it remains conservative in aspiration and articulation. Conceptual work tends to be about what teacher leaders can and should do better (Frost and Durrant, 2003; Harris and Muijs, 2002) and what headteachers can do to foster, encourage and develop it (Leithwood, 2003).

This model of teacher leadership presents a professionalizing agenda around identity and satisfaction through what is done outside of the classroom. Hybrid models of transformational leadership are travelling to the UK in ways that are consistent with this form of teacher leadership: first, instructional leadership puts the emphasis on teaching and learning, but the approach is one where the organisational conditions are managed in such a way as to maximise the impact of the teacher rather than begin with students and their learning; second, distributed leadership gives recognition to the need for a division of labour, but it is essentially a form of top-down delegation rather than a relocation of decision-making; and, third, parallel leadership where heads take on a strategic role and teachers a classroom role suggests a collaborative link in relation to resource acquisition and deployment, but when combined with cultures of power this is less about vertically connected activity and instead emerges as a horizontal divide between in class and out of class work where the latter is given more status and pay (Gunter, 2005a). None of these models awaken the sedated teacher delivering the data necessary to satisfy external performance measures (Gunter, 2003).

There is a range of travelling ideas and empirical work that tell other stories about professional practice. In particular, work by Crowther (1997), Foster (1989), Lingard, *et al.* (2003), and Smyth (2001; 2003) suggests that teacher commitment to wider values of social justice can remain resilient and make a difference even at a time of performativity. Evidence exists of local models of school improvement and change that are innovative through the focus on learning, as well as providing the data and answers to the questions demanded by the standards agenda (Hatcher 2005). While it is out of the scope of this paper to explore this in detail, there is evidence of practitioner professionalism in regard to teaching and learning, and new and innovative ways in which learning is being approached (Fielding, 2001; Gunter, 2001a; 2005; Hollins, *et al.*, 2005).

What Patrick, *et al.* (2003) identify as a "co-linear" existence of performance and development in policy and practice in Scotland can also be identified in England, and it does mean that what is travelling and what is embedded needs ongoing study. Research from Scotland suggests a tension between embedded conservatism

and activism, within a policy context that is both seeking to affirm professional values but at the same time drive forward the standards agenda through managerial practice. In England, there is a more overtly managerial policy process that has both captured parts of the profession and alienated others; and, which has strengthened the acceptance of organisational hierarchy together with the strategic interpretation of policy into practice. The complexity of locality and the struggle for position within practice does mean that the research agenda needs to look less at policy relays and more at how decisions and choices are exercised in context. Consequently what matters is not so much how evidence is constructed and accessed, but how it is used through conceptually informed practice. So the emphasis is on how practice, thought through in social contexts (classrooms, staffrooms, seminar rooms), allows the teacher to be networked into a range of knowing (Gunter, 2005b). Of interest here is how such an approach would enable teachers to grapple with how they want their work to be known and labelled, and so as Leithwood (2003) asks what is the “motivation for grafting the concept of ‘leadership’ onto the concept of ‘teacher’” (114)? This is a legitimate question that teachers need to ask in relation to their embedded identity and the formal organisational leader as postholder identity that is travelling to them. There has been resistance to this title which can be interpreted negatively as provider capture i.e. teachers don’t understand what they might become (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001), or more productively, teachers do not want to take on board labels and identities that distort the core purpose of teaching and learning as a shared and communal activity (Gunter, 2005a).

Exploring the power processes embedded in the link between label, identity and practice, means that new understandings might develop. For example, teachers as leaders might just be teachers who are teachers, and as such leadership as activity (setting direction) and action (talking) is located within this. Teachers could be identified as passive, active, resistant or accepting as a result of how they are studied as responders to policy. If the approach is to focus on their practice and student learning, then alternative understandings may develop. If the student is put at the centre of schools and schooling then as Starratt (2003) argues there has to be a shift from the transmission and testing of particular types of knowledge to the “active social construction of knowledge” (161) in context, and so learning is located within a tension between the development of moral agency to do, to know, and to be, with social processes of negotiation and agreement. Once a relational form of leadership within learning is adopted, where activity (e.g. teaching) and action (e.g. listening) takes place, then it is possible to reveal the importance of what teachers do on their own and with others in the process of teaching with children.

Teaching is not just a means to an end (data, certificate) but is “...a *distinctive way of being human* in a world that is now one with an unprecedented plurality of lifestyles, value orientations and careers” (Hogan, 2003:209, author’s own emphasis). Crucial to this are what teachers believe works and how their caring responsibilities of ‘do no harm’ sustain choices in whether to engage in particular forms of practice. Noddings (2003) argues that teaching must: first, “be constructed around the perceived need for learning” (242), and this dependency on learning means that teaching “does not exist for itself” (242); second, “we can hardly insist that every student must learn what the teacher ‘teaches’” (243) and so how the student is positioned in teaching matters; third, “it is not the subjects themselves that induce critical thinking, but the ways in which they are taught and learned” (246), and so it is the judgement of the teacher that matters in regard to how and why learning takes place from the design of interventions through to assessment.

Having a defensible model of practice such as this is not professional arrogance but recognises the teacher as policymaker (Ozga, 2000). This conceptualises teachers making decisions about their work rather than being “ventriloquists for transnational capital” (Smyth, 2001:156). If embedded policy and the underpinning knowledge

claims through which conceptually informed practice operates are respected, then this characterisation of the teacher makes sense, because: “education policy research should be available as a resource and as an arena of activity for teachers in all sectors because of its capacity to inform their own policy directions and to encourage autonomous, critical judgement of government policy” (Ozga, 2000:5). There are two implications: first, how teachers engage with the form of entrepreneurial leadership being imposed upon them and their headteacher colleagues; and second, how teachers practice policymaking. The two are connected through the exercise of agency through which a more radical form of reflective practitioner is adopted than the benign self-flagellation version that is offered to teachers in England (Gunter, 1997). For example, Smyth (2001:171–172) argues that “teacher learning, which is becoming increasingly coupled with teacher leadership, is about teachers not being fearful of ‘confronting strangeness’...”, where there is a refusal “to accept customs, rituals, and the familiar world unquestioningly”, and so, “teacher leadership is, therefore, about teachers understanding the broader forces shaping their work and resisting domestication and not being dominated by outside authorities”.

SETTING THE AGENDA

What is modern (as distinct from medieval or feudal) is empty until purposes and strategy regarding people, work and power structures are constructed into a process of modernisation (Gunter, 2005c). There is no pure modernisation but instead what is ‘new’ is laid over what is ‘old’, and what is ‘newer’ might not be ‘new’, and so current approaches in both England and Scotland are a complex interplay of travelling and embedded policy and knowledge. The public sector value system is more resilient in Scotland than in England, the marketisation of services is stronger in England than in Scotland, and so modernisation is emerging with distinctive features in both systems. As Ferguson (2000) argues in England the dominance of markets means that managerialism as organisational performance is prevalent but in Scotland issues regarding performance and inclusion are approached in policy texts as seeking to work with teachers in developing a collaborative profession. The establishment of the Scottish parliament means that there is a formal and potentially autonomous space whereas in England the lack of such a forum combined with the neutering of local government means that finding such spaces remains problematic. Nevertheless, there is evidence of activism in England (Gunter, 2005d) and of schools developing alternative approaches to official models (Gunter, 2005a). The consequences of this are, as Smyth (2003) argues, teacher identity is not fixed by the self or by external determinants such as government training, and so where and who teachers turn to for support when they receive travelling policies is a key issue for the field.

The brief analysis of the literature on teacher leadership shows that the bulk of what is being produced is external to the UK and at its most generous is primarily about enabling the efficient and effective deployment of personnel. More pessimistic assessments could see this as presenting work done outside of the classroom as more important than that done with students, and so status and distinction comes from being separated out from the rank and file, while the reality could be working a lot harder for little professional or material gain. However, there is research and theorising that presents other stories and approaches that could sustain the teacher as teacher that is located in learning purposes and is directly connected to learners. In this conceptualisation teachers cannot only access ideas and arguments about the work they should and could be doing, but also support for a more activist approach to the formation and development of their identities (Sachs, 2003). However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the possibilities of developing what Jones (2004:22) calls “an education counter-politics” in both Scotland and England, with more work needed on whether and how alternative policies are being developed within practice. Indeed the place of the knowledge producer in higher education is directly relevant

to this situation, and those who undertake systematic reviews of the literature for government agencies, work on national programmes of training, and/or work with practitioners on postgraduate programmes have to ask some serious questions about their positioning within field.

Blackmore (2004) asks whether research is about servicing policy change, critiquing policy change strategies or developing an activist approach through strategising about change. For example, critical evaluation and activist approaches is a form of “scholarship with commitment” (Bourdieu, 2003:24) and requires policy analysis of trends suggesting the deregulation of teaching. The unreflexive adoption of teacher leadership as an organisational role means that Remodelling can be rolled out smoothly and optimistically as if teachers are being reprofessionalised in England. However, once teachers accept the management of others doing their work then they essentially write themselves out of the script. Models that begin with pedagogy and the primacy of learners create a form of teacher leadership that maintains the professional purposes of teachers, and their work with students as citizens as well as economically productive workers. These models exist in research and theorising in the field both as embedded and travelling knowledge within and to both nations but it seems that knowledge workers in England are being overtly corralled through contract research into the servicing of policy. What comparative work within the UK can do is to examine knowledge production processes, and the link between the state, public policy and research. Analysis of current Scottish education policy processes seem to suggest that embedded dispositions towards members of higher educational institutions as legitimate knowledge producers is enabling teachers to have access to knowledge and knowing that their English counterparts can only obtain through their own efforts to read, to research and to pay for postgraduate study (Menter, *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, collaborations across the four UK nations and between field members in schools and higher education are the spaces where critical questions can be asked and activist opportunities be seized.

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