

Governance and Education in England

Helen M. Gunter¹

Abstract: There has been a permanent revolution of reforms to the education system in England over the past thirty years. This paper presents a description and conceptualisation of governance as a means of understanding and explaining those reforms. Specifically I draw on the data and theoretical work from the *Knowledge Production in Educational Leadership* (KPEL) project funded by the ESRC to examine the relationship between hierarchy, markets and private interests with New Labour (1997-2010) education policymaking. I present institutionalised governance as a frame for explaining the inter-actions of government with researchers, private consultants, and the profession in designing and delivering reforms.

Keywords: education system, reforms, educational leadership, governance

Introduction

Reform of schools in England has been rapid and far reaching in the past thirty years. Specifically changes have been made to: first, the purposes of schools with a shift from social democratic inclusion to schools as independent businesses in a consumer driven market place; second, the school staff with a shift from qualified teachers towards a flexible and performance managed

¹ School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK.
E-mail: helen.gunter@manchester.ac.uk

workforce; third, the curriculum with a shift from professional control to government prescription of the content and organisation of teaching and learning; fourth, the assessment process with a shift from professional control to national standards and testing with league tables, and an emphasis on data analysis and targets; fifth, the quality process with a shift from professional control to external inspection by OfSTED. The policymaking processes that have generated such reforms have been influenced by at least three different approaches to how education is understood within English society. In the immediate postwar period the emphasis was on a civic approach which generated inclusive projects regarding entitlements to free publicly funded and comprehensive education. This was challenged directly by Thatcherism from the late 1970s onwards, and neoliberal approaches to education as a product to be traded in the market place rather than a public service came to dominate. Neoconservative approaches allied with this position, and argued for the need to ensure that private matters such as faith, and what are known as traditional values regarding student behaviour, are not undermined by schools and indeed should be supported in classrooms. So for the past three decades the neoliberal and neoconservative approaches to education have dominated in policymaking in both Conservative governments (1979-1997, 2010 onwards) and New Labour (1997-2010), where ministers have framed and shaped policies in ways that have generated markets and private interests in public education, and have protected particular conservative interests regarding how children should be taught (see Chapman & Gunter, 2009). New Labour sought to suture together investment in public services with private interests and markets through Third Way politics (Giddens, 2000), and this period of education policymaking will be the focus of this paper. I intend presenting some examples of particular education policies before going on to examine the nature of governance and presenting institutionalised governance as an explanatory framework.

Centralisation and decentralisation

The dynamics of policymaking can best be understood through the presentation of some examples from the New Labour governments (1997-

2010):

Curriculum

New Labour inherited the National Curriculum and national testing (7, 11, 14 and 16 years of age) that generated data for National League Tables of school performance. Two aspects illustrate the strong centralisation of the curriculum through the increased emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy, with very direct interventions through guidance on teaching and assessment; and second through a overhaul of the 14-19 curriculum where the continued attachment to A levels as the 'gold standard' has limited parity of esteem with vocational qualifications. However, overall what has dominated are demands by parents (qualifications necessary for a university place) and private industry (the right type of skills for the labour market in regard to functional literacy and numeracy). The role of the profession in regard to teachers and to their associations has been marginalised as decisions about what should be learned and how it should be learned has been opened up to consumer based choices through the delivery of outcomes.

Standards and Inspection

New Labour inherited a government commitment to higher standards and the OfSTED inspection system (set up in 1992). New Labour presented its blueprint for its approach to standards in the first White Paper in 1997 called *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE 1997), where they made a commitment to a world class education system and set out to do this through making direct interventions into the curriculum and school organization. In addition to this David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, made a commitment to resign if standards did not improve. The main thrust of policy was to link accountability with investment, where teachers had to answer for student outcomes in return for more resources and staffing (Blair, 2006). Professional practice was regulated through OfSTED inspections and annual league tables, and in addition to this School Improvement Partners were appointed with a remit to enable schools to focus on data and targets.

School Leadership:

New Labour inherited a schooling system based on local hierarchies with the headteacher as the chief executive (organisational leader and strategist) under site based management in tension with the traditional role as leading professional (teacher and curriculum expert). New Labour recognised that in order to bring about its reforms locally then it needed headteachers to be on board as transformational leaders, and so a major investment was made in improving the status and training of heads. A National College was set up to train and develop aspiring and serving headteachers, and to control knowledge production regarding models of effective leadership (Gunter, 2011b). This again was done through central hierarchy where contracts were established with individuals and networks of consultants and professionals, and the impact of private sector thinking and models means that the emphasis is more on effective leadership as distinct from headteachers as leaders. This has been through a reform strategy known as remodelling the school workforce (see below) where generic leadership attributes, skills and behaviours from across the public sector, the voluntary sector and the private sector are recognised as valid to leading educational provision. So the leadership of schools is open to the wider job market.

Remodelling the School Workforce

New Labour inherited a workforce that was demoralized after rapid reforms and a culture of attack on teachers as professionals from successive Conservative governments, New Right think tanks, and the media. The policy strategy adopted has been to modernize what is meant by a professional and how professionals should conduct themselves. There are two main thrusts: first, in the Green Paper *teachers: meeting the challenge of change* (DfEE, 1998) the government defined what being a professional meant, and proposed the introduction of performance related pay; and second, in order to deal with the poor image of teaching (particularly low pay and long hours) remodelling would take away the work that teachers should not normally do, and the government invested in a privately produced change model for schools to bring in the use of ICT, teaching assistants and more administrative support, particularly through School Business Managers (Collarbone, 2005). The

emphasis has been on the teacher as deliverer of externally determined curriculum frameworks and manager of teaching assistants (who might teach), and who is performance managed according to student outcome data (Butt & Gunter, 2007; Gunter, 2007).

Academies Programme

New Labour focused on failing schools as a means of improving standards. In particular, an emphasis was put on inner city schools with a range of projects such as: *Education Action Zones* (EAZ), *Excellence in Cities* (EIC); and more recently *National Challenge Schools* with particular investment in London, Manchester and the West Midlands (see Chapman & Gunter, 2009). Additional investment in urban areas came with the City Academies Programme from 2002 where New Labour revitalized the previous Thatcherite project from 1986 known as City Technology Colleges. In short, the Academies Programme is based on the closure of one or more ‘failing school(s)’ in an area and replacement with an Academy that is ‘independent’ of the local authority and sponsored by a private individual and/or companies. There were incremental changes made to this Programme, not least that the Academies no longer need to be in an urban area (or failing) and so ‘city’ has been dropped, sponsors can be schools, universities and third sector organizations, and sponsors need not invest up to £2m anymore. There are currently over 300 Academies opened, with the Conservative led government from 2010 declaring a commitment to expand the programme and also allow parents and other groups to set up their own Free Schools (Gunter, 2011a). The emphasis on the ‘independent’ school remains a contested reform regarding the hierarchical power of the state to invest public money and the private interests of individuals and religious groups to gain control of educational provision in local areas.

What these short illuminative accounts achieve is recognition of the interplay between centralisation and decentralisation: what is in the control of the central government in London and what is delegated to other bodies, and what can remain outside of this through private interests in families, communities and businesses. All of the reforms outlined above are from the central UK government in London, and they have effectively managed the

implementation through a delivery strategy based on targets, data and accountability (see Barber, 2007). These reforms have depended on markets to operate with delivery organisations given contracts to implement, and private interests have been enabled to operate as consumers of education services that are regulated by the centre and increasingly provided through partnerships with private businesses. So in order to understand the governance of education in England there is a need to strategically examine the interplay between three main structuring forces:

- Hierarchy (centralisation and managerialism)
- Markets (decentralisation and networks)
- Private interests (individual and family)

The education system in England is hierarchical through the unitary and uncodified political system in the UK, and this is manifest in a number of ways: (a) the continued existence of constitutional monarchy where the Queen holds considerable residual powers (the appointment of the PM, the dissolution of parliament, and Royal Assent to legislation), where by convention the Monarch acts on the advice on her government and much of the Royal Prerogative is operationalised by the PM and/or Ministers (e.g. Royal Pardon); (b) the sovereignty of Parliament where national legislation instigates, regulates and controls all policy and action, and where winning the majority of seats in the House of Commons at a general election usually gives a single party a mandate to govern (coalitions are rare and so deals with other parties are not normally necessary); (c) the ability of a government to construct and reconstruct national agencies without special constitutional procedures and to use public money to invest in programmes and projects by these agencies (e.g. the National College from 2000). Consequently the governance of education in England is highly centralized through a national department in London, with a Secretary of State who sits in Cabinet². While there may be decentralization

² When New Labour came to power in 1997, the national ministry in London was called the

through public institutions such as Local Authorities, this can be controlled through managerialism where the culture and practice of local officials is highly restricted through budget restraint, targets and performance management.

Decentralisation in England has been mainly through markets, where the role of the state in the provision of public services has been challenged: first, the introduction of business practices and language into education e.g. performance targets, business plans, and value for money; second, the introduction of new types of personnel and roles into schools e.g. school business managers, and marketing managers; and third, new power relations in regard to public accountability and the provision of data to evidence performance (e.g. privatized inspections contracted and overseen by the Office for Standards in Education, OfSTED, from 1992). Schools, like a business, can fail and be closed, and Local Authorities can be replaced by a contracted private company to run publicly funded education.

Private interests have also come to the fore through the increased role of the parent in making an active choice about their child's education (parents can exercise a preference for the school) and the role of the parent in determining quality through moving a child to the school that as a consumer they determine meets their needs. In addition and connected to this, wider private interests have grown rapidly in the form of religious groups who have continued to secure state funding for their religiously branded school (Catholic, Church of England, Muslim) and private philanthropists who have been able to gain access to public funds through the sponsorship of Academy Schools (Gunter, 2011a).

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) after reorganization had taken place in 1995 (prior to this the title was Department for Education, DfE, and before that the Department of Education and Science, DES). In 2001 the DfEE became the DfES or Department for Education and Skills. In 2007 the DfES was split into two: Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills (DIUS). DIUS no longer exists as Universities are now included in the Business, Innovation and Skills portfolio. In May 2010 the Conservative led government took office and changed the name of the Department from DCSF to Department for Education (DfE).

This interplay between hierarchy, markets and private interests in the governance of education in England has created a complex system of different types of schools, a range of funding, and ways in which people are made accountable. For example, legislation by the government can bring about major changes, where in 1988 the then Thatcher government brought about a major structural and cultural change to education through the Education Reform Act. This legislation was partly hierarchical with the introduction of a national curriculum, partly about markets through the introduction of site based management based on open enrolment where schools would be funded on the basis of how many children attended, and so schools could hire and fire staff in response to competitive growth or decline, and partly about private interests where parents as consumers and the private sector as the provider of educational services gained a powerful role (Gunter, 2008).

Institutionalised governance

Generating meaning about this complex and dynamic policy process has led me to develop a conceptual perspective that I have called: Institutionalised Governance (Gunter, 2011a; Gunter & Forrester, 2009a). This has been developed mainly through my research on New Labour and the development of leadership as a policy strategy for the modernization and transformation of public education from 1997 (Gunter, 2011b). In particular, I have studied the setting up the National College in 2000, where the role of hierarchy in the form of government decision making and public funding interplayed with markets through the generation of approved leadership knowledge and good practice, and with private interests through the contracting of consultants, researchers and professionals to do research, write reports and to lead training.

By 'institution' I mean public institutions that are established to govern, regulate and deliver public services, and that have a permanency where they usually continue when governments and people change. I also need to point out that in England there is a need to give recognition to particular constitutional arrangements. The UK has four home nations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The three latter home nations have either an elected

assembly (Northern Ireland, Wales) or parliament (Scotland) where education is a 'national' policy issue, whereas England does not have its own elected parliament and so education policy remains in the hands of the UK government in London. So the "institutional" aspect is through the use of public institutions such as the Department and Ministers in London together with an emphasis on delivery through, for example, the National College. While political scientists have argued that the state and its institutions have been "hollowed out" (Rhodes, 1994) through the development of markets and networks, in education policy public institutions remain very strong. This is based on the clear mandate from elections with New Labour as a single party in government, and through the establishment of a reform agenda that they were able to push through in spite of some opposition (see Gunter, 2011a). The use of contracts to control appointments and commissioned projects meant that those brought into government were disciplined into compliance, and those who broke the rules were excluded. Those who raised questions about policies or worked on alternatives or undertook independent research were often ignored and sometimes denounced (Gunter, 2011a,b).

The "governance" aspect gives perspective to how individuals and networks of people have been brought into public institutions, variously, to advise, to work, to complete a research project and/or to deliver reform through running training programmes and/or providing training materials. New Labour invested heavily in educational reform and commissioned research projects, and through contractual arrangements people from business and universities were brought into the policymaking process. Some took up appointments such as Professor Geoff Southworth who moved to the National College to lead on research; Professor David Hopkins moved to the Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the Department in London. Some bid for and won the right to undertake research projects, and so PricewaterhouseCoopers led the National Evaluation of Academies (PwC, 2008), and produced a major report on school leadership (DfES/PwC, 2007). People moved in and out to give advice, sometimes informally, and headteachers were often brought into lead on projects and interconnect national policy with local implementation (Gunter, 2011b).

The interplay between those inside government with a powerful mandate to govern and those disposed to support through their outside expertise can be

characterized as institutionalised governance in how it operates at the national macro level in Number 10 Downing Street and the Department regarding national policy, at the meso level through the regionalization of policy delivery through e.g. National College regional centres; and at the micro level where in the day to day practice in schools legislation and guidance are engaged with, and networks of advisors and consultants, together with training and case studies of good practice, are used to meet national requirements. In additional hybrid partnerships developed that linked government with markets and private interests, and a good example of this is *Future Leaders* led by Heath Monk (who was previously Deputy Director in the Department) in partnership with Absolute Return for Kids (ARK) a philanthropic investment charity and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) a charity which works with New Labour specialist and academy schools.

Located within institutionalized governance is a power process which can be described and explained by using Bourdieu's (1990) analysis of objective social relations as the symbolic exchange of capitals. Specifically, New Labour sought to stake a claim for the modernization of public services, and in doing so entered an exchange relationship with private sector providers of knowledge, know how and strategy. In this way the government presented itself as pro private sector and in tune with the most up to date thinking about the public sector, and the private sector saw an opportunity to extend markets into the provision of education and so demonstrate the vitality and contribution that private capital can bring for parents and communities. This exchange relationship was also extended to researchers in higher education who had to generate income in order to sustain their work and the university, and so they too saw projects and reform delivery as an opportunity to stake a claim for the relevance of their research and knowledge. Specifically, members of the New Labour governments had direct links with those in the fields of school improvement and school effectiveness, and so knowledge workers won commissioned projects (e.g. Day *et al.*, 2009) and were directly involved in the National College. In return policy was legitimized through the cultural capital of the university and the validity of methodology and methods. Headteachers were also part of this exchange relationship, where in return for supporting and implementing reforms they were given higher salaries, a National College, and

a shift in culture that generated a higher profile and status (e.g. heads were given knighthoods and other honours).

Potentially these particular groupings in the policy process could be seen to be disparate as there is seemingly little in common between a private company, a professor and a headteacher. However, I have identified the positioning by these interests and the symbolic exchange of capitals as a *regime of practice*. While this regime has its origins prior to New Labour taking office in 1997, what is crucial in understanding the dynamics of the exchange process is how all revealed a New Labour delivery disposition or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). In Bourdieu's (1990) terms a modernisation *game* was in play, and where entry was controlled through the *doxa* of reform, standards, and leadership (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 11). These self-evident truths spoke to potential players who rarely actually spoke about the rules of the game, instead the *illusio* meant they got "caught up in the game" through "a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 11). So the New Labour policy regime had a *logic of practice* where there was "knowledge and recognition" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 198) of both domination and dominated. The regime sought to dominate through participation in policy and how their knowledge and ideas were privileged, but were in fact dominated through the structuring influence of neoliberal and neoconservative requirements for education. As Bourdieu (2000) argues this is an example of *misrecognition* of how the regime and the *doxa* of reform is socially, politically and economically constructed through the game in play.

Conclusion

In summary, education policymaking in England is located within a complex strategic and tactical operation of institutionalized governance. The policy actors are people in central government (the PM, the Secretary of State and other Ministers, Civil Servants) and people who are brought in to support and enable government (advisors, consultants, researchers, headteachers), either in taking up full time appointments or through short-term contracts. The

knowledge pool that has been drawn on has tended to be from school improvement and school effectiveness literatures and researchers, with an emphasis on the normality of headteachers as transformational leaders.

There have been consequences to this: a strong certainty about the right strategy with clear presentation and optimism in policy texts and speeches, with the involvement of people who are presented as knowledgeable and modern in their thinking and delivery. Investment has been made in creating the climate and the evidence to support the reforms, underpinned by a strong belief system supporting what is the right thing to do. Certainly gains have been made and the Government can provide statistical evidence to show that student outputs based on home tests have made some improvement in the first New Labour decade, but international test data shows a decline (Mansell, 2009). This emphasis on testing in England (and the US, see Ravitch, 2010) has had negative and even perverse impacts on children and teachers: with children being entered for easier examinations (Wrigley, 2011), children doing just enough to pass tests (Galton, 2007) and with reports of truancy (Harrison, 2010). There are reports of teachers teaching to the test, professionals not wanting to apply for headship (Butt & Gunter, 2007), with heads finding themselves in an ambivalent position in relation to the reforms (Gunter & Forrester, 2009b). Significantly, the *Cambridge Primary Review* has reported the «excessive prescription and micro-management» by central government, and that «the extent and manner of control from the centre has been, on balance, counter-productive» (Alexander, 2009, p. 8).

There are issues that need to be raised about the governance of education that created this situation: first, while individuals and networks have been brought into government, there has been a marginalization of important policy actors from within the profession, from Universities and from Local Authorities, and so questions need to be asked about the accountability processes for those who are brought in, and why others who are knowledgeable and have a contribution to make are being excluded; second, the working of institutionalized governance has meant that particular groups have been marginalized or in some cases neutralized, and under remodelling the teacher unions were brought into a “social partnership” with government (except the National Union of Teachers) and this compromised their ability to fully

represent the interests of their members; third, knowledge production has been highly controlled through contract compliance, and largely functional with an emphasis on removing dysfunctions from the system (i.e. deal with failing schools) and this has been overlaid with upbeat rhetoric around change, modernization and transformation. Consequently, socially critical approaches to knowledge production and democratic knowledge claims have been marginalized, and so the social, economic and political infrastructure underpinning education has remained intact, and indeed already advantaged interests have become even stronger. As a result gains in regard to equity have not been realized, and so the gap between rich and poor has widened in England (Raffo *et al.*, 2010) and that class continues to be the best predictor of achievement (Kerr & West, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Fourth, an examination of trends is leading educational policy scholars such as Ball (2007) to identify that what we are witnessing is the dismantling of public sector education, and it is now best to consider education that is publicly funded (or not) in order to see how and where public money is being invested and how that is being made accountable.

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