Learning to lead: the approaches and strategies of headteachers in English schools.

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Abstract
The rise of school leadership as a policy imperative in England has been dramatic under New Labour governments from 1997, particularly with a huge investment in a national leadership training framework and the National College for School Leadership. Drawing on data from a major research project funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) we report on headteacher biographical experiences of leadership. Specifically we examine what headteachers have to say about their approach to leading and leadership, and we provide evidence of how they understand leadership development. We present a critical analysis of the model of leadership practice and development that is currently being promoted in official government policy.

Introduction

The ascendancy of school leadership in England is linked to the UK government's goals of raising educational standards and modernising the education system. The primacy of leadership is part of a wider agenda of transformation across public services where leaders have been conceptualised as the vehicle by which policy reforms can be implemented and change can be realised (Cabinet Office, 1999; PMSU, 2006). School leadership has also received greater attention by policymakers and by academics both nationally and internationally where there has been a proliferation of research and writing (see Mullen et al, 2002). Following Gunter (2005) we recognise that while research is pluralistic policymakers have shown a preference for the advocacy of functional organisational leadership with an emphasis on measuring the impact of school leadership on student outcomes and effectiveness (e.g. Leithwood and Levin, 2005). While the intention is for policy to directly impact on the practice of local leaders in the delivery of national reforms (Barber, 2007) the issue for this paper is whether and how headteachers can engage in local policy development (Gunter, 2001). We draw on Bowe and Ball (1995) who argue that "practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of policy" (p22). A study of practice enables an examination of leader and leadership dispositions, together with how "policy ensembles" (Ball, 1994: 22) such as performance audits and choice work in ways to constrain the "the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise'; thus it limits our responses to change, and leads us to misunderstand what policy is by misunderstanding what it does" (Ball, 1994: 23). In this paper we intend to explore these matters, and we present data from headteacher respondents in the ESRC funded *Knowledge Production in Educational*

Leadership Project (KPEL) to show how headteachers as school leaders in England understand their role and the approaches they take to leadership.

The Ascendancy of School Leadership

Arguably, leadership has emerged in policymaking as a 'lever' for promoting change, particularly supporting neo-liberal attacks on the state and the public provision of education around the world (see Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, Leithwood et al., 1999). From the 1980s the focus on 'management' underpinned much of the Conservative government's policies (see Coopers and Lybrand, 1988). The idea that the right to manage, as favoured in business (and by new right trade union reformers), would improve the quality and efficiency of public services led to managerialist activities and greater control (Clarke and Newman, 1997). The emergence of a New Public Management (Hood, 1991; Ferlie et al., 1996) was not exclusive to the UK but a driving force behind the policies of governments worldwide and connected to concerns about quality, performance and measurable outcomes (Chubb and Moe, 1990). By the 1990s the discourse of leadership superseded that of management and was constructed as the means by which organisational culture could be transformed (Gunter, 2004). Leadership, often defined as a process of influence (Yukl, 2002), is associated with being visionary, motivational, inspirational and innovative. Leadership came to be regarded as *the* label for professional practice in order to secure change in education, and this discourse of leadership was embraced by New Labour (Gunter and Forrester, 2007).

When New Labour came into office in May 1997 the modernisation of education was central to its policymaking agenda. New Labour's ultimate aim was to improve standards and develop a "world-class" system (Barber 2001). *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) was published within weeks of New Labour taking office. It provided insight into the direction of policy and drew attention to the importance and quality of leadership from headteachers. Subsequently, in *teachers: meeting the challenge of change* (DfEE, 1998a), a whole chapter was devoted to school leadership. The development of a national training framework for headship was pronounced (see also NCSL, 2001) along with extended pay scales and

performance related pay (DfEE, 1998a) It was apparent that headteachers were fundamental to the government's over-arching strategy for education (see also DfES, 1998b):

> All schools need a leader who creates a sense of purpose and direction, sets high expectations of staff and pupils, focuses on teaching and learning, monitors performance and motivates staff to give of their best. The best heads are as good as the best leaders in any sector; including business (DfEE, 1998a: 22)

It is evident from policy texts that leadership in schools clearly resided with the headteacher who was entrusted with the task of implementing government's educational reforms (see DfES, 2004a). However the quality and effectiveness of some heads, and their ability to achieve results, was doubted by policymakers who perceived the need to ensure that heads were equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to respond to the challenges of change (House of Commons, 1998). The existing training of heads was regarded as inadequate and so the discourse was around an urgent need for a coherent training programme. Policymakers were also aware of a looming headteacher shortage and therefore a potential crisis in the number of people able and willing to lead schools. Government intervention was thus required to redress this trend and ensure a succession of school leaders as the local implementers of reform.

Policymakers' interest in school leadership follows evidence from the fields of School Improvement and School Effectiveness where educational researchers identified a link between the quality of leadership and effective schooling (Hopkins 2001; Sammons et al., 1995; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2001). Policymakers have contracted 'experts' from these fields to construct school leadership and accepted the configuration as a model that is 'transformational'. In New Labour's first term this took the form of the "hero head" whereby strong leadership was invested in a sole individual who would, to use New Labour speak, 'turn a school around'. In order to ensure this model was propagated among headteachers, New Labour made two major interventions: first, it instructed the then Teacher Training Agency to produce National Standards for Headteachers (TTA, 1998). The professional competence and conduct of headteachers has therefore been made explicit and this has structured the content of formal national preparation and professional development programmes, and framed constructions of 'good practice'. Second, a National College for

School Leadership (NCSL) was created and offering “cutting edge leadership training” (DfEE, 1998a). It is to the NCSL that this paper now turns.

Training Transformational Leadership

The idea of a national college had been developing over several years prior to New Labour coming into government (see Wood, 1982). Bolam (2004: 256) argues that a college became feasible from 1997 for three main reasons: first, it was ideally suited to New Labours plans for enhancing the status of the teaching profession as part of its core strategy of raising standards in education; second, ICT developments opened up a whole range of communication possibilities that had previously not been available; and, third, the government was prepared to invest substantial sums of pubic money in both a national college and ICT.

Plans to establish a national college for headteachers were announced by Prime Minister Tony Blair at the first New Heads Conference organised by DfEE in October 1998 (DfES, 1998b). The Prime Minister declared that £10 million would be made available to cover setting up costs and investment in the training of new and serving heads would be increased to £25 million for 1999/2000 (more than double for previous year). The Prime Minister called for better recognition of heads, higher salaries for good heads while those who were not effective would be weeded out (Passmore, 1998). The NCSL was subsequently launched in November 2000, housed initially in temporary premises on the University of Nottingham campus, prior to moving into its own purpose-built premises there in 2002.

The College has three core areas of activity: national and partnership programmes; research and development; and online learning, networks and information. It is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) with a remit from the Secretary of State for Education. The first remit letter stated that the college “develop and oversee a coherent national training and development framework for heads, deputies and others in leadership positions” (Blunkett, 2000: 2) and “develop its role as powerhouse for high quality research on leadership issues directly related to actual practice in schools” (Blunkett, 2000: 3-4). A linear training framework is now provided: from aspiring and serving middle leaders and heads through to experienced

heads. In terms of research, Riley and Mulford (2007:84) assert "as a recipient of government funding for educational leadership research, the NCSL can exert an unprecedented influence on the direction and scope of research within England". The NSCL epitomises a centralised monopoly and branding for the configuration of school leadership as a practical and research field in England.

Headteacher Experiences of Transformational Leadership

New Labour's focus on education brought a deluge of externally imposed initiatives affecting every aspect of schooling and school-life creating opportunities and challenges. While the plethora of initiatives reportedly are designed to improve performance and are radically changing schools for the better (Barber, 2007), the pressures of constant change and unrelenting government policies has inevitably impacted upon the lives of those leading (and working in) schools (Sellgren, 2007). There are too many initiatives to list here, but we draw attention to just some in order to illustrate the inherent tensions within policy, which headteachers have to try and reconcile at the local level. First, the narrow standards agenda versus personalised learning and creativity; second, the production of evidence as individual high performing learning organisations versus the inter-agency collaboration demanded by the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004b) agenda; third, the promotion of a new professionalism for teachers (higher status/higher rewards) versus Workforce Remodelling including Teaching Assistants (not teacher-trained) who increasingly have teaching roles and responsibilities (Butt and Gunter, 2007).

Headteachers have been required or encouraged to implement New Labour's reforms, manage change and are held accountable for their school's performance. Without a doubt the work and role of the headteacher has altered considerably under New Labour. What has transpired is a situation where: the nature of the headship role is too much for one single person; demographically headteacher numbers are declining; and there are too few people in schools willing to become a headteacher. To address this situation government has gradually reworked the "hero-head", top-down model of school leadership towards one whereby leadership is distributed throughout the organisation (Leithwood, 2001; Harris, 2005). Others

in schools are thus charged with taking on responsibilities and the head's role involves building a strong and effective leadership team. This shift reflects trends in leadership more generally elsewhere. The government is also seeking new forms of leadership and commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to examine a range of "existing, emerging and potential models" (DfES/PwC, 2007:3). Federations of schools with an executive at the top of the hierarchy and co-headship are being given consideration along with whether the person leading a school needs to have QTS (DfES/PwC, 2007). The government is also actively pushing for more collaborative ways where schools work together in partnerships in order to improve schools (Gunter et al., 2007).

So far we have outlined the rise of school leadership in policymaking and the educational policy reform context in which headteachers have to operate. Concerns are being raised about the heroic and distributed leadership models promoted by New Labour and its NDPBs (Barker, 2005; Gunter 2001; Gunter and Rayner, 2007). However, the state monopoly over knowledge production through the control of preparation, development and research, means that there is a marginalisation of studies of experiences (e.g. Hall, 1996; Southworth, 1995; Ribbins, 1997) in favour of impact studies (e.g. Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood and Levin, 2005). Consequently, little is currently known about how headteachers actually do the job and how they position themselves at this time of permanent revolution. In the next section we describe our project and then illustrate how headteachers approach leadership at the local level.

Researching Headteachers

The KPEL project investigated the rise of school leadership in public policymaking and specifically as a policy strategy under New Labour. Knowledge about school leadership and how that knowledge is produced and used was thus central to this project, and so the investigation focused on the relationship between the state, public policy and knowledge production (see Gunter and Forrester, 2007). This paper focuses specially on the data and analysis generated through interviews with 25 headteachers who participated.

Table 1 presents the full sample and like Ribbins and Marland (1994), “we have tried to select people who we believed would be interesting” and were “different in terms of their life experiences and their views” (p7). The heads are at diverse stages in their careers and we have adopted Sugrue’s (2005) categorisation of describing school principals (headteachers) as “recent” appointees, “experienced” or “veterans”. The heads are individuals with different backgrounds, life experiences and career trajectories. They differ in age and the number of years spent in the teaching profession. They have their own perspectives and philosophies about education and about learning and life more generally. Their training, both as teachers and as leaders, has been undertaken in different periods of time and is thus underpinned by different educational ideologies and philosophies. Different generations of headteachers have known different levels of professional autonomy and managerial control. There have been different expectations of headteachers over time and so leading a school has had different meanings for them. Their experience of working in the context of different school settings varies as does the types of schools in which they are currently headteachers. Some are heads of schools in rural locations, others are in urban areas. The communities surrounding their schools may be described as deprived and disadvantaged, affluent and prosperous or somewhere in-between. The performance of each school, as defined by its league table positioning, encompasses the full range from low to high performing. The schools may be faith schools, non-denominational, community schools, or specialist schools for example.

Table 1: Sample.

Headteachers	**Primary**	**Secondary**	**Special**	**Total heads**
Recent (1-5 years)	3 males 2 females	1 male 3 females		9
Experienced (6 -15 years)	3 females	2 males 1 female	1 male	7
Experienced (Retired) (6 -15 years, now retired)	1 female			1
Veteran (over 16 years)	1 female	3 males	1 female	5
Veteran (Retired) (over 16 years, now retired)		3 males		3
Total schools	10	13	2	25

Fieldwork (September 2006 - March 2007) focused on the relationship between school leadership as a form of national public policy and as lived practice. A biographical approach was adopted whereby the headteachers were invited to talk about their professional experiences. Each headteacher responded to a series of questions on aspects on their reasons for becoming a headteacher, the nature of their training and professional development, and their likes and concerns about headship. Their views of New Labour's policies were sought as was their understanding of official model(s) of school leadership. Particular attention was given to how each headteacher perceived their approach to leadership practice, to reflect upon how this had been learned and how effective they believed their approach was. Limited space here permits a full presentation of each of the 25 individual approaches to leadership and so we provide a focus on five headteachers who illustrate themes from the whole data, see Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of 5 heads

Headteacher	Gender	Status	School Type	School Location
Susan	F	E	Primary	Small Town/Urban
Mary	F	R	Primary	Village/Rural
John	M	R	Primary	City/Urban
Linda	F	E	Secondary	City/Urban
Bill	M	V(R)	Secondary	City/Urban

Of the 25 headteachers interviewed some articulated their approach to leadership in terms of different phases. These were both 'experienced' heads or 'veterans' who could reflect on a number of years of headship. They perceived that at first they were "directive" and later moved towards "collaboration" whereby they devolved leadership to others. Susan described her approach to leadership as having three distinct phases. In the first phase ("this has got to change" phase) it was necessary to instigate change quickly in order to achieve what she believed the governors had appointed her to do. There was a sense of urgency during this phase which she describes as "like an emergency to me"'. She was authoritarian; leading from the front, directing change and was "reactive". Subsequently, she attended the Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH) and her staff were required to complete a questionnaire relating to her leadership. She was "quite shocked" to find staff thought of her as "didactic" and "this is how it is". This prompted her to review her practice, which she

perceived as “harsh” and she was determined to “soften”. She vowed to make time to talk and listen to people, though found this very time consuming. In the second phase (described as “giving responsibility”) she gave members of staff particular responsibilities in order to give them a sense of ownership within the school (in terms of its mission, sense of purpose, decision-making etc.). However she did not make staff accountable and so found that accountability remained with herself. In the third phase (“giving responsibility and accountability” phase) she describes this as “better organised”. Staff have responsibility but now with accountability. She sets time limits on these responsibilities (e.g. developing activities, policies, initiatives etc.); they are undertaken within specified timeframes which she monitors and this enables her to have some control. She operates an open door policy for staff to talk to her about any issues, concerns etc. and she places great importance on being able to see people when they need to see her. Leadership in the school is described as “distributed” though Susan is adamant that distributed leadership as a specific approach is not new, but rather “trendy jargon” for an approach that has always taken place in schools.

Some headteachers articulated the importance of the “team”, of “sharing” leadership and “working together”. We draw on data from Mary to exemplify this kind of approach. Mary states that she “shares” leadership of the school “as much as possible”. She considers she has “a very open style” where “everything that goes on ”is discussed “in a very open way”. She regards herself as the “ideas person” whereby she makes suggestions to staff which they then deliberate together and either put them into operation, adapt or don’t take forward. When she first came to the school she devised the school development plan herself. Now she provides the structures and time for staff to “fulfil their roles” and “take responsibility so they have much more autonomy over their own subjects”. Staff thus contribute to the school development plan which is “not my school development plan, it’s the whole of the school”. She “coaches” staff and gives them responsibility “so that they can develop themselves”. She actively encourages staff to engage in “CPD” and “sends them out as much as possible”. She believes however that she probably “come[s] over as too friendly” with staff and so possibly there are times when she is “taken advantage of” because she is “not as assertive as [she] should be”. This she attributes partly to the “context of this school” and partly as her “own

fault". She considers that staff "know me very well" and so it would be difficult "to suddenly change" her leadership approach. She has contemplated the nature of her approach though doubts whether she would actually have been able to achieve as much if she had been "harder-nosed". She is however shortly moving to new school where she plans to be "more assertive" stating: "Fundamentally you are what you are but you can try and incorporate, you can develop some [leadership] styles which I have tried to do. And when I move I intend to be different."

For some headteachers "networking" is an important component of their approach to leadership. We draw on data from John to exemplify this kind of approach. He enjoys the "professional contact with other heads and sharing ideas" and meets formally with a network of local heads. He talked at length about the nature of the network and the federation of schools to which his own school belonged. He is "constantly engaged" in his own professional development and is "always out on courses" or at the NCSL. He describes his leadership approach as "quite open", "quite democratic" and as being "totally approachable". As a leader he believes crucially in "empowering" his staff and giving them "independence". He relies a great deal on his "personality as a manager" and believes in presenting to staff "a personal model" which is "a model of stability". John strives to be "the calming influence in the storm", where he says, "I'd like to think I give that stability, I give that kind of control when things are tough and I know that's what they look for and that's what they look for from me".

Presenting a model of personal development to staff is very important to John. Equally he is "committed to maximising development in other human beings" and has thus sought to develop the teaching staff and teaching assistants. He states:

> "I feel that if we were to produce a fertile environment in which children should grow, all the adults in charge of that environment have got to have a meaningful and active role in that process. And that I hope is what goes on, in fact I know that's what goes on in this school."

John has concerns about the rate in which the government introduces change and new initiatives in education. He estimates that he favours about eighty per cent of these though considers some "need to be looked at given more time to be looked at and thought out in a more contextually-based way". Nevertheless he claims that courses he has attended have

been particularly influential so that he approaches “change in a totally different way” whereby he “goes out and seeks and demands change”.

Some headteachers identified with transformational leadership. We draw on data from Linda to exemplify this kind of approach. She perceives herself as a “charismatic leader” and indeed has been identified by the Department for Children, Schools and Families as a “transformational leader”. Her opinions on various issues have thus been sought by the Department. Her approach to school leadership “is to be creative and passionate about this school.” Her approach entails having “vision for the school”, “imagination” and “creativity”. She described herself as a “risk-taker” and her approach is “collaborative”. The school’s leadership team comprises nine people who devise the school’s three year development plan, which is “carved” up in to one year action plans. The vision for the school is “drawn down into step changes” and priorities are determined for each year. These priorities are printed on posters and placed around the school so that “everybody can own them and engage them in the whole school”. Linda regards herself as “a people orientated person” and an “ideas person” – she is “much more fired up about things we can do” rather than what the school has already done. She has the “vision for the school” and has appointed people to “embrace the vision of where we are going”. She believes she is intuitive in being able to appoint staff who will fit into the school’s particular environment/culture. She believes she draws on a “fairly eclectic mix” of styles depending on circumstances and situations. She regards herself as “outgoing” and ensures she has a visible presence in the school by being out on the school corridors, going “round school twice a day” and conversing with staff and students; “I am a walk and talk person”. She does not regard herself as “an interferer” believing “people should be trusted to get on”. Trust is therefore and important attribute though she has structures in place to make sure things work in the way they should (described as ‘antennae’).

Some headteachers emphasised the importance of having clear set of values that underpinned their whole approach to leadership. We draw on data from Bill to exemplify this approach who emphasised he had “a values-driven approach to school leadership” and which had a child-centred focus. At an “intellectual level” his leadership was bound up with a

conceptual map (in the form of a detailed chart) which enabled him to understand the school and "all its interrelated complexities". The conceptual map was underpinned by "the values of the school" and the aims of the school stemmed from those values. The values were identified by "the staff, conversations with governors and to some extent by parents through the PTA and pupils". He devised the conceptual map and this was deliberated by staff. This process created: "a corporate understanding of what the school is about because it's only when we have a corporate understanding of what the school is about that we can work as a team, and teams within that larger team."

He dealt with administrative matters each morning before the school opened, "met with the deputies at 8.30am everyday" and "did a lot before school actually began". During the day he could thus "channel [his] energies into being around and playing a fairly typical role in things" and was "not an office bound bureaucrat administrator". He "spent a huge amount of time working on the ethos" and creating a climate where "pupils can learn and be successful". He was "always pushing for improvement in every area". At the "practical level" he "attempted to be omnipresent":

> "I did yard duties, I did lunch duties. I consider those to be of huge importance especially lunch duty. I was on the corridors virtually five hours a day, in classrooms, in staff rooms, spending a lot of time with the pupils. Staff actually, they never resented it. I think in one sense they saw it as a kind of 'watch it because he might be coming in any minute now'… I would sometimes read the work, sit down with a pupil…I would sit in on the discussions... So that I felt was a very important aspect of my headship"

He regarded his "greatest strengths as a head was the art of delegation" meaning:

> "where you give to an individual an area of responsibility - giving them in a sense the right to make a mistake, not that you want them to make a mistake or that you will be pleased if they do but you have sufficient trust in them to believe that they will discharge their duties in a way which is commensurate with the corporate view of the way in which the school is led."

The research findings presented above provide a snapshot view of approaches to leadership at a particular historical moment. The research focused on headteachers' lived experiences of leadership and how, through their approach, they reconcile the demands of transformation and cultural change.

Approaches to School Leadership: Towards a Dynamic Positioning

Headteachers were asked specifically to describe their approach to leadership. Making sense of headteacher's individual differences and responses in the context of different working environments is challenging, though at the same time seeking patterns and relationships is essential in understanding approaches to school leadership. One way is to create 'types' and this has been utilised in other studies (for example, Grace, 1995; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; Woods et al., 1997). However, our analysis of the data identified the complexity of the headteachers' working lives and their approaches to leadership over time; and, head's accounts were sometimes contradictory and inconsistent. What we have created therefore is a dynamic positioning of approach (see Figure 1) which takes into consideration a range of approaches which individual headteachers might embrace or move through at different times and in response to different circumstances. Positions are therefore not necessarily fixed, and arguably more than one might be appropriate simultaneously, with a dialogic process in play (Bradbury and Gunter, 2006). Positions are not necessarily exclusive and may be informed by characteristics that are shared across others, such as 'trust' for example. Its purpose is to illustrate rather than offer 'proof' of approaches to school leadership, and so it offers a way of thinking about how headteachers approach their leadership work.

Figure 1: Dynamic Positioning of Approaches

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Autonomy</td></tr>
<tr><td>Own Purpose</td><td>Directive Approach</td><td>Directed Approach</td><td>Determined Purpose</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Inclusive Approach</td><td>Distributed Approach</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Participatory</td></tr>
</table>

The dynamic positioning of leadership approach (Figure 1) can be read as follows. The vertical axis is a continuum from heads as autonomous where they decide, through to

participatory approaches with staff, students and parents involved in decision-making, or evening undertaking bottom up involvement. The horizontal axis is a continuum of whether heads understand their professional purposes as being determined by themselves in main as members of an educational community interplayed with others who may require or expect a particular approach, e.g. the school's governing body or central government.

The **Directive Approach** is a position taken by heads when they have a strong sense of their own purpose as head*teacher* and what they want to do and achieve in the job. The **Directed Approach** is very similar as constitutes leading from the front, however, the direction and the process by which change is taking place may be under the direction of internal (e.g. governors) and/or external (e.g. inspectors, Local Authority, sponsors, NDPBs) interest groups. There are times when both approaches are overlain with the language and behaviours of the official New Labour model of heroic heads as transformational leaders, where the heads presents themselves as charismatic, inspirational and visionary. For the Directive Approach this can mean when the headteacher adopts the New Labour persona as one congenial to him/herself in driving forward their agenda, while for the Directed Approach this can mean adopting an approved of identity in order to deliver.

The **Inclusive Approach** incorporates the notion of the school community as a core component, where educational purposes are led on by the headteacher who actively seeks the participation of others through a 'first among equals' position. Relationships at a professional and personal level are fundamental here, as are mutual exchanges, understanding and trust. Here leadership is understood and a communal and relational social practice rather than automatically a product of role. The **Distributed Approach** is a position that follows official good practice where headteachers are directed to create diverse workforce roles and delegate the responsibility and accountability for tasks and projects.

Headteacher approaches to leadership may differ over time and in context, where narratives about what was done and why may not always be clear or coherent. Susan is explicit about how she has positioned her leadership from directed to distributed, and there is a dialogue

going on with a more inclusive approach, but she has been directed to move through the LPSH rather than it being based on an explicit model of participation. Mary has not been successful in taking up the inclusive position and intends to be more directive in her next job. Bill seems to have inhabited the directive approach during his long career, with a constant focus on educational values of teaching and learning. Interestingly John and Linda seem to be in dialogue between directive and directed. On the one hand they have a strong sense of leadership identity and they are determining school purposes, but it is clear that this is in tension with being directed, John by NCSL training and Linda through her links with the Department.

Developing explanations of these different positions and how they talked about as being inhabited, understood, practiced, accepted, abandoned, is located in theorising around the interplay between agency and structure. Building on Bourdieu's (2000) thinking tool of habitus, there is evidence in the dynamic positioning and repositioning and ongoing dialogue that the headteachers have disposition to the leadership by one person is a known role, with individual reflections on what works and doesn't, and how they think it needs to be done. There is also much evidence that this disposition has been structured by their experiences over time, and is restructured through the ongoing narratives that they construct when talking about it. Hence their agency is shaped and even determined by how headship is understood at that moment in time, and for those who are in post currently, there are often tensions between wanting to set the direction and being directed by others.

There is a predisposition to use the official language and talk about what is regarded as official good practice, and it seems that the child centred focus of their work is underplayed as a result. There is some recognition that there is a doxa or self evident truths embedded in the New Labour delivery model though readings of this by the headteachers is highly individual with a range of positions that are not absolute: Susan accepts performance management but is critical of the literacy hour. Interestingly there are dilemmas over the requirement to do distribution, as involving others has traditionally been a part of headteachers and their work, but what is actually going on as distinct from articulating the label is unclear with a range of

claims and labels being used that would need further on-site research. Central to this analysis is whether the heads recognise that their role is being constructed by others, and that their sense of agency may be a form of what Bourdieu calls ‘misrecognition’. Hence the heads may talk the language of vision but in reality the space in which they can determine is narrow, and at most it may be a case of interpreting tactically what can be done rather than actual strategising (Hartley, 2007). While there are claims made about making decisions according to headteacher and school purposes, this is not really resistance as national standards still have to be met and it is heads who are officially successful who position in this way. Indeed a number of heads are involved with the NSCL and the Department where they are advising and delivering in a national way, and while some are uneasy about policy strategy they are prepared to work with it and try to change it from within.

Analysing the narratives remains difficult because the heads talk about how busy they are with no time to think about what they are doing, or read anything other than official texts and approved of writers (e.g. Covey, Fullan). We also experienced that in spite of our attention to appropriate disclosure and interview protocols many of the heads could not conceive of research as being independent of the Department and the NCSL, and so narrative construction was affected by this. This adds to interpretations of misrecognition, where heads such as John and Linda, do not talk about how their positioning, and the tensions within it, as a product of the context in which they are trying to practice. Whereas Susan is more aware of the game in play and how she has accepted direction as a means to an end, and is trying to develop positions that secure her role amongst the workforce. Interestingly only the veteran head, Bill, has a sense of educational values, whereas the others, even the experienced two, are more likely to position themselves with policy implementation narratives where the emphasis is on making things work locally. In that sense the politics of headship through the exercise of power within and outside the organisation, is in need of more development, and the field has intellectual resources from Hoyle (1982) to begin to develop contemporary perspectives. Importantly, none of these five heads talk about their work in ways that show that the inclusive position as one that is the starting point for headship, and as such the continued association of leadership with hierarchical role is enduring. This is how New Labour

has been able to rework headship as organisational leadership (directed and distributive) through appealing to the leader centric nature of education (directive), without engaging productively with professional and collegial ways in which professionals may prefer to work (inclusive).

Conclusion

There is much written about leadership but there is little actual research into headteachers and their work. This is because headteachers have been the objects of radical reform over the past twenty years, with New Labour shifting the emphasis away from heads in a market place introduced under the Thatcherite governments to heads in a delivery system. Consequently, headteachers have faced interventions into their professional identities with deliberate strategies to both seduce them with the symbolic capital of national recognition (speeches, honours, pay, training college), the doxa of headteachers as central to school improvement which acts as form of misrecognition through the coercive force of performance audits (inspections, labelled as failure, league table position, public dismissals). Research is controlled by the government, and so reform priorities dominate, and the main emphasis is on how implementation might be secured better in order to meet targets. What our work has done so far is to keep alive the tradition in the field of collecting narratives of how heads go about their work and what meanings they attach to it, and consequently there are opportunities through scholarship to “disrupt totalising technical and managerial strategies of regulation” (Thomson, 2001: 19). We have begun to reveal the demanding nature of the job and that words such as style, model and type are inappropriate, and damaging. We have presented a much more dynamic framework for enabling headteachers over time and in context to demonstrate that what they do shifts through how leadership is constructed as a social practice. Also it is more than this because our data is yielding interesting understandings of how much of the time heads are in dialogue about how they get an increasingly impossible job done in ways that does no harm to themselves, their colleagues or the students.

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