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What is This?
Stories of Compliance and Subversion in a Prescriptive Policy Environment

John MacBeath

ABSTRACT

In their commitment to raising standards successive Conservative and Labour governments have moved progressively to tighter prescription of school policy and more far reaching proscription of practices deemed unacceptable. This article examines how 12 headteachers construct the policy environment and how they respond to it in the schools they lead. The evidence base is 12 in-depth interviews with headteachers, in six primary schools and six secondary at the outset of the TLRP/ESRC research project Learning How to Learn. This subset of headteacher interviews from the total number were selected for this article because these 12 interviews were accompanied by the fullest data set of complementary interviews, questionnaire and observation data which will be the subject of other papers to follow. The interviews provide a baseline picture of how these school leaders were talking about leading learning in their schools and the authority, or ‘warrant’ they referred to in validating their views. Patterns of compliance and subversion are examined with reference to theories of organizational, and ‘double loop’ learning.

KEYWORDS change, culture, inspection, learning, leadership

Twelve School Leaders

The 12 English headteachers, six primary, six secondary, whose interviews are the source of this article, had all signed up in 2001 to TLRP/ESRC The Learning How to Learn Project for the following three years and therefore represent a particular purposive sample of schools. Many had already been involved in a prior project with King’s College London on assessment for learning and were therefore predisposed to formative assessment and to reflection on the nature of learning and school-wide learning policies.

The Learning How to Learn—in classrooms, schools and networks Project was a four year development and research project funded by the ESRC from January 2001 to March 2005 as part of Phase II of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. The full description of project aims are set out in a number of
cognate articles, James et al. (2007, Pedder et al., 2005). In essence the aim of the project was to advance both understanding and practice of learning how to learn in classrooms, schools and networks and to investigate what characterizes the school in which teachers successfully create and manage the knowledge and skills of learning how to learn. The role of leadership in fostering those conditions was not an explicit focus of the project but the ways in which the 12 headteachers framed the Project within their schools emerged as a salient feature of the inquiry. Access to teachers and classrooms was gained through them and in the initial stages at least they worked with the project team on deciding a strategy for introducing project ideas into their school.

Forty-three schools were recruited to the project from five local education authorities and one virtual education action zone. The leading criterion used for selection was the willingness of schools to be involved for the four-year duration, and to contribute actively to the development of thinking and practice. A range of contexts was represented in the overall sample: urban/rural; small/large; mono-ethnic/multi-ethnic, with the proportion of one secondary school to two primary schools (preferably in cluster groups, though this was rarely possible).

Questionnaires administered to teachers and pupils collected data about perceptions of current practice and valued practice, complemented by interviews and observations in classrooms. The project team estimated, initially, that the project would involve approximately 1580 teachers and over 20,000 students, an estimate that proved to be reasonably accurate. Of the 40 schools remaining at the end of the project 12 schools with the most complete data set were selected for closer analysis.

This article, one of a number which examines these 12 schools focuses specifically on the initial interviews with 12 headteachers to establish a baseline of how school leaders were thinking about the nature of learning, individual professional and organizational, at the outset of the project.

Interviews with the headteachers were structured around their learning agenda at pupil, teacher and organizational levels, setting these within the current policy context. Transcriptions from interviews with these 12 heads ran to over 27,000 words, with a mean length of around 18,000 words across all 12 texts.

The key themes addressed in these the interviews provided part of the coding frame developed by the whole Project team. In the reading and re-reading of these texts a number of other key themes emerged which referred specifically or obliquely to the policy context in which these schools were located, in particular to current Key Stage Strategies, to Ofsted and to a less definable climate and set of pressures within which their work as leaders and managers was carried out. In examining these transcripts references to external authorities was chosen as a focus for specific analysis, identifying ways in which headteachers located themselves and their schools in relation to those authorities—to DfES and Ofsted as main points of external reference, as well as invited
experts' contributions on learning. The following discussion is based on close reading and re-reading of these texts, systematic analysis of key recurring ideas, identifying references to external bodies and the way in which these were contextualized within the narrative. The problematization of policy development or the absence of such critique proved to be salient aspects of these narratives.

Policy Environment

In all these 12 narratives an embedded theme is the relationship of school practice to the policy environment in which these heads found themselves. Light is thrown on government policy but constructed variously among this group of 12 school leaders. Two markedly differing accounts of policy and how it impacts on practice provide the extremes of a continuum, at one end depicted as a positive force for change and highly influential in supporting and improving practice while the polar opposite view describes a government imposing dysfunctional strategies on schools, deskilling and disempowering teachers' practice. These two polar positions, both from primary school headteachers, serve as a frame for the more nuanced or ambivalent narratives which fall between these two extremes.

Policy Environment as Supportive

The following is a distillation of one headteacher's perception of the policy environment:

The policy environment is one that has helped to move schools on, to challenge uninformed or simply sloppy practice. It has given teachers something tangible to go on. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies provide models that work. ‘It's the first time we've been given anything to go on’. ‘It was brilliant to be told what to do’. The three/four part lesson with starter, input, work, plenary has been most helpful in lending pace and variety to lessons. Good ideas and innovative techniques for teachers have succeeded in engaging pupils more actively in their own learning. By providing teachers with tools to use National Strategies have provided support for weaker teachers. They have encouraged a rigorous approach to teaching and learning. They have focused teachers' attention on outcomes and given an emphasis to targets and target setting. Ofsted too has played its part in making a contribution, affirming good practice, spotlighting areas for development and providing key areas for focus in improving quality and standards. (Headteacher secondary school B)

Policy Environment as Oppressive

The following offers an alternative construction of the policy environment.

The policy dictat is so tight that to survive and do what is important for staff and children one has to be subversive. The policies are both overprescriptive and condescending, deskilling rather than empowering teachers. Richness and creativity are
lost by formulaic prescription. The literacy strategy is so superficial we have to take risks in order to free up teachers to take back ownership of teaching and learning. After teachers have gone through the training and jumped through the hoops we help them ‘to go wild’, while recognising that for their own career promotion needs, in other places they have to be astute in knowing when to toe the line and play the game for inspection purposes. However, ‘if people would get off our backs just a little the learning could just rocket because children and people in the schools were doing what they wanted to do and passionately believed in’. We try to help staff to ‘fly’, to go the way they want rather than having to feel the burden of having a master outside the school. (Headteacher primary school L)

The contrast between these two depictions of policy may be characterized using Perkins’ (2003) notions of ‘taming the wild’ and ‘wilding the tame’. In the first of these narratives the wild is tamed by clear targets, predetermined outcomes and focusing of teachers’ attention on templates of good practice. ‘Being told what to do’, as in the first narrative provides a sense of comfort and security and affirmation by the authority of Ofsted, reassuring staff that practice falls within the bounds of government mandates. Pace and variety in lessons is injected to engage pupils more actively with the task at hand with the formula of the three/four part lesson as a containment, thwarting diversions and offering support and clear direction for weaker teachers. Taken together these routines are seen as provide the rigour that was previously seen to be missing.

‘Wilding of the tame’ suggests a recognition of domestication and a conscious attempt to loosen the ties that bind teachers to mandated practice. This is explicitly stated in the process of learning to jump through the hoops before ‘going wild’. Another metaphor is of shedding the burden so that teachers are able to fly on their own. The term ‘empowerment’ is used to convey a sense of agency, the rediscovery of richness and creativity in learning and teaching and of reinstatement of professional self-confidence. This is depicted as ‘risk’ because of its non-compliance with mandated practice but at the same time recognising the nature of the political ‘game’ which allows teachers to meet expectations of Ofsted when required. While in the first narrative the locus of change is attributed to external influences, in the second narrative there is explicit reference to leadership (the ‘we’) in helping teachers to go wild.

The difference between a healthy and an unhealthy organization argue Senge et. al. (2004: 32) lies in members’ awareness and ability to acknowledge their felt needs to conform’ and their ability to challenge their habits of seeing and responding to external pressures. How the policy environment is described is as much a reflection of a school’s stage of development, of a particular headteacher’s construction at a given time or revealing of a more deep-seated conception of the school policy interface. Nor are these polar positions as crisp and static as these archetypes suggest. As becomes clear through the analysis of these texts they conceal a deeper struggle for leadership in navigating the path between compliance and subversion.
The implication for leadership is to know what stance is appropriate at a given time and in relation to specific policy movements. Giroux’s (1992) counsel is to be alert to the ‘omniscient narrator’, the authority who speaks on your behalf. There is no grand narrative that can speak for us all, he argues, and therefore professional educators must take responsibility for the knowledge they organize, produce, mediate and translate into practice. If not there is a danger that they come to be seen as simply the technical intervening medium through which knowledge is transmitted to students, erasing themselves in an uncritical reproduction of received wisdom. Rather than internalising the master narratives, Giroux suggests, the task of leadership is to examine how these narratives become constructed, what they mean, how they regulate our social and moral experience, how they presuppose particular views of the world and pre-empt debate as to what is worthy of attention.

**Setting the School in Context**

We are offered a glimpse of how these headteachers' view the policy world in their response to the researcher's invitation to set the school in context. How heads choose to describe the salient features of their schools provides a clue to how they validate their own practice in relation to external pressures. On the one hand their accounts may be constructed predominantly with reference to the external validation of success, or with a more inward focus in which there is validation of the school's own criteria of success. For example, in one transcript a secondary headteacher gives an extended account of his school's success referring exclusively to the school's normative standing in performance tables and the validation of practice by the most recent Ofsted report. By contrast, another secondary head working in a similar urban environment chooses to tell the story in terms of the challenges in putting learning and teaching centre stage and creating a professional development culture. In the course of her lengthy introduction to the school neither Ofsted nor GCSE attainment scores are cited. Validation of the school's progress is by reference to students' and teachers' evaluation of important priorities and through her own efforts as a school leader to create the kind of environment for learning which she values.

These two heads, in common with the ten others in this sample, describe their efforts to put learning centre stage, acknowledging the tensions in trying to accommodate a concern for the ‘how’ of student learning within a drive for raised achievement. All of them refer to the impact of Key Stage Strategies, to changing lesson structures, to external pressure and accountability. Their approaches to assessment of achievement appear to be broadly similar but it is in the degree of embrace of government policies or a critical distancing from them that differences among these 12 schools begin to emerge most saliently.
Rediscovering Learning

Learning, it appears from all of these 12 transcripts, is being rediscovered. There is a sense in which, after a long period of quiescence learning has re-emerged as the essential purpose of schooling. How learning is discussed by these 12 heads is elaborated in response to direct questions by the interviewer as to school policy, but implicit theories also permeate much of the discussion that runs through these interviews. Discussions of learning tend to refer to pupil learning but reference is also made to professional learning and occasionally to organizational, or system, learning. The predominant focus, however, is on a core cluster of ideas that might be said to characterize a Third Millennium view of student learning, reflecting to a high degree a broader policy discourse. That view may be summarized as follows:

Learning is individual. Children learn in different ways. They have their own learning needs, styles or preferences. Learning should be active, interesting and enjoyable. Children should take responsibility, or ownership, for their own learning but this is contingent on development of their self confidence and self esteem. Experience of success and feedback on achievement raises levels of expectation. It is important that children know where they are in their learning and where they need to go, so levels of achievement and goals and targets to aim for are critical. With these as a supportive structure pupils are able to assess their own progress towards those targets and reach, or maximize, their potential. With knowledge of prior attainment and planned outcomes what children are learning is no longer a matter of guesswork on the part of teachers.

In much of the discussion of learning, as in the above broad summary, there is often a subtle transition from general principles to a specific school form of learning and, more specifically still, a linear conception of progress towards pre-specified targets. While the discourse is generally framed in terms of ‘individual needs’, targets and levels of achievement circumscribe what is to be learned and curricular or policy needs appear to assume a higher priority. As illustrative of a new discourse one headteacher says that until he arrived ‘nobody ever talked about outcomes’. The persistent reference to ‘outcomes’ throughout the transcript is generally linked to ‘achievement’, with the implication that these two things are synonymous. The implication is that under his leadership, with a new discourse on outcomes a concern for achievement is now, for the first time, to the fore. Achievement and outcomes are also bedfellows of ‘targets’. These are neither freely chosen by students or teachers and although ‘negotiated’ with students individually, they sit tightly within a National Curriculum/Key Stage mandate.

The ‘rigour’ of targets appears largely unproblematic however, an antithesis to a bygone age in which educators were not held to account for leading teachers down the perverse path of child-centredness. Richard Pring (2005) describes a Conservative Secretary of State holding John Dewey and Pring himself collectively responsible for the decline in standards brought about by
progressivism and the Left-leaning educational establishment. This is exemplary of a grand narrative which appears to have gained currency even within the teaching profession itself and among school leaders. Referring to the 1970s and 1980s one secondary headteacher claims 'a short period of time ago nobody was interested in achievement in schools'. A primary head makes a similar claim, referring to a previous time when 'teachers took no responsibility for children's learning at all. They had no expectation of them at all'. There is an echo here of Michael Barber's characterization of the 1970s as the decade of 'uninformed professionalism, the 1980s as 'uninformed prescription', the 1990s as 'informed prescription' and the current decade as 'informed professionalism'. Internalization of the grand narrative has, for some of our sample of headteachers at least, not only coloured their view of policy-making but provided a rationale for a more directive form of leadership in accord with a new orthodoxy. Commenting on the 'Barber quarter' Andy Hargreaves (2004) describes this as governments' tendency to 'denigrate the past in order to justify the present'.

Although these interviews predate 'personalised learning' as a policy (Miliband, 2004), the essential tenets of that are already embedded in the language and reveal inherent tensions between a more directive style of teaching and classroom management on the one hand and a 'personalised' learner-centred agenda on the other. While appealing to more pupil-centred pedagogy there is at the same time a common acceptance that the teacher is firmly in charge of what happens in the classroom. One secondary head spoke of making 'a high profile statement' to teachers that they were in charge of the classroom and that 'whatever happened in the class was their decision'.

Such a view sits uneasily with a common assertion that it is about helping children and young people to take control of their own learning. Where heads speak of pupils 'taking responsibility for their own learning' it is set within the closely defined parameters of National Curriculum and National Strategies. This is illustrated in the metaphors which heads use in describing students' own target setting. One head, using the metaphor of the 'goalposts', suggests a very clearly defined frame at which learning is aimed. 'I do believe that students need to know what the goalposts are and I do believe that they do need to be told continually what they need to do to improve'. The statement by one secondary head that 'every child is an achiever' is in the 'real world' self-evident, but takes on specialized meaning when interpreted in the context of curriculum targets, levels and key stages.

Within these clearly defined parameters there is a widely shared enthusiasm for a broad canopy of ideas which include learning styles and preferences, thinking skills, emotional intelligence, accelerated learning, multiple intelligences and brain-based learning. As one secondary headteacher puts it, the senior leadership team have 'dripped in things like the visual, the kinaesthetic and a bit of stuff about the brain'.

VAK is the shorthand reference used by a number heads to refer to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles which, given widespread endorse-
ment by visiting trainers and a substantial body of literature and tend to be treated as unproblematic. CATS (Cognitive Abilities Test) is cited frequently as a helpful resource in identifying individual biases to one of these three modes and poses teachers and school leader with the challenge of how these can be incorporated sensibly into lesson planning.

Two differing practical applications of learning styles emerge from these discussions. One view sees these constructs as useful for teachers in helping them cater more consciously to individual strengths, while a second (and not necessarily incompatible) view sees awareness of learning styles as helping the teacher widen the repertoire of modes of teacher presentation and modes of student engagement.

**Learning Journey**

The journey is a much used metaphor in relation to learning and progress. It is construed as one undertaken more in expectation than hope. That is, the destination is clearly understood by the pupil as the next ‘level’ or the next handhold on the climbing frame.

I want them to be level three by the end of year on, you know, it’s checking that sort of progress and getting them to want to improve the journey together. (Headteacher primary school J)

There is a broad consensus that students are increasingly internalising that frame of reference and able to articulate their journey in terms of baselines and targets:

I think they are able to say, ‘this is where I want to be’ ‘this is where I think I am. There’s where I want to be and this is what I need to get there’ I think they’re clever at doing that too. And I suppose the fact that we put letters and number with it merely makes it refined and comprehensible rather than the airy-fairy way I would have of assessing people. (Headteacher primary school J)

The journey towards agreed targets is from one level to the next, a model that now appears to be deeply embedded in teachers’ thinking about learning. The extent to which these permeate practice is illustrated by one secondary head:

I should be able to go into a classroom, I should be able to ask the child what level they’re working at and I should be able to ask what level or what they have to do to improve from that level. (Headteacher secondary school B)

There is a kind of religious tenor to a statement by one headteacher, referring to ‘picking up children who have lapsed’, conveying an image of ‘backsliding’ or losing the faith.

Targets and levels combine to provide the ‘road map’ and are made explicit and visible on classroom walls, stamped on front of books and sometimes on
each piece of work, or portrayed on posters on the walls. Targets are often reviewed at the start of lessons, reinforced and highlighted at every opportunity. While the intensity and visibility of targets and levels differs among the 12 schools, in all of them it is a preoccupying concern. Targets have, as one primary head says, have ‘become a topic of endless discussions’. This appears to reflect a fairly wide agreement that pupils need to know the level they are working at and that parents too should be equally informed and take part in the target setting process.

There is also one dissenting voice among the 12. One primary headteacher argues against this as a form of labelling and as a self-fulfilling prophecy, which she sees as lending itself to a purely instrumental approach to learning.

I try very hard not to let the children know what their actual level is. I want them to know where they are and what they want to do to improve but I don’t want them to get a handle on what level they are because that has lots of baggage with it and they go home to their parents and say, ‘I’m a level three’ and then, you know, there’s the inevitable, the pressure on them that they need to do, you know, they need to be a level four or they want level five so they’ll go in the top class of secondary school. (Headteacher primary school J)

While this head tries to dissuade staff from sharing levels with pupils she is aware that it creates a tension with a policy of openness and transparency and parental partnerships where informed parents are anxious to know their children’s stage or level of progress. This headteacher, who has a commitment to assessment for learning as an integral aspect of a Learning How to Learn Project, is aware of the difficulty in recasting parental expectations.

The challenge for leadership is to work with the paradox of a closer collaborative relationship with parents, providing the security of summative assessments while at the same time trying to undo the successful embedding of marks and grades, a commitment to which has over time penetrated deep into the affections of parents.

**Nature of the Warrant**

Much of the discussion of learning refers to, and is ‘warranted’ on the grounds of government strategies. This is not, however, the only source of authority cited for the affirmation of practice. All 12 schools have at some point invited visiting speakers to run sessions on thinking skills, brain-based learning, assessment for learning, or school improvement. One primary head alludes to a ‘buzzing around’ of ideas about accelerated learning, ‘picked up’ through other colleagues, from reading, or from people who have returned from courses enthused by what they had heard from inspirational speakers. Reference is made by headteachers to experts, to seminal texts, to research or to school improvement literature. ‘I’m a Michael Fullan fan’ says one secondary head in the context of her approach to school improvement strategies. Another head
cites Shirley Clark’s research as ‘one of the most influential books I have read I think’ and in response to an interviewer probe, ‘It’s at the heart of our thinking’.

The transition from the ‘I’ to the ‘our’ is illustrative of the way on which personal conviction and influence can become embedded in whole school policy. Policies and practice on learning appear in most cases to be driven by a personal conviction of a headteacher, whose enthusiasm has been fired by an inspirational authority. These then provide an agreed set of principles of learning which everyone is expected to sign up to.

There’s the general principles of learning within the school are accepted by everybody who works here and they would all work towards and they’re quite clear about it. And not only that, but agree with it. (Headteacher secondary school B)

These various authority sources, empirical evidence or ‘warrant’ on which these principles rest tend not to be regarded as problematic or open to question. More exception than the rule is the statement by one primary head who says ‘We actually needed to do a lot more thinking about how children learn’.

There is, however a more commonly shared scepticism of learning as represented by levels attained or test scores.

If we’re only looking at the improvement in children’s learning by looking at their SATs I think we could be disappointed, so I’m really quite looking forward to looking at ways in which we can measure the improvement in children’s learning and work together to find out how you can measure that. (Headteacher primary school K)

There is also an explicit recognition that the learning process sits uncomfortably within an assessment ‘climbing frame’:

I think some of the assessment that we discuss as the staff are the tedious bits in giving them the levels for national curriculum. Our own assessments and personal assessments are much wider than that and each teacher assesses for their own individual needs, usually for pushing on and involving the children in their own expectation of what they want to get to. (Headteacher primary school J)

The ambivalence of being obedient and ‘doing what we’re told’ while at the same time recognising the need for a more critical appraisal of learning is exemplified by this headteacher.

We’ve been absolutely bombarded by government initiatives. Some are very good and some are awful, but we’ve got so caught up in it and we’re all very obedient now and we all do as we’re told [although] I still think children learn an awful lot of rubbish at school that is totally unnecessary to them as people. (Headteacher primary school G)

**Learning and Teaching**

There is, running through the conversation, a conflation of the language of learning evidenced in the frequent references to ‘teaching and learning’ as one
single conjoined concept, particularly when referring to strategy as in ‘teaching and learning strategies’. The language of teaching appears at times to be confused with that of learning, and references made in the context of a discussion about learning frequently tend to refer more to what the teacher is doing or to teacher intention rather than to student activity or intention. Occasionally this results in an awkward straddling of two distinct and inherently conflicting ideas.

I think we’re aiming to enable every individual student to maximise their potential, to be challenged, to be stimulated, to produce learning outcomes for themselves. (Headteacher secondary school E)

This is exemplary of a statement that appears on the surface to be about learning but in its language of outcomes betrays a more school-centred frame of reference. It may be nothing more than a child-centred view which, it is felt, needs to be dressed up, ill-fittingly, to conform to a dominant political discourse. The following is a further example of a conceptual slide from a child-centred view to a teaching strategy.

The children are partners in that enterprise [learning] and a whole range of strategies for keeping everybody on task’. (Headteacher primary school H)

Equally difficult to reconcile is the student taking responsibility while the teacher is ‘in control of the learning’

[Students] taking the responsibility for themselves, the way they manage themselves in the school. So we’re not now talking about the teacher being in control of the child in the same way but they [teachers] are still in control of the learning. (Headteacher secondary school B)

It may be inferred from these comments that headteachers are struggling with a cognitive resolution between a learning-centred or ‘personalized’ agenda, on the one hand, and a highly prescriptive set of teaching strategies on the other. There is an implicit, and sometimes explicit, recognition that teaching and learning strategies have to be contextualized within a curriculum and assessment framework, the rationale of which is not derived from individual learning needs but from a body of conventional wisdom as to what knowledge is of most worth, and reinforced by strong coalitions of interest in maintaining subject status. Strategies which attempt to be learner-centred have to work from a set of logistical givens about the structure of the school day, week and year, so that references to ‘pace’, variety, beginnings of lesson, time on task all refer to extracting the maximum learning returns from ‘lessons’, tightly structured in order to cover the ground with maximal efficiency. There was a time, says ex-HMI David Green when inspectors understood pace as referring to a rhythm of learning as Whitehead (1929) described it, not to what the teacher was doing to maintain control and attain the predetermined objectives for a whole class.
When it comes to the terminology of teaching, heads seem to be on safer ground and engage more confidently with a greater repertoire of ideas. The elements of good teaching tend to be treated with less ambivalence than when referring to learning and there is a high degree of consensus as to what makes a good lesson. The three or four part lesson is mentioned by headteachers in all the 12 interviews either explicitly by name or by reference to National Strategies and structuring of teaching episodes. Within this sharper, more highly focused lesson structure teachers work harder, trying to accommodate individual needs and styles while interesting and inspiring students in brisk teacher-directed lessons.

We’re looking at knowing individuals well, having prior information, trying to interest the students and inspire the students in every lesson. (Headteacher secondary school E)

‘In every lesson’ is the sting in the tail of this ambition, a theme taken up by another head who describes his vision of honing lessons to a perfect pitch across the school. To this end he organises a professional development week in which the focus is on the planning of exemplary lessons. At the same time he acknowledges that the planning and energy required are unsustainable. ‘Not every lesson can be delivered with that level of planning, that level of sheer energy in the classroom’, says one secondary headteacher. The language of ‘delivery’ is highly apposite in a context where the focus shifts from the active construction work on the part of the student to the energetic delivery of the curriculum by the teacher.

Lessons as the unit of instruction appear to have acquired a new status, dating to an earlier era than Key Stage Strategies but given new authority and impetus by those initiatives. In contrast to a previous era, particularly in primary schools, where children were expected to come into the class (or open plan area) and take the initiative to get on with their own project regardless of the teacher, the emphasis in these accounts is on teacher-directed classroom entry, immediate engagement through attention-grabbing warm-up activities, and endings to lessons comprised of plenaries or ‘carpet time’, irrespective of where children are in their learning. Within this teacher-directed framework the filling in the three-part sandwich is student activity, structured to engage them actively in a set task.

Structurally within every lesson, there is time within every lesson where students are working independently, working in groups, working in pairs where they are actively doing something. They’re not listening, they’re not passive. So learning should be active as far as it’s possible to do. (Headteacher primary school L)

This period of ‘active learning’ sits within what is described by one headteacher as the ‘scaffolding’ of the learning experienced and provides a theoretical, Vygotskian, justification for the framework within which learning finds expression. ‘Active learning’ is depicted as an episode within the self contained
lesson at the end of which there is assessment of what has been learned, explicitly related to levels of attainment. This is what one primary head talks about as ‘upping the ante, ensuring that all staff follow the model of ‘making explicit what they [pupils] are to learn, they will learn what we want them to learn, what they’re supposed to be learning’. Lessons are framed by objectives at the outset and review of objectives achieved at the lesson’s end, and the approach is consistent across the school.

A consistent approach to teaching, all teachers make sure they tell the children the learning objectives for each lesson, all the teachers link to the planning, the planning’s linked to assessment. There’s a very consistent approach throughout the school, and all staff follow the policy and the ethos of the school. (Headteacher primary school G)

Consistency is a key word that runs through the pages of these transcripts. ‘Enlightened policies are uniformly implemented by all teachers’, claims one secondary head while another uses the word ‘consistency’ 24 times in the course of the interview. Its importance is reiterated with regard to Key Stage Three, with regard to independent learning, study skills, homeworking policy, training areas, ‘across colleagues’, in the use of LSAs and with reference to parents:

We need to achieve that consistency across all those subjects so a parent would know that a level five in English means the same thing in subject-specific terms, a level five in maths or music or whatever. (Headteacher secondary school B)

The prevalence of this theme offers a sharp contrast with the absence of terms such as dialogue, dissent, disagreement, or conflict. Conflict is mentioned only in relation to children, or in one case as a management style that heads off potential conflict. Dissent is not in the lexicon of policy and improvement. ‘Dialogue’ is mentioned in four interviews, in each case referring to an instrumental use—between teacher and pupil in order to set targets, in communication with parents, ‘open dialogue’ following classroom observation and ‘professional dialogue’ as integral to appraisal.

While there is a wide scale adoption of a new government discourse, and a generally high level embrace of National Strategies there is at the same time a critical distancing and accompanying critique. Pace, for example, as dictated by the teacher's agenda is seen as in conflict with the emphasis on thinking, or ‘wait’ time.

I don't think we give them enough thinking time either, because of the pace we've been pushed so hard on pace of lessons, that before you know what's happened, you've not given them any thinking time at all. (Headteacher secondary school A)

A much stronger statement comes from a primary head who, having implemented the Strategies, is highly critical of their effects on learning.
The literacy came in and it was just unbelievable, the formality of the lessons and I found that . . . well, I just felt that it was obscene, the way we were expected to teach literacy. In fact, it just made literacy die a death in my opinion. The excitement was out of it. (Headteacher primary school J)

Another critique is of what a head describes as ‘the do it by numbers rationale', claiming that it had ‘stopped teachers thinking'. Yet another primary head talks of ‘the need for a breather to get away from the routine of literacy'. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, says another, have encouraged a culture of ‘tell me what to do and I’ll do it', pushing people too fast, not allowing time to grow or assume ownership.

[It is] not helpful for teachers’ own self-esteem because their teaching styles and their teaching repertoire have been challenged in way that which has not enabled them to feel they have any part in it, they have no ownership of it.’ (Headteacher primary school L)

Compliance with Government imperatives has entailed a ‘ducking and weaving' one's way through the ‘narrow' demands of curriculum, striving for the enrichment of the ‘wider' curriculum and ‘widest' possible opportunities for learning. The vocabulary of ‘narrow' and ‘wide' are deeply embedded in a discourse of achievement which sets in opposition the pressures for attainment of competitive targets and the more person-centred mission of the school. The words ‘passion' and ‘excitement', which occur within the learning conversation, sit alongside the embrace of the three/four part lesson and a grateful endorsement of Ofsted, resulting in a curiously ambivalent set of implicit theories.

Ofsted ‘Warrant’

All heads make unprompted references to Ofsted in the course of the interview. These allusions may be categorized as:

- Affirmation or validation of practice.
- Advice or challenge to practice.
- Use of templates and criteria.
- Critique.

Validation

Validation of practice by Ofsted is highly valued among those heads who made reference to recent inspection.

You know, with our Ofsted lesson observations we were the highest in [the authority named] with 42% ones and twos and the data I get back as a head which is in the report shows that 66% of our staff got a one or two at some time . . . talking to the inspector I think we have very few unsatisfactory lessons now. You’ve got to be
pleased by that. Obviously I’d like them all to be, you know, ones and twos. (Headteacher secondary school A)

The importance of Ofsted’s affirmation is conveyed in this primary head’s ambition for her school to be graded as ‘excellent’.

You know when Ofsted come we don’t want good or very good. We want excellent. That’s what we’re aiming for. So once you reach one plateau you can go to the next can’t you? (Headteacher primary school G)

For another primary head the power of Ofsted endorsement is illustrated in her desire to visit a school given high marks by the inspectorate.

[I intend] . . . to visit my colleague’s school where Ofsted is just gushing about how wonderful they are, you know, now I need to go and have a look at that and see what that looks like. (Headteacher primary school H)

In one secondary school Ofsted was cited 21 times in the course of the interview, testimony to the extent to which the Ofsted approach to evaluating teaching had been internalized by the school. To an English observer or insider this may be seen as commonplace and unsurprising, so deeply is this now embedded in school and national culture. It is only when seen through the eyes of visitors from other countries that the depth of impact of Ofsted in the lives of schools and headteachers becomes conspicuously apparent.

Advice

Although giving of advice is not strictly speaking within an Ofsted remit, inspectors’ pinpointing of weaknesses leads directly into action and appears generally to be seen as helpful and valued.

Since the Ofsted we’ve addressed that [independent learning] through the relatively simple aspect of increasing a significant number of computers in the school, the drive at the moment is to try to equip them with the necessary study skills to take on that independent research (Headteacher secondary school B)

It is seen in some cases as lending strength to the head’s own conviction or desire to move staff to ‘a less didactic’ style, to more independent learning or to a move away from summative marking to more formative uses of assessment. A primary headteacher, describing the development of an assessment policy in the school, is then asked by the interviewer ‘Who was that for? Who did you have to have a policy for?’ and replies, ‘Oh, I suspect Ofsted’.

Use of Templates

Most of the references to Ofsted were in relation to models or templates that had been adopted by the school. The Ofsted model most often cited was in relation to classroom observation.
We've done observations, largely based on the Ofsted model of observing teaching quality. (Headteacher primary school M)

Heads provide examples of a straight adoption of the Ofsted observation scale, a form of self inspection either for internal use or as a prelude to an Ofsted visit.

When we started and did lesson observations we had a good 10 per cent of lessons that were unsatisfactory and you know, by the time we got to Ofsted we did have three unsatisfactory lessons during Ofsted on five teachers. (Headteacher secondary school A)

The way in which this way of thinking and talking about teaching is illustrated in the shorthand used by this headteacher, who appears to assume a common linguistic reference point, a ‘restricted code’ that, it is assumed, will carry the same meaning for the interviewer as it does for the head.

But the teachers who were struggling have moved quite a long way. I mean several teachers who were teaching six and seven, I mean really sad lessons, are now teaching at four most of the time, sometimes three. (Headteacher secondary school A)

The internalization of school self inspection is seen in the wholesale adoption of an Ofsted approach in one school.

You will find that every aspect of Ofsted inspection has been graded by us from the occasional excellent down to the more than occasional but still fairly rare—unsatisfactory. So every aspect of teaching and learning by us. Every dimension covered by Ofsted across everything that Ofsted looks at, has, in a sense been graded now by a senior team. (Headteacher secondary school B)

The process of self inspection as exemplified here tends to be confused with self-evaluation. Indeed the Ofsted model is essentially a translation of an inspection protocol into a school-led process in which self-evaluation assumes the character of a large scale audit and tends to be undertaken as a prelude to inspection. There is an occasional reflective acknowledgment of an Ofsted way of thinking so powerful that it not only drives a school’s development and direction but ‘slips into the psyche’.

[The Ofsted frameworks] drove our thinking in some way. We certainly didn’t use them in any way but they’ve been overshadowing us for long enough and they slip into your psyche really. (Headteacher primary school M)

Another primary head describes a meticulous application of the Ofsted approach to development planning, but describes it as ‘a very strange school development plan’ in which the school is measured against ‘147 statements that are all Ofsted-linked’. Its usefulness she sees primarily in being able to contest Ofsted’s judgement because of the school’s own thorough preparation. It is
further evidence of how seriously inspection is taken and how much energy and time it consumes in a school's life.

**Critique**

The headteachers' relationship with Ofsted is one replete with paradox. Its endorsement is highly valued and made public. There is an apparently enthusiastic embrace of much that Ofsted has to offer by way of direction and templates and inspectors' observations often serve to strengthen the headteacher's hand. There is also a hint of strategic manoeuvring, as described by this secondary head.

> From a head's point of view, you're wanting obviously to get a good relationship with your Ofsted team because it's actually the essential thing. You learn this, that it is a key thing. (Headteacher secondary school D)

He adds by way of self-revelation:

> Talking to this guy he said, 'Well, of course, a school like yours, I'm going to give you a real high-powered team.' And I sat down and I said, 'Oh good' where I was really thinking, 'Oh bugger!' You know, can't I have some thick ones who will just do what I tell them.

There are also frequent allusions to playing the game. Any latitude within the three/four part lesson is set aside for inspection purposes. One primary head talks about the 'tightening up' of the lesson which excludes the normal routine of listening to pupils who come with stories and are eager to relate their experiences. The use of the word 'slippage' is highly significant in signalling the teacher agenda as against a more pupil-centred classroom ethos.

> When Ofsted did come in, the slippage, which they call it, was tightened up because we're all able to do that. It doesn't matter on some occasions. You don't have to teach the minute they [the pupils] come in because sometimes there are desperately important things that they have to tell you. (Headteacher primary school J)

As this head adds '[human behaviour] that is not allowed. Not during Ofsted week.' Again, resistance to the idea of being 'hide bound' is conveyed in this contrast between what teachers would normally do and what they would do for an inspection team.

> I don't like having it laid down and to be honest, unless it's Ofsted, you're not that hide-bound by it. There is room to put in a bit of interest if you want to and something else. During Ofsted, probably not. (Headteacher primary school H)

The strength of compliance from headteachers contrasts markedly with the sense of authority and conviction that these heads express in the context of their own schools. In order to stand up for yourself in an Ofsted context appears to require an extra measure of strength and confidence.
You have to be very strong. You have to be confident enough to say this is where we are, this is where we know we need to go and we will take that in our time and in our own way to advisors and to Ofsted. (Headteacher secondary school D)

Creating a Culture for Learning

The term ‘culture’ has passed seamlessly into the lexicon of schools. In these 12 interviews the concept is used interchangeably with ethos, atmosphere, climate and environment, all of which tend to focus on the learning, or learning and teaching, as lying at the heart of the culture. Heads talk about ‘immersion’ in the learning culture, keeping teaching and learning ‘to the forefront’ or ‘bombarding’ pupils with the singular and ubiquitous message. Heads speak of building culture anew, entailing the assertion of ‘good practice’ as well as intolerance of certain other practices.

It was an opportunity for us to actually say, ‘This is what we consider to be good practice’ and although we needed everybody’s agreement, it gave us, I think, that opportunity to share with staff and having visited the school beforehand, there were certain practices which were not going to be acceptable in a new primary school. (Headteacher primary school K)

There is also a pervasive sense of building a counter culture, one which confronted the previous way of doing things, such as ‘a culture of marks and grades’ or a ‘blame culture’, moving to one of mutual support and acknowledgement of vulnerability.

... to move the culture to being a much more achievement one and not blame ... And I mean one thing I am proud of actually is the fact that we do get a lot of staff, offer a lot of vulnerability and ask for support, expecting us to help them do it better. (Headteacher secondary school A)

In most cases discussion of culture refers to the professional teacher culture, and concerns are expressed as to how to ‘move people’ and overcome resistance or cynicism. There is a prevalent theme of new directions, re-ordering of priorities, intolerance of old and ingrained habits, of development and change. It is, in the words of one secondary head, ‘a culture of change being expected and change being possible’. A culture of change is seen as a prerequisite for staff taking ownership of new ways of doing things.

The culture has to change for things to change. The culture will only change if people take ownership. (Headteacher secondary school C)

One way in which change and ownership happen is through a mutual peer observation, teachers learning from teachers. ‘There’s a more open door culture, there’s people watching each other’s teaching’ says one head. This tends not to be seen as something spontaneous or ad hoc but a process that is carefully managed.
What I do a lot of, when I know someone's got an issue, I think through who's the best person is for them to watch teach and try and go for someone who's better and not daunting because we have got some teachers who would blow the weaker teacher's minds and then they just think, 'Oh, I can't'. It's like a kid. You don't show them an A* when they're an E. So, you know . . . It's been a lot of lesson observation, talking about lessons . . . (Headteacher secondary school A)

The parallel made between students and teachers suggests that threat, resistance, and sensitivity to peer expectations manifest themselves among mature professionals just as they do among immature students. Confronting expectations of students is seen as running in parallel or in conjunction with the challenge to staff, and as integral to the making of a counter culture. Two heads describe an 'anti-achievement' student culture in which students 'are quite interested but they mustn't show it'. The antidote is 'an atmosphere where students feel secure, where they feel supported in their learning, a culture in which it is safe to learn, in which students are encouraged to play an active role in making the school as a whole a better place in which to learn. This cannot be effected, it is argued, without teachers too making it a better place to learn and reaching out beyond the school to the parent community.

The counter culture is also characterized as one that challenges the expectations of parents.

We are trying to counteract a whole culture there and working with parents as well because their expectations that children come to school and sit and learn. (Headteacher primary school L)

The depiction of ethos and culture in these extracts reveals a strong invisible, or in some cases, highly visible, guiding hand. Culture is not simply something that grows weed-like but is created and nurtured, moulded to a strong vision of school leaders, by those who have, and use, the power to decide.

**Leadership and Management**

While leadership was not explicitly addressed in discussions of culture, nor talked about as a key interview theme, leadership styles and values permeate almost every aspect of the discussion. There is a clear and consistent message that headteachers set the vision and culture of the school and that schools carry the imprint of those personal or professional values. One secondary head reflects this widely held view when he says, ‘You wouldn’t be a head teacher unless you had a very strong philosophy yourself, unless you had a very strong vision of what a school would be about’. Sometimes the values are alluded to apologetically as having ‘a bee in my bonnet’, without appeal to evidence or to higher authority.

Most heads make a distinction between what is and isn’t negotiable. By virtue of their office heads have the freedom to decide, or impose, ways of working.
Ownership of core principles or practices is explicitly seen by one headteacher as lying with the senior team and not the staff.

So there’s a few core things that come from me and senior team that they're not for ownership, they are and if you don't submit to that, it's not really a place to work. (Headteacher secondary school A)

At its most extreme it takes the form of what Maccoby (2001) terms ‘narcissistic leadership’ in which self is conspicuously centre stage in the transcript. The following are a few examples from an interview in which the use of ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘myself’ was the continuous strand in describing policy development within the school.

This policy has got a lot of me in it. It's largely me.

That wasn’t from the staff. That was from myself.

It comes from me, an awful lot of it comes from me.

The policy has got a lot of me in it. It's largely me.

It was quite brutal. It was tough. It was me. (Headteacher secondary school D)

The use of words like ‘tough’ and ‘brutal’ are one expression of what is widely referred to as ‘strong’ leadership. It encapsulates ideas of sticking to your own principles, raising the stakes, creating willing followership. One secondary head describes having to ‘force’ ideas on to his colleagues, involving ‘battles’ to get people to accept his plans for the school.

This tough stance tends by most heads to be seen as applying in the early stages of headship when the challenge is to get everyone on board and moving in the same direction. The balance of command, consultation and consensus is conceived as one that changes over time as vision and direction are established and key principles become embedded in practice.

On my arrival here it was the case and I think within the first six months we had a new assessment policy. I think that wasn't something that I consulted on. I was fairly dictatorial on that. (Headteacher secondary school C)

‘Stepping back’ from a more directive mode and adopting a lower profile is seen as possible once the school has moved towards a more collegial non-hierarchical culture, one in which people feel empowered to take initiative for themselves, to both lead and follow their colleagues.

What I’m not trying to do is step back and let different things run. And that does seem to be working. So that's what I see as a learning organization. People take the initiative in a non-hierarchical way, people reflect on what they're doing, they share that practice. (Headteacher secondary school C)
There is, none the less, a sense of tension among heads between their own driving values and a desire for ownership and empowerment on the part of staff. This ambivalence is explicitly conveyed by a secondary head who talks of empowering people to arrive at the right decisions.

... process is the empowering of people and as you empower them they will then be making that decision, having that input within the school, knowing that they're doing it within what we agreed is important for the school. (Headteacher primary school K)

In some cases there is a more honest and forthright acknowledgement of this process as manipulation. The word ‘forcing’ in the following statement is in uneasy juxtaposition with the implied ownership:

I think teachers have got to feel that they're making decisions but what I suppose I'm forcing them to do is making those decisions. (Headteacher secondary school D)

As in this case, a ‘strong’ directive leadership style can be dressed up as consultation, and what makes for genuine consultation among equals becomes hard to discern. One secondary head claims that ‘The staff write the policies. I don't write the policy, they're not written by me, they're written by them’. The next statement by this head, however, contains an ambiguity which is picked up by the interviewer:

They [policies] weren't imposed, they were negotiated and people were challenged in their thinking so that they would look to see what it is that we felt were important issues about the school.

Interviewer: Who were ‘we’ at that point? When you say ‘we’ . . .

Head: Well, that would be very much, I think, the management within the school. (Headteacher primary school K)

The ‘we’ is a contentious area in building a genuine learning community and while trying to include, or ‘move’, all staff toward a common goal there is recognition of the disparate attitudes, values and motivation that comprise a professional body. Schratz (2001) characterizes a school, or perhaps any organization, as containing missionaries, true believers, lip servers, spectators, underground workers, outright opponents and emigrants, distributing themselves along a spectrum, according to the degree to which they ‘buy into’ the vision and mission of the school, with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

In schools which do encompass a range of motivations the change strategy, as defined by a number of these heads is to invest efforts at the fertile end of the attitudinal spectrum (the missionaries and true believers) where you can expect high returns for minimal investment. ‘You play to your winners’ says one secondary head. The view that ‘other people will respond to what they’re
seeing going on around them’ suggests an implicit theory of epidemiological change (Gladwell, 1999; Hargreaves, 2004) in which interesting or ‘breakthrough’ practice spreads and reaches a tipping point. The strategy includes an encouragement to leave for those who don’t fit, or can’t adjust to the changing culture, replacing them with carefully selected true believers, in tune with the school’s, or perhaps more accurately, the head’s, vision.

One head whose school is highly successful in terms of its GCSE results and Ofsted report, ascribes his success to a highly directive style of leadership, aggressive recruiting of quality staff and incentive policies to both attract and retain them.

I suppose fundamentally I think people make things happen and people are what the school’s about and I think I know very quickly when I meet people whether they’re people I want here that will make a difference or make it exceptional. (Headteacher secondary school A)

There are references to ‘the thinkers’, ‘the innovators’, the change agents’, the ‘champions’ whom heads rely on and ‘use’ to foster a climate of change. These people may have no formal status, ‘without portfolio’, but more commonly they occupy a middle leadership role. In secondary schools departmental heads or departments as a whole are seen as spearheading change. The leading edge departments, or ‘those at the sharp end’ tend to be seen as those which have been involved most centrally in the National Strategies, offering a core of changed practice and modelling which extends outward to other departments.

In contrast to the departmental focus, and in some cases complementary to it, are cross department groups or working parties devising policies, testing ideas and feeding back to senior leadership. These may take the form of teaching and learning groups, for example, designed to include staff with differing strengths or groups with specific functions, such as professional development, and include members of staff with no formal status, newly qualified teachers for example. While these accounts contain a hint of a welcome for diversity and challenge to the everyday practice the latitude for dissent or radical reappraisal of mainstream orthodoxy remains a more open question.

Conclusion

The clearest message to emerge from these 12 extended interviews is the success of government policies in leaving a depth of imprint on school practice and shaping the discourse which accompanies it. The success of National Strategies is vouchsafed by the compliance of headteachers, for the most part willingly, and by the imprimatur of Ofsted inspection. There is, at the same time, an accompanying critique of the formulaic nature of aspects of the Strategies. There is dissatisfaction with assessment measures such as SATS and a more general depiction of Ofsted inspection as an occasion for strategic
conformity. Yet, from an ethnographic perspective the lack of challenge offered to external authorities is striking and hard to reconcile with the authority and conviction of these heads as powerfully influential within their own schools.

There is a strong sense of a new orthodoxy running through these accounts. It reveals itself in an almost uniform view of learning, bearing the hallmark of brain-based theories of learning styles and multiple intelligences which, while widely endorsed, is contained uncomfortably with highly structured lesson units in which ‘delivery’ is a predominant metaphor. At the same time there is an almost complete absence of critical reflection on the embrace and advocacy of learning styles (see for example, Coffield et al., 2004; White, 2004) while the all-consuming nature of targets and levels conveys a ruthlessly cumulative image of learning in which any deviation or distraction from the journey to curricular goals is to be eschewed.

All heads agree on the importance of a culture of learning and use every opportunity to reinforce the message. Peer observation, often across subject boundaries, is the mechanism by which the dialogue around learning is fostered, yet the conversations tend to betray a more teaching focused perspective. Use of the Ofsted model focuses observation on what the teacher is doing and the normative scale to evaluate teaching tends to close down rather than open up a more critical discourse.

The apotheosis of a learning culture is portrayed as a consensual one. Intellectual bonding appears to follow on the heels of social bonding and one has a sense of the individual being buried under the weight of the policy and beneath the pressure for a uniformity of practice. A sense of agency on the part of teachers is hard to detect and even the strong sense of agency among the heads appears to be contingent on policy direction. The apparent lack of room for dissent risks locking schools into what Argyris and Schon (1978) call single loop learning—a continuous loop of defined objectives, planning, implementation and evaluation. The ‘double loop’, apparent in glimpses in these narratives, is one which provides space to stand back outside of that process, inviting critique, dissent and even subversion of orthodoxy. ‘Organizations require a minimal degree of consensus but not so much as to stifle the discussion that is the lifeblood of innovation’ write Evans and Genady (1999: 368), arguing that the constant challenge of contrasting ideas is what sustains and renews organizations.

Schools that play safe, driven by external mandates set tight parameters around what can be said and what can be heard. Such schools are antithetical to the notion of a learning organization which, by definition, is always challenging its own premises and ways of being. For Evans and Genady organizational effectiveness is inherently paradoxical. It is dynamically balanced between control and flexibility, internal and external focus, by the tensions between means and ends. There is freedom to break rules because the culture is resilient enough to learn from it. Their (1999: 369) aphorism ‘organize one way and manage another’ implies that the greater the external pressure and the tighter
the hierarchical constraints the greater the need for flexibility, diversification and agency.

The paradox of agency is that in a context of a top down cascade of government initiatives reaffirmation of teachers’ experience is paramount. It is the prime source of knowledge on which a learning organization both rests and moves forward (Senge, 1990, 2005; Boreham and Morgan, 2004). However great the constraints of organizational structures, resource provision and political imperatives, individual agency means that teachers are not only in control of their own practice but able to exert their influence on the very structures which contain them. In Giddens (1984: 5) terminology it may be described as a dynamic co-construction of change, driven internally by ‘a continuing theoretical understanding of the ground of their activity’. Beane and Apple (1999: 7) offer three critical conditions for democratic schools:

- The open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.
- Faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems.
- The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.

The 12 schools of this study may be described in Ofsted terminology as ‘well led’. The vision and enthusiasm of these senior leaders shines through the transcripts. The words ‘passion’ and ‘excitement’ reoccur and there is a prevailing sense of these schools being driven by uncompromising principles. There are elements of heroic and narcissistic leadership, sometimes juxtaposed with an espousal of distributed leadership and a continuing struggle to resolve the tensions between individual and shared leadership, policy dictat and ownership, but needing to be resolved within the school as a unit of improvement in a competitive environment. In a Danish context where schools are beginning to feel the brunt of political pressure Moos et al. (2000) warn that school leaders can easily find themselves blindsided unless they are able to bring a more critical ‘reading’ to the larger policy context of their leadership activities. In similar vein Frost (2000) describes the process of ‘getting colleagues on board’ as one which may fall prey to the rhetoric of collaboration ‘as a euphemism for strategic manipulation’.

The individual efforts of these heads to improve their schools has to be seen in a context of ‘challenging circumstances’ which apply not simply to the problematic social context in which they are set but to policy directions which exceed national boundaries. The overriding concern of raising standards and meeting targets is owed in large part to the continuous flow of data from OECD and other sources of international comparison. This is allied to a global trend for self-management at local level and tougher government intervention at national level, combined with higher stakes accountability and external
evaluation. These trends, driven primarily by an economic rather than an educational logic, leave headteachers to work out their own salvation within the bounds of their own schools, in a continuous quest to find a marriage of convenience between dutiful compliance and intellectual subversion.

Notes
1. Personal conversation in the context of critique of the New Relationship with Schools.

References


**Biographical Note**

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