

SUBMISSION FOR PHD BY PUBLICATION

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No part of this submission has been or will be submitted for any other academic award.

**Richard Riddell
3rd October, 2012**

ABSTRACT

This submission provides a commentary on thirteen of Richard Riddell's publications between 1999 and 2010. It explains the professional and policy contexts from the early 1990s onwards, when the author was a senior Local Authority officer, which gave rise to the thinking behind the first phase of his publications. These included the development of a bespoke school improvement process, deeply rooted in the context of the communities served by a school, and involving the development of an urban pedagogy and curricula. The centre piece of this phase was *Schools for Our Cities* (Riddell, 2003b). Attention then moved for phase 2 of the publications towards the social processes outside school that advantage middle class children within it. Research for this phase identified a *managed model of social reproduction* being operated by middle class families with children at independent schools, and an independent school/prestigious university nexus. Policy interventions of the 2000s might have begun to create analogous kinds of social processes for working class children, but they are no longer in place. The central piece for phase 2 was *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* (Riddell, 2010).

PREFACE

The submission for PhD by Publication that follows represents the results of some fifteen years' work to find and develop meaning, in Fullan's classic sense (2001), in the practical matter of seeking to improve schooling for disadvantaged children, their parents and their communities. This continuing intellectual project was founded on professional experience during a period of 'large scale reform' (Barber, 2000), where the nationally-imposed mechanics of systemic change seemed too rigid to engage with the complexity of an urban schools system that had developed over forty years of social, economic and political history.

What began as a local professional inquiry – what do we know about children here, what seems to be effective in working with them in a particular place – based on observation and what colleagues reported, spoke about at meetings and wrote up, inexorably widened to the gathering of professional evidence from a much wider field. And then it developed further into an examination of the academic and evidential basis for the myriad assertions made then (and now) about how children learn, and how this may be affected by their material and cultural circumstances. This wider process was discursive – reading and scholarship was complemented by lengthy discussions (interviews in the formal sense) with practitioners in schools and local authorities, and with academic specialists in a range of disciplines – and iterative in the sense that developing notions of what might be appropriate or useful were then discussed again with practitioners, principally headteachers at that stage.

Theoretically, this inquiry for the first phase of the publications (as explained in the submission) was positioned in relation to the developing school effectiveness and school improvement paradigm and attempted to reconcile criticisms of the paradigm, such as those made by Thrupp (1999) and the contributors to Slee *et al* (1998) about ignoring the effects of *context*, with the imperative to get on and improve urban schools, something not always seen or appreciated by academic commentators. The inquiry also involved exploring the insights of social psychology, in a constructivist sense, into the processes of learning.

This all was (and continues to be) an attempt to move beyond a typically negative characterisation (or 'critique') of particular policy formations, to an exploration of the possibilities for change within them. In this sense, the purpose of the inquiry has been to provide approaches that schools might try, using the notions to aid understanding developed in the publications for that purpose. These notions – and the overall approaches – are certainly original, but they do not present an original contribution *to theory* as such: they are not intended to do so and this should not be sought here. The author is not an academic sociologist, historian or psychologist; the inquiry engaged in applies theoretical insights from all these fields to illuminate the experienced reality in urban schools and communities.

At the same time, the weaknesses of national policy – and particularly the silences within it (Whitty, 2002) – have not been left unexplored. The combined effects of the quasi-market (Whitty *et al*, 1998) and middle class strategies (Ball, 2003a) – explored in some detail in the body of the submission – have produced a structural reality for schooling with which national policy not only did not engage but did not recognise. This continues

to be the case now. So the inquiry has also formulated recommendations to national policy makers – particularly how urban schools may be treated most effectively if they are to thrive, and what national policies might help in this regard - as well as to practitioners as to how they might consider the needs of children properly within prevailing climates.

As the inquiry moved into its second phase – as far as the publications reviewed in this submission are concerned – its attention turned to the wider social structural reality in which that of schooling is nested. The influence of what happens to children during the far greater proportion of their lives spent outside school than within it is clearly important for how they learn and develop. And this influence – as measured by outcomes (DCSF, 2009a) – is also structured socially and economically. So, from the standpoint of what might be done to change outcomes and trajectories so structured, the inquiry tried to relate an understanding of the differences inscribed in social structure, for example, in relation to the particular capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) that individuals bring to certain fields, to what actually happens on an everyday basis to these individuals and their families. In other words, this entailed an examination of the proximal factors in transmitting advantage and disadvantage (Feinstein *et al*, 2008).

This phase of the inquiry was based on the gathering of original empirical data of a different sort: from a wide range of interviews, as explained in the submission, testing their reliability and consistency both internally and against other national and local studies. In relating interview data from parents, independent schools, universities, senior officials and others, the inquiry in effect examines the everyday imbrication of social structure and the formation of young people as individuals, as Vincent and Ball (2006) express it, especially in relation to the development of aspiration.

Theoretically, therefore, the inquiry by this time is firmly positioned in relation to sociological analysis in the tradition of Bourdieu, but again draws on earlier constructivist insights from social psychology. As before, the inquiry did not seek to make an original *theoretical* contribution, but nevertheless developed original notions with which to think about the development of aspiration.

Following the path established earlier, this developed theoretical framework allowed the interrogation of the then current national policy streams for promoting the achievement and attendance at university of otherwise disadvantaged young people, informed by interview data from those responsible for them. This was intended – certainly – to evaluate whether such policy streams were or could be effective and achieve their intended outcomes in the light of the structural issues they were largely silent about. But the intention was also to provide advice on what policy changes were necessary, while taking into account existing frameworks and formations.

The whole of this intellectual project has been an attempt to establish a sound, theoretical basis, involving the development of some original notions, for the provision of practical advice to national policy makers and local practitioners so they can improve lives of people now. It does not provide a characterisation of the particular current stage of the evolution of our social or economic system, though it draws on those of others. Nor does it paint a utopian picture of what life might be like in an ideal world, if we were not to start from our current position. Such a picture needs to be sought elsewhere.

Richard Riddell

October 2012

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1: INTRODUCTION

The publications being submitted

The publications and papers I am submitting for consideration for the degree of PhD by publication are as follows. They are divided for examination into phase 1 and phase 2:

Phase 1

1999 Is there a need to develop an urban pedagogy? *Improving Schools* 2 (2) p38 – 41

2003a The Curriculum and Pedagogy of Bottom Strata Schools *Improving Schools* 6 (1) p
12-19

2003b *Schools for Our Cities: Urban Learning for the Twenty-First Century* Stoke-on-Trent:
Trentham Books

2005a Government policy, stratification and urban schools: a commentary on the *Five-
year strategy for children and learners* *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (2) p 237-241

2005b *Learning Disadvantage and Challenging Schools*, in Clarke (Ed) p43-55

2006a Understanding Learning Disadvantage *Primary Leadership Today* 1 (2) p15-17

2006b Education Inequalities and Social Structures *Race Equality Teaching* 23 (4) p44-47

2007a *Urban Learning and the Need for Varied Urban Curricula and Pedagogies* in Pink,
W and Noblit, G (Eds) p1027-1048

Phase 2

2007b *Developing Social Capital for Working Class Students: Aspirations and Identity*

Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference,

Institute of Education, 5 – 8 September. Available at

www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/168093.doc; accessed 21st May 2012

2008 *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief In “Disengaged” Students* Paper presented at

the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Heriot-Watt

University, 3-6 September 2008. Available at

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/175302.doc>; accessed 21st May 2012

2009a *Schools in trouble again: a critique of the National Challenge (2008) Improving*

Schools 12 (1) p 71-80

2009b *Continuity Of Expectation: Middle Class Parents, Independent School and ‘Good’*

University, Or, How Social Structure Aids Reproduction Paper presented at the

British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of

Manchester, 2-5 September 2009. Available at

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/184231.doc>; accessed 21st May 2012

2010 *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief - Snapshots of Social Structure at Work* Stoke-

on-Trent: Trentham Books

For ease of reference, publications will be referred to by year and letter, eg 2009b.

Structure of the submission

This commentary on my publications is organised into five chapters, including this one.

Chapter 2 provides a background to the publications. It begins with a personal account of my professional roles and experiences from the 1980s when I began to be involved in Education management and policy making at a senior and occasionally national level. The attendant frustrations, triumphs, ambiguities and contradictions experienced during this time gave rise to the thought processes that eventually emerged in the first publications. Phase 1 is thus deeply rooted in the turbulent context of ambitions for 'standard-based reform' (Barber, 2000) under the Major and the first two Blair Governments.

This personal account is objectively an attempt at self-positioning (Grenfell and James, 1998), both in relation to the events and processes considered by phase 1, and the treatments given them. Inevitably, in hindsight, the writing of this account has involved the construction of a sort of *life history* narrative (Goodson *et al*, 2010), not all of which is presented here. Such a narrative provides an *emplotment* of the past from a contemporary viewpoint: it is a personal explanation and justification for the publications – *why* I wrote them as they are – and is done 'morally, socially, psychologically' as Bruner says (1990: 121) - but it does not provide an academic *justification* for them.

So the personal account with which Chapter 2 begins is complemented by a more objective and academic assessment of the policy context for the development of phase 1. This also sets the scene for education reform for the remainder of the decade, against which, and in the face of longstanding issues of social structure, the phase 2 publications were set. By the time *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b) was published, I was working in a different professional capacity, and so after that my personal account is less relevant.

Chapter 3 considers phase 1 of my publications, largely concerned with the development of an urban pedagogy (and curricula), 1998-2007. It considers their relation to each other,

the processes and rigour by which they were developed and their claims to new knowledge. There is some consideration of their continuing validity.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the later papers and publications – phase 2 - concerned with the research that led to the publication of *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* (2004-2010). Their rigour, and contemporary and continuing validity, are considered, including in relation to ongoing findings from other research. The strengths and originality of the models and claims to knowledge are examined.

Chapter 5 describes my continuing work.

A brief characterisation of my publications

I argue throughout the submission that the distinctiveness and strengths of all my publications are defined by two things.

First, by the *breadth* of the connections they make, both between and within the terms of national and local Education - and other - policies, and between different modes of study and academic specialisms. Such broad-based connections are intended to illuminate the real and potential trajectories of individual students, particularly from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds, the institutions such as schools intended to serve them, and the factors that govern both.

Second, they are defined by an orientation towards *action* to bring about social change.

The publications to date have been written in a certain way: because of the 'limitations of biography', if considered such, of being a senior Local Authority (LA) officer at a time of such significant change, with a profound personal and professional commitment towards social justice, *everything* I have written considers what *active* possibilities there are for

change, within the terms of the national policy conditions of the time, both political and professional. One has to understand the constitution of the present to frame the future, I would maintain. Both phase 1 and 2 publications, as stated in the preface, engage with the policies of the Government of the day, and how they could be made to work, rather than being limited to a critique of them, or driven by, for example, the sort of decontextualized imaginaries that sometimes seem to inform much discussion of Government education policy.

But, such treatments must always consider whether there is a deeper truth behind what is being described, and whether the writings themselves constitute a ‘misrecognition’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) of underlying social forces at work. I will argue not, but also that the stubborn and limiting nature of current aspects of social structure, for example, as seen in the independent school/prestigious university nexus, should be acknowledged publicly. The Milburn Report (Panel on Fair Access, 2009) did not do so, and indeed, depended on changing economic, rather than social or political action, to realise its aims. There seemed little practical point to me (2010), beyond the purely rhetorical, in arguing for the abolition of independent schools, but I did consider it. Social processes are rarely designed as such, and perhaps never could be. But my view is that we must try our best to modify them and their effects.

These working notions also have implications for the *breadth* of the publications in which I have sought to place pieces. My experience as a senior LA officer – described in chapter 2 – and later as an Education Consultant, Head of Education at an NGO and becoming more involved in academia, has required I address a variety of audiences, in person and in writing, and, earlier, through other broadcast and published media. This is reflected in

both phase 1 and 2. Broadly-based audiences, including professional ones and undergraduates, tend to want to see a wider picture than the one resulting from precisely-focused siloed pieces of academic research: how does it all fit together; how, as Fullan (2001) would say, can an individual interpret and find meaning in *any* proposed changes, within the context of their own work with or for children, now or in the future.

2: BACKGROUND TO THE PUBLICATIONS

The limitations of biography: a personal account of my professional background and its significance for my publications

The 22 years I spent in education ‘administration’ were the most significant for the development of my outlook, thinking and writing, principally – I reflect – because they provided such a rich context and experience at a time of huge policy change. All the posts I held were expected to be concerned not just with *administering* the present, though that was important, but improving and changing it. The duties described here are those particularly relevant to the management of educational change within a changing local and national policy context.

After teaching in comprehensive secondary schools, including four years as a head of economics and then of business studies, I moved to Wiltshire County Council as an Assistant Education Officer (AEO) in 1981. I held two AEO posts there. Significant for my future thinking, were first, being involved in the complete secondary reorganisation of Swindon, and second, as part of the Central Area team, putting into effect the ‘Wiltshire Way’. This is best understood as a loose understanding of what the child-centred, progressive principles of the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) might mean, exemplified in Griffin-Beale’s 1979 edited book of Christian Schiller’s writings, published by private subscription and much exchanged in the county at the time. This involved ‘ensuring’ the ‘right’ headteacher and teacher appointments, making strategic retirements and redeployments, advisory supervision and the occasional intervention – so all through staff in schools.

In 1986 I moved to Nottinghamshire and joined the Curriculum and Professional Development Group of officers, whose job was to encourage and skill schools (and the county's eight FE colleges) to bring about improvement for students. There was no 'Nottinghamshire Way', but there were huge centralised programmes of professional development, including the Nottinghamshire Staff Development Project (NSDP). This was intended to equip Curriculum and Staff Development Consultants in every institution to become change agents, drawing on institutional budgets created from the devolution of the vast majority of grant-aided money from central government then called LEATGS. Broadly, NSDP was suffused with Fullan's notions of the need for all staff to find and take meaning from change (see 2001), and was based on a particular package of skill development rooted in Egan's notion of the 'skilled helper' (2002) and Rogerian counselling (see Rogers, 1989). The introduction of the National Curriculum in Nottinghamshire was supported in similar manner, through families of schools created for the purpose, each having their own consultants. I increasingly lead sessions on all these programmes (and was responsible for the family project in 1989/90), and developed the management and administrative systems for the devolution of budgets.

The notion of school-generated (though may be LEA-encouraged, enabled or even led) change became central to my own thinking during my time in Nottinghamshire, and has remained so. But as significant for my understanding was acquaintance with the nature of strategic systems, targeting money to agreed priorities, and the nature of the leadership required to put into place clear and consistent expectations of schools, matched with appropriate, principled and consistent support, separate from monitoring and inspection. I had not found that in Wiltshire; nor did I when I moved to the West of England, though

these principles lay behind the original notions of Bristol LEA's first vision document, *Achievement in Bristol* (Bristol LEA, 1996).

These principles also became part of the developing national rhetoric from the early 1990s onwards, and have become much more explicit since the election of the Coalition Government (see Cameron, 2010, for example). But they were not the only part. School responsibility became just one of what Ball (2007) described as a 'bricolage' of policy discourses that were not always, as he says, consistent with each other, and were variably drawn on, depending on the context. I was to develop my own internal versions of some of these, but nationally, schools were responsible for their own development, only as long as they could be allowed to be, as Ball has expressed it (*ibid*). Most commonly they would lose this responsibility – *de facto* if not *de jure* - after having been allocated a 'category' after Ofsted inspection – special measures or serious weaknesses at that time, with the possibility of being served with an improvement notice, now the responsibility of Ofsted.

I was appointed Assistant Director of Education for the County of Avon in 1990. My twelve years as a senior manager, with what that entails for oversight of the whole of the local authority-supervised state education service (then including FE colleges, polytechnics and colleges of education) began at a time when *everything* was being re-fashioned in the wake of the 1988 Education Act, and subsequently the 1992 one: independence for higher and further education, increasing delegation of money and responsibility to schools (and possible complete independence through grant maintained status), and perhaps most significantly, the turbo-quasi-market that had been developing since the early 1980s, now to be driven by new publicly-available data about performance through inspections and annually-published tables. These changes are considered further

in the second half of this chapter, but the remainder of this personal account will be concerned with the formative experiences of the next ten years or so and how they shaped not only my own outlook – or bricolage I would argue because of the contradictions inherent in working at senior level in an LEA in this period - but the developing counter-interpretations of phase 1, arising in a true grounded way. Overlaps in the two treatments are kept to the absolute minimum; they are different even though they both cover the same period of history. But both are necessary to understand why and how I came to write phase 1 of the publications in particular.

First of all, and in apparent contrast to, for example, the Clifton and Farnborough local authority estates in south Nottingham, I was struck in the early 1990s by the physical degradation and bleakness of many working class areas in Bristol – both in the inner city and the peripheral housing estates – and, following a prolonged period of time with little capital resources for schools, the corresponding decrepit and depressing state of many school buildings: the obvious leaks in flat and other roofs, but also schools that had not been painted for ten years or more, scuff marks in all the rooms and corridors, metal windows that no longer closed, rooms too hot or too cold, partly broken furniture and so forth. For thousands of children and their parents in Bristol in particular, their experience was largely of moving from one awful environment to another, and for those on peripheral estates who could not afford the bus fare to the city centre – which was (and continues to be) many of them – shopping in a centre where half the premises had steel plates on their windows.

Second, as a counterpoint to this, I heard anecdote upon anecdote from heads, school and LEA staff about the results of poverty, extreme neglect of children, violence between

parents at the school gates (which I witnessed more than once) and so on. This was triangulated by the seemingly desperate aggression I experienced from many parents I met, either in meetings about school closures or through casework that had been referred up, or through the major review of SEN I was leading in the early 1990s. I began to develop a mental picture of schools under siege, in Bristol in particular, serving anguished parents and children, and situated in the midst of the social dissolution taking place all around them – no 1990s recovery here. I used some of these experiences in support of the arguments in *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b) and certainly knew from *direct experience* that many schools in the city had a day to day ‘relentlessness’ about them (*ibid*: 59); and that for many children, doing *well* at school was the last thing on their mind (*ibid*). I thus became a sympathetic figure in schools.

Third, as an accompaniment, from my frequent contacts with school staff, again through formal meetings or sitting in staffrooms during school visits, I heard many times what I began to think of as the ‘what can you expect’ narrative (that is, of these children, parents, community), to the degree that it appeared not very much actually in many city schools. Many (by no means all) classrooms I visited were not orderly places, there was little evidence of pace (to simplify considerably), many children were often off task and much staff time was consumed by children’s behaviour and upsets. Within unpainted and decrepit school buildings, classrooms were often monochrome places, with no obvious signs or celebrations of learning or excitement.

When, midst all this, Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) undertook a major survey of ‘quality and standards’ in ‘seven urban areas... characterised by high levels of social and economic disadvantage’ (Ofsted, 1993: 5), my first reaction was defensive. The report was derived

from a number of full inspections, visits to other institutions, and discussions and consultations with LEAs, including Avon. When HMI came to feed back to the LEA, in the fashion of the time, and I chaired the group of officers receiving it, I defended the schools, believing that HMI had not appreciated the circumstances in which teachers were working. And yet... at the same time, my experience was suggesting (this was 1992) that there was a lot of truth in the statement that 'the residents of disadvantaged urban areas... are poorly served by the education system' (*ibid*, p6). This tension between on the one hand professionally recognising *for* heads and teachers the circumstances in which they worked, and on the other advocating improvement for children, was central to my professional life for the next few years, but it also remains the key, I would argue, for *any* strategic pull for change.

But this was also an issue of *how* Ofsted presented findings, that is, without concern (or awareness I thought) for how their messages would be simplified and distorted when reported in the local media and, as I also thought, could make improvement harder. This – how Ofsted did not always help - was the subject of a television programme and a personal telephone conversation at the time with the then Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI). But it also affected children and what they thought of themselves; an early memory was of a year 6 assembly in a school that had just gone into special measures. The head was reassuring the children that they could read and write, despite what they had heard on television the previous night about levels of literacy. The parents were sitting and listening at the back.

Fourth, at the same time as all this, teachers, including heads, were using the 'what can you expect' narrative in governing body meetings which included local politicians, many

of whom came to be newly elected members of the Bristol Education Committee in 1995. They did not like it, and were distrustful of professionals – including officers – who said things could not get better and that poverty was an excuse, not a reason. Though they wanted to defend their local schools – particularly once the inspection reports began to be published and the first performance tables came out under Bristol – they wanted to see something done about it, even though they heard the stories of greater levels of need and, for example, (allegedly) worsening behaviour. There was little political demur from a statement that appeared in a review later undertaken by academics for the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative (Jackson *et al*, 2001: 20):

The prospects for continuing prosperity and rising standards of living... are threatened by the current failure to deliver acceptable minimum levels of educational provision to a significant number of young people in the region.

This is all arguable and contestable, of course (which comes first?), but David Blunkett, Labour's first Secretary of State after 1997, described his feelings at the time he took office to a Select Committee in 2010 as follows: 'We had a crap teaching profession (then)', but 'we haven't any more' (quoted in Bangs *et al*: 2011:19). This was part of the political zeitgeist of the time, of which I was a part. When I was appointed Director of Education for the City of Bristol in 1995, Bristol was then a Labour-controlled authority, and before the wholesale adoption of the reforms of the incoming Labour Government, the new Council had committed itself in its first strategy document, *Achievement in Bristol* (Bristol LEA, 1996, largely authored by me), to raising standards and setting itself citywide targets for literacy and numeracy. A successful bid had led to one of the Conservative Government's literacy projects being based in the city, the precursors of the

national literacy strategy, involving the directional whole class pedagogy to be favoured by Reynolds and Farrell (1997) and already the object of Ofsted reports (see 1995).

So there was a working balance to be struck between, on the one hand, the developing politicians' notion that the quality of education was not good enough for working class children, and this was (largely) the responsibility of teachers, and on the other, being explicit about these matters while appreciating the difficulties and challenges that made it harder to improve. There was also a further managerial conundrum lurking here, as always. That local authorities were not entirely welcome partners of central government had become more and more obvious since the early years of the Conservative Government(s) 1979-1997. As budgets were rapidly delegated to schools which were then progressively allowed to spend them how they wished, including on services not provided by their Council, the question arose whether local authorities were welcome partners of their schools too. Any LEA officer had to seek *legitimacy*, therefore, as an important part of the role. By the time Bristol was formed from the old Avon in 1995/6, I became acutely aware that Bristol headteachers, again particularly secondary, mistrusted the County Authority and felt it had neglected their interests. Avon had not – in their view – campaigned for parents to send their children to their local schools, and to cap this, had expanded and improved the buildings of secondary schools outside the city, now in separate unitary authorities.

So improving things was an interesting balancing act: publicly, and in discussions in particular with national government (and internally it had to be said) the discourse trod its way, not always methodically, emphasising first one, then another, aspect of the bricolage of reform discourses.

Further and fifth, the results of the stratification described in *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), usually referred to quite publicly then as the pecking order, were dramatic in Bristol (see Bristol LEA, 2001), and engendered my interest in it as a social, economic and cultural phenomenon. This was a city where about 40% of the cohort were not in Bristol state schools and had either gone to the large private sector (eleven secondary schools) or a local authority school in one of the surrounding authorities. The lack of background data in the private sector numbers and not knowing who had migrated in general out of Bristol compared with birth statistics, makes it difficult to be more precise; but what was known was that no more than 80% of children who were still in Bristol state primary schools by year 6 transferred to a state secondary year 7 (Bristol LEA, 2000).

The schools right at the bottom of the pecking order (my 'bottom strata schools' – 2003a, b), particularly secondary, were early candidates for special measures, just as Hackney Downs had been (Tomlinson, 1998), experiencing the hard end of similar social processes. Add to the general degradation – physical, pedagogical and psychological – described, the huge concentration of needy children and the exodus of families with aspirations, begging for now a definition of the word (see chapter 4), these bottom strata schools were often tense places, even at primary, as well as relentless. At the two secondaries at the very bottom of the strata in Bristol, attendance had slipped to below 50% by year 11 and their internal organisational lives took place against the continuous background of loud student noise. The belief that these schools could be improved was tempered by the need to have a very public dialogue, in the harsh glare of regional media, all based in Bristol, framed by what Ball described as a discourse of derision (1994). It could not be said that

these schools were not appalling and it was (seen to be) predominantly ‘our’ fault – teachers’, officers’.

Sixth, the stratification and the consequent concentration of need in particular schools was not the only feature of secondary schools in Bristol at the time. The schools in the ‘bottom strata’ had become very small both because of parents fleeing, but declining pupil numbers generally that affected all schools in the city. The pattern of school places in the city, partly due to earlier political decisions, did not reflect where the children now lived – the west of the city had hardly any secondary provision, and work undertaken on behalf of the Council suggested that there were two schools’ worth of children living there not catered for by the state (Bristol LEA, 2000). And the size of some of the schools suggested that, even with a relatively generous funding regime, the appropriate curriculum structure, emerging from Government reforms (later set out formally in DfES, 2002) was not possible, even in collaboration with colleges. So a review was undertaken of Bristol’s entire Secondary and Post-16 provision – all its proposals were agreed finally by Cabinet as the last act before I left Bristol.

The proposals were based on what became a clear logic, I would argue, thrashed out first with headteachers and governors, and then in a pre-formal consultation (that is, before proposals for specific closures) with all staff and primary and secondary parents. They included: agreed minimum 11-16 and post-16 entitlement curricula as the basis for raising attainment, based on affordable funding models that enabled the appropriate school size to deliver them, and being of a sufficient size and in the right places to make possible a wider social mix by 11. It was accepted that such change might only *modify* rather than *eliminate* the pecking order of schools (see Bristol LEA, 2001), but one effect of a new

school in Bristol West has been to push a former high prestige (ex-grammar) school literally off the top of the pecking order to a situation where it is now avoided by some parents who previously would have to have lived within 0.6 kilometres of its front gate to get in.

As a result of this process, five secondary schools closed and one new one was built (the one in Bristol West), all secondary schools acquired an inclusion specialism, and post-16 education was organised around a small number of local post-16 centres partnering with the College. This process took two years to final decision, and much longer to implement, years after I had left the city. Needless to say, this was far too long for Ofsted (who said so), but the review became publicised as excellent practice by the DfES, as it was by now, and Bristol was the first LA to sign off a Building Schools for the Future agreement and all secondary schools (almost uniquely) have been redeveloped there. Many of the schools are now academies, but the issues of social mix and recruitment are not yet solved. The structure itself conceived in 2000 may not be appropriate for the circumstances of 2012 and onwards.

Finally, the bricolage of discourse, fashioned in the terrors of the fire of performativity (Ball, 2003b) of the late 1980s and early 1990s, was inflected further by the developing, top down approaches increasingly taken by the incoming Labour government, considered more broadly in the next section, and the further apparent politicisation of Ofsted. We began from a situation in 1997 of LAs being seen as more valued partners of the incoming government. The Labour Party in opposition had had informal consultations with a wide variety of individuals and organisations (including myself) in developing its policy in opposition (Labour Party 1996a, 1996b). The peppering of the latter of these two

publications especially with the words 'high expectations' and 'excellence', with which no one could disagree, were indications of what was to come. But if there was no disagreement, it could be asked why teachers, headteachers, governors... and officers and elected members had allowed things to develop the way they were.

The tone changed very quickly. Immediately after the election, we were receiving copies of important central government announcements by fax before they went public. By the Autumn of 1999, we were being warned by the Minister of State that '15 failing LEAs' would be 'identified by Christmas'; at this time, we knew that ministers had been stung particularly by the criticism that had followed the publication of the 1998 Teacher's Green Paper (DfEE, 1998). LEA Ofsted Reports from the first ones in 1998 included an HMCI 'commentary' (not a summary) that were inflammatory. Draft reports circulated for days in the DfEE (among officials and ministers) before officers (never mind elected members) saw them. Accordingly they were sometimes leaked, often because it had already been decided that there was to be a private sector intervention. A colleague Director of Education in another city received a call just before Christmas in 1999 from a senior member of the government about 'his' report which he was told was 'not very good'. In fact, he had not seen even the draft. And to conclude on this, in the first year (2001) that Bristol had not achieved the literacy targets given us in 1998 I was informed that the 'Secretary of State wished (me) to communicate his disappointment to my primary headteachers' - in these very words.

So the bricolage now included us as part of the problem, though this would remain ambiguous: were we, as officers and politicians, 'complacent about standards'? And shouldn't we, therefore, increase the pressure on schools to increase the rate of

improvement? Out of this came the many 'national strategy' teams in LAs, whose job in urban LAs was to do just that; this transformed the focus from long term improvement to short term gains and the football manager mentality for headteacher (and Director of Education) posts, inflating salaries considerably. The contrasting discourse was the one imbibed in Nottinghamshire - the need to encourage schools to take responsibility, because only they can do that long term, and to always keep them with you when talking about change.

There were other issues as well that are addressed in *Schools for Our Cities*. But the prevailing climate became one where there was a much quicker questioning of leadership capacity, often as the first matter to be addressed, that I considered in the article about the 'National Challenge' (2009a). All this, following on from the naming and shaming of the 'worst schools' in 1998 (Barker, 2010), set the tone for the developing 'crisis narrative' (Riddell, 2003b, Chapter 2) about state schools, especially in urban areas, and the fecklessness of those responsible for them. My 1999 article began (Riddell, 1999: 38):

The phrase 'Inner City' has become loaded, in the public discussion in this country, with connotations of difficulty and low achievement for the education professions, and for many parents of something they should avoid at all costs.

More than ten years later, it remains a legitimate question to ask whether matters have substantially changed – or indeed are likely to.

Context for the publications: Educational Reform from the 1980s until the present

These personal experiences took place during a period of intense educational reform, similar in much of the English-speaking world (Whitty *et al*, 1998), but which continues to

the present time with the Coalition. Education reform has had a number of developing *features* over this time, though these have assumed different levels of prominence, depending on the government of the day. Although the intensity and increasing pace of the change from the 1988 Education Act is often emphasised, national political dissatisfaction with the state of schools – the crisis narrative (Riddell, 2003b) - is popularly tracked back to the speech made by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, at Ruskin College Oxford, in 1976 (Barber, 1996; McCulloch, 2001).

This speech certainly characterised what was ‘wrong’ in state education and foretold many of the forthcoming *themes* of reform, that continue, nearly forty years later: that, particularly at that time, in relation to the developing economic uncertainty after the oil shocks of the early 1970s (Brown and Lauder, 1997), the outcomes of schooling (later ‘standards’) were inadequate. Callaghan had little comparable public data to justify his conclusion, but in 2010, the Coalition’s first white paper on education *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) was still making similar claims, after two changes of government. According to this white paper, the PISA process had identified how poor the performance of (England’s) schools was in comparison to those of other competitor countries. And what will be referred to in this submission as the first McKinsey report (2007) on ‘high-performing school systems’ was mined heavily for what the Government thought needed still to be put in place here.

Another theme was that the teaching profession was just not accountable enough. Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State for Education in the late 1980s employed the notion of ‘producer capture’ (McCulloch, 2001), that is, no outsiders had much say in what it did. Via the moral panic (the obverse side of the crisis narrative) that developed in

response to episodes such as the William Tyndale affair in the 1970s, Culloden Primary in 1990 (Bangs *et al*, 2010), and the various public versions of the ‘progressive teaching’ supposedly arising from the implementation of the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967), it became a public trope that teachers should be told (more) what to do and held accountable for what they achieved with children. Of course, notions of an entitlement curriculum had also had respectable academic backing too in the past (see White, 1973), quite separate from the notions of accountability.

The result of all this, through the 1988 Education Act, was the implementation of a National Curriculum in schools from 1989, a detailed prescription of *what* had to be taught from Key Stage 1 to 4, as they became known, and the commencement of testing at 7, 11 and 14, in addition to the results already published for 16 year olds. All were to be published in what became known as performance tables and, after the 1992 Education (Schools) Act, a regular cycle of school inspections commenced to replace the occasional visits from HMIs. After the first set of annual inspection data was published, the then HMCI, Chris Woodhead made the controversial remark about there being 15,000 ‘failing teachers’ (Barber, 1996) – part of a developing and progressively more shrill ‘crisis account’ (Gorard, 2000) of the education service, or, again, the ‘crisis narrative’ (Riddell, 2003b).

Just after this, the publication by Ofsted of an academics’ review of the international evidence about educational achievement (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996), purported to show how the more (economically) successful pacific rim countries had better educational outcomes, and, the key factor in this, among others highlighted, was more formal teaching methods including whole-class interaction, reflecting the earlier *final* draft at

least of the 'Three Wise Men' Report four years earlier (Alexander *et al*, 1992). Thus, the connection between high standards of schooling with a healthy economy (Callaghan's key theme) was again made, and was endorsed very early after Tony Blair became Leader of the Labour Party (Barber, 1996). It then continued as a theme until the Brown Government (Cabinet Office, 2009; Riddell, 2010).

During the 1990s, UK Governments began to develop a taste for *improving* how schools taught and implemented the National Curriculum in response to the developing evidence of attainment. Under the Major Government, the Education Secretary Gillian Shepherd announced a "'tough and comprehensive" programme of measures' to raise standards in schools throughout the country' (DfE, 1995: 1 of the press release), using the GEST funding as leverage (Grants for Education, Support and Training, as LEATGS had become), especially for schools that had been given an Ofsted category, including 'special measures'.

The election of a Labour Government in 1997 took this further – *vide* the comments made in hindsight by David Blunkett to the Select Committee - by prescribing *how* teachers should teach, starting in primary schools, with the three and four part lessons of the primary literacy and numeracy strategies. Academics such as David Reynolds had contributed to these, and they were announced in a White Paper published within three months of the election (DfEE, 1997). There was considerable continuity with the policies of the previous Government, however: there had been primary literacy and numeracy projects in a number of LEAs, based on implementing a similar, whole class, interactive pedagogy (Whitty, 2002), like the one implemented in Bristol.

But now the government began to go further. The previous Government had intervened very publicly into the Ridings School (now closed), in Calderdale, and Hackney Downs (now the Mossbourne Academy and the subject of Tomlinson [1998]); these now increased in volume. A list of the worst schools was published - 'named and shamed' as has been said. Barber wrote about 'imagining an end to failure' (1998) and there were more interventions through 'fresh starts'. Two contrasting recent accounts of this period and its process can be found in Barber's 2008 book - positive - and in Barker (2010), very negative. There is also the Sally Tomlinson piece (1998) itself, much older. And interventions in Local Education Authorities soon followed, beginning with Hackney and Islington in 1998 (Barber, *ibid*).

These continuing developments of governments to *improve* schools, drew on (and may partly have been motivated by) a developing academic research paradigm. And, beginning with Barber himself, the Labour Government in particular saw a number of academics entering the civil service, not just as special advisers, but to manage teams of officials. He was succeeded in 2001 by David Hopkins.

The publication of the 'Rutter Report' (Rutter *et al*, 1979), *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, had been significant for these developments as it was one of the first that showed that what happens in (secondary) school does affect how well children do. It was followed by the work for *School Matters* undertaken by the Research and Statistics Branch of the former Inner London Education Authority (see, for example, Mortimore *et al*, 1995), and there began a process in the UK and other countries, particularly English-speaking ones, of seeking out the characteristics of so-called *effective* schools – that is, what the characteristics are of schools that have good (largely attainment) outcomes for children,

particularly when these schools were succeeding 'against the odds' (see National Commission, 1996; Maden, 2001), another developing theme.

Many publications have resulted from this work, no doubt fuelled by developing national political interest, including early ones such as Sammons *et al*'s (1995) classic summary for Ofsted in the UK, or Teddlie and Reynold's (1993) publication concerning a ten year research project in the United States. All were attempting to elucidate these characteristics. Reynolds *et al* provided a helpful overview early on in the process (1996), but this sort of work has continued to the present day with, again for example, possibly all the work of the National College for School Leadership, 'reports' on what seems to be effective (for example, Harris *et al*, 2006) and what is now called the EPPSE project (most recently see Sylva *et al*, 2010) which is firmly in this genre.

But being clear about what effective schools do (again measured in terms of particular outcomes) does not mean that other schools *necessarily* become more effective by trying to adopt them. There thus developed a further research paradigm, out of the old, that of *school improvement*: investigating how the improvement process takes place on the basis of what was known about *school effectiveness*. Research in the newer paradigm developed apace: see, for example, Gray *et al* (1999) and Hopkins (2001) for two widely-quoted general books that came from prominent members of the tradition, arising from field work. The two paradigms began to be linked more formally: the setting up of the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Centre at the Institute of Education in 1994 (Stoll and Fink, 1995) was an early exemplar. And some publications, such as Harris *et al*, could be seen to cross the traditions. The 'succeeding against the odds' theme was usually associated with the nature of the 'urban' quote at the end of the last

section, and books about *improving urban schools* emerged early: eg Anyon and Wilson (1997) and Barber and Dann (1996) from the US and the UK respectively. *Schools for Our Cities* was another one, although, it will be argued, in a different tradition.

Straightforwardly, the school improvement and school effectiveness paradigm had been adopted by Government, which intended to use a combination of ‘pressure and support’ (DfEE, 1997) to help bring about – or rather *mandate* - school change (Fullan, 2003; Bangs *et al*, 2010). But one of the principles of the 1997 white paper had also been ‘zero tolerance of underperformance’; another was ‘intervention will be in inverse proportion to success’ (p12). When considered against the crisis narrative, the developing nature of this settlement, compared with the previous government, can be clearly understood; it was completed in one sense with the development of performance management (DfEE, 1998). This overall system for teaching and schools has often been termed (pejoratively) *performativity*, of which one of the clearest definitions is found in Osborn *et al* (2000: 16):

...a teaching profession in which individual performance management and an explicit structure of incentives constitute the central policy planks towards achieving higher professional standards. It is an... explicit framework of expectations coupled with a system of sanctions and rewards (that it is assumed) will result in enhanced performance.

The idea was that schools (and teachers) *would adopt* methods of improving themselves, according to best evidence, with clear agreed outcomes for schools, teachers and children. And, with the developing sophistication of performance data, they would be held accountable for the change. If the change was not sufficient, there would be some

form of intervention. This is broadly the system in place at the time of writing (Riddell, 2011).

However, this developing academic paradigm, as well as its political counterpart, had by no means gone unchallenged. Key *critical* texts included the Slee *et al* collection (1998), which included the Sally Tomlinson piece on Hackney Downs. Concerns there included the punitive nature of performativity (and hence its ineffectiveness), the lack of any appreciation of the effects of social and economic context, the masking of who is (and is not) empowered by these arrangements, and the inaccuracy anyway of much of the data on which conclusions were based, particularly in international comparisons. Gleeson and Hudson (2001) described the (undesirable) characteristics of the 'performing school' that had arisen from the new order, as had Ball (1994); Thomson (2002) discussed the inadequacy of the then current notions of schooling as a response to the social and economic conditions of the 'rustbelt'; and Martin Thrupp (1999) researched the variation in pedagogies experienced by children from different social backgrounds, itself widening gaps in outcomes, and with Wilmott (2003), excoriated the exclusionary nature of the new managerialist discourse, or 'new public management' as it became known (see Exworthy and Halford, 2009). Although *Schools for Our Cities* takes in much of these arguments, much of what all of them say does not, however, address the issue for policy makers of what you can *actually do*. In this sense, the attractions of the school effectiveness and school improvement paradigm are obvious. The question was how much of the real story about school performance was being recognised.

The policy makers' desires to improve schools must be set against the important other aspects of developing public service policy since the 1980s, which also affect the

possibilities and parameters of improvement. These include the introduction of the quasi-market into public services generally, but to the provision of school places in particular. Allied with the social developments and changes (or otherwise) in social structure that have taken place since the 1970s, explored further in chapter 4, and what we know about the continuing social basis of differences in attainment (DCSF, 2009a), this has exaggerated the differences between schools with parents moving away from (against) schools highlighted as 'poorer' by the abundance of publicly available performance data, leading to restructurings and closures in many cases.

At the same time, the devolution of responsibility as well as money to schools, away from local authorities or their equivalent internationally (Whitty *et al*, 1998) has led to the role being ambiguous at times over the past thirty years to say the least and certainly, as considered in the last section, not necessarily perceived as legitimate. This issue is central to *how* schools may be helped to improve – and by *what* or *whom* - and provides further background to the phase 1 publications. With the apparent withering away of the role of LAs envisaged by the Coalition Government (DfE, 2010) and the expansion of academy status, it is not yet clear what will replace this 'middle tier' considered essential in high-performing school systems (McKinsey, 2010, reflecting the much earlier Fullan, 2001).

The Labour Government 1997-2010, while going much further than the previous Conservative ones in terms of promotion of the market and privatisation (Whitty, 2002), was nevertheless concerned with widening opportunity, particularly from urban and poor areas. It financed huge programmes by the standards of earlier government action, though consistent with the *Excellence in Schools* principles, much of it was prescriptive and top down (Riddell, 2003b). These included 'Excellence in Cities', a five strand

programme rolled out to over 20 urban areas. In particular, this included the gifted and talented programme, to help inspire and bring on, in particular, young people from working class areas, and the 'Excellence Challenge', later 'AimHigher', a national programme, reinforced by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) money and targets, to widen the social basis of participation in universities. These are all reviewed – with other more minor projects - in *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* (Riddell, 2010).

As common with New Labour, the 'third way' (Giddens, 1998; but specifically for this point, Whitty, 2002) added other policy objectives to those for widening participation, namely the middle class flight from public services. This became a prominent theme as the first term of the Labour Government developed (see Tony Blair's introduction, for example, to the 'Excellence in Cities' prospectus [DfEE [1999]]), but is still prominent in the first document of the Coalition Government on public service reform (Cabinet Office, 2011), though somewhat differently expressed.

3. CONTENTIONS AND CLAIMS TO KNOWLEDGE: 1999-2007

Genesis of phase 1 publications

The contentions and claims to knowledge in phase 1 of the publications developed over time. They were rooted in critical reflection on the evidence of professional experience and contemporary expectations of performance. This was undertaken individually and with staff in schools, the LEA and the DfEE/S; governors; academics; and, as explained in chapter 2, the local media that framed much of this experience.

The fulcrum for such reflection in the late 1990s was the (witnessed and much discussed) diversity and challenge of school contexts in Bristol, on the one hand, set against the expectation that one detailed prescriptive pedagogy (from first the national literacy and numeracy strategies and then the Key Stage 3 strategy) might not be appropriate when applied mechanically and unadapted in thousands of different classrooms.

Schools for Our Cities (2003b) is the central publication from this period and benefited from a year as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. This time made possible first, an extensive series of semi-structured interviews with academics, LEA Officers, officials in the DfES and, in particular, headteachers of ten Bristol primary and secondary schools. These interviewees acted as sounding boards for the developing notions of the book. Second, it enabled an extensive and continuing in depth literature review, and a detailed analysis of national and local policy documentation (in fields much wider than Education), often including their associated media releases. *De facto*, this involved applying Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003). There was a limited look at pupil outcome data, including that from the review of secondary and post-

16 provision in Bristol. Finally, my own deep professional knowledge of the school system in Bristol provided primary data for the analysis of stratification in relation to the market and the characteristics of the schools themselves.

Differences between the phase 1 publications

Is there a need to develop an urban pedagogy? (1999) was the peer-reviewed version of what had originally been a discussion paper circulated throughout the LEA in 1998 – which elicited a range of responses from school and LA staff – and a companion more popular op-ed article in the Times Educational Supplement (*Tower Blocks of Learning*, April 9th, 1999, published on the same page interestingly as an article by Michael Barber extolling the National Literacy Strategy). The contentions here were that the combinations of diverse social and economic circumstances made it much harder to succeed in urban schools (this is considered in more detail below) and that therefore a more unique response was required – at this time termed an urban pedagogy. At this early stage, this was framed in terms of what used to be referred to as ‘brain-based learning’ (again, see below). This was progressively abandoned in the later works, beginning with advice from Peter Mortimore (personal correspondence) that the article to be published relied too heavily on it.

In *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), the notion of an urban pedagogy developed into an understanding of learning in relation to the diverse and challenging context inside and outside school, that requires a bespoke teaching and curriculum response and, above all, *learning schools* to sustain it. These need particular sorts of leadership. This is a developed and original theory of urban school improvement. The book contains the most detailed analysis of the effects of the school stratification process, drawing on the Bristol

prime data, that constitutes and animates the context for teaching and learning. *The Curriculum and Pedagogy of Bottom Strata Schools* (2003a) was commissioned to coincide with the publication of the book and makes the similar argument that the structure of urban school systems requires both different ways of teaching and different subject matter to be taught, and a particular approach to improvement in urban schools. Curriculum became *curricula* by the time of the chapter for the UK Section of the International Handbook of Urban Education (2007a), reflecting the need to value better the learning that takes place in the communities served by urban schools, but the construction of the argument was fundamentally the same.

The other commissioned pieces in phase 1 of the publications were structured round the same foundations, but with differing emphases appropriate to commission. The article in the *Journal of Education Policy* (2005a) examined the Education version of the five year plans which were being produced across Government for the 2005 general election; its contention was that the generalised notions of improvement in the plan took no account of the deeply stratified school system to which they were supposedly addressed. The chapter in the Paul Clarke edited collection (2005b) focused on bringing my understanding of the nature of bottom strata schools to the then national scheme for 'Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances', the first to set 'floor targets'. Specifically, the article argued that the scheme allocated responsibility for poor performance entirely to internal school factors, prescribing treatments focused on short term, imposed goals, rather than the longer term focused goals required for fundamental improvements in urban schooling. Like much school improvement literature, therefore, it did not tell the whole story.

The two articles in 2006 could be considered directed at a professional rather than purely academic audience. The first, for a primary headteachers' magazine (2006a), expounded on my original notion of 'learning disadvantage' (described in more detail below) which could be present in all schools, and what might be done about countering it. And the second (2006b), in *Race Equality Teaching*, returned to the matter of structure through stratification, and how it made the non-contextualised contentions of the new post-election white paper (DfES, 2005a) somewhat meaningless with the odds so much stacked against bottom strata schools.

Principal contentions and claims to knowledge in Phase 1

For ease of reference, the principal contentions and claims to knowledge in phase 1 publications are set out here, rather than dwelling on the differing emphases between one to the other. Variations between earlier and later publications are mentioned, however, if they relate to substance and are necessary for understanding. The contentions and claims were as follows:

1. Urban school systems – schools as a whole – have always been socially stratified to the extent that they reflect the larger, therefore more socially homogeneous, communities they serve in towns and cities. This phenomenon is *exacerbated* by a combination of the development of the quasi-market in school places (Whitty *et al*, 1998), and the development of aggressive middle class strategizing within it (Ball, 2003a), stretching former pecking orders. With a movement of 'aspirant' parents away from certain schools, the system has become *steeply* stratified, with the creation of 'bottom strata schools'. The originality of this analysis was to put together earlier descriptions of what had happened (Newsam, 2003; Brighouse, 2003), Ball's

analysis of middle class agency (*ibid*), primary evidence from the interviews, the review of secondary and post-16 provision in Bristol (Bristol LEA, 2000) and, of course, my own authentic experience. The upshot is that, in an urban authority like Bristol, surrounded by other authorities with schools preferred in the market, most secondary schools could fall into this category. Stratification is not neatly contained within local government boundaries or even within the public sector.

2. The worsening economic (and social) context of the communities served by such bottom strata schools during the 1980s and 1990s, through serial unemployment and increasing poverty, allied in some circumstances with the immigration of traumatised refugees, has led to a sometimes overwhelming concentration of extremely needy children in these schools, for whom learning is often the last thing on their minds. They present with social, emotional, educational and physical needs, and sometimes with mental health problems or extreme behaviour. This provides the 'relentlessness' of day to day life in these schools, whose characteristics are described in particular in chapter 4 of the book (2003b), based on interviews and extensive professional experience, not replicated and written about elsewhere.

3. Bottom strata schools, because of all the above, become vulnerable to short term change for the worse. This was an original argument from professional experience, drawing on the interviews with headteachers and LEA Officers. Change for the better never seemed to be quick, reflecting the complex nature of school change (eg Fullan, 1993, 2001), but not some of the then national orthodoxy, eg the 'Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances' scheme (Hopkins *et al*, 2001). It was argued that primary schools can become dysfunctional in weeks, secondary in a few months, and special

schools, particularly for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, within days. Recovery did then depend on often dramatic intervention, then undertaken by LAs.

4. Still, arguing from the interviews and the evidence from experience, many children attending bottom strata schools are loved and cared for and their parents think education is important; working class does not mean deprived, however the national discourse had shifted. However, these children are not from professional middle class families, and the assumptions and constructions of learning and expected behaviours in school, it is argued, and sometimes the expectations of adult/child relations, including their linguistic structure, are often radically different from those prevailing at home and in the community. If school learning does not value or even recognise learning as such in the family and community and does not reinforce and reinterpret it in the classroom, children will be cumulatively disadvantaged as they get older, living more and more fractured and less integrated identities, explaining some of the gaps in attainment in England that widen with age (DCSF, 2009a). Drawing on Pollard with Filer's (1996) notion (and construction) of *epistemic identity* – a combination of the intellectual and physical potential, and the material, cultural and linguistic resources that a child will bring to each potential learning encounter – I developed the original notion of *learning disadvantage*. It was intended to conceptualise the dislocation between learning in the classroom and elsewhere – it is constructed socially and changes the nature of the educator's task.

5. In bottom strata schools, with greater combinations of need, and children suffering learning disadvantage, the task of 'succeeding' by the norms of the day is much more

difficult, though possible with harder and more sustained effort (Mortimore and Whitty, 2000). These schools, arguing from experience and the interviews, serve communities that have unique combinations of social, economic and demographic factors – and these in turn change over time. Schools must therefore uniquely bespoke their curriculum and teaching, so that all children may move seamlessly from the breakfast table to classroom and back home again, and where all their forms of learning relate to and reinforce each other, working cumulatively. This requires an *urban pedagogy*.

The early notions of *urban pedagogy* relied on what used to be referred to as the ‘new brain learning’, as has been said: there are many texts here, but popular examples at the time were Dryden and Vos (1994 – a best seller) and Smith (1996). It included such notions as ‘accelerated learning’ and ‘learning styles’ and making connections between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, of which, it was said then, we only use a small proportion. It became clearer from the late 1990s and into the 2000s that many such claims made were not sustainable (Howard-Jones *et al*, 2008) and some, for example, ‘brain buttons’, were ridiculous. By 2003 and *Schools for Our Cities*, the essentials of the urban pedagogy and curricula agenda became focused on making reflective connections with the children (and their parents), teaching for learning transfer (Claxton, 1999), adjusting the symbolic communication of learning and worth to reflect local framings, teaching learning strategies (which were in the national curriculum at that time), incorporating ‘funds of knowledge’ and ways of learning in the community (Moll and Greenberg, 1992) and employing a wide variety of learning experiences and structures. These were social and cultural matters,

not just technical ones. Above all, schools needed to be learning communities and work in partnership with other schools and all the agencies that touched the social contexts of children. Parents and communities needed to be enrolled in, and contribute to, schools' long term, sustainable vision. Schools needed to learn about, and in, the communities they serve.

This was a unique pulling together of what might be done in the urban context. There had been much written and argued previously about pedagogy and deprivation (see Haberman, 1991, for a famous example), but the only previous mention of an *urban pedagogy* is in Ayers and Ford (1996), as the title of the editors' introduction (p211 - 218) to a series of anecdotal reports of teachers' experience in urban schools. Ayers and Ford frame them, broadly, in notions of *critical* pedagogy (see Darder *et al*, 2009, introduction). What *none* of these publications put forward is the sort of holistic and original view of urban school improvement presented in chapters 5-7 of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), repeated in 2007a, whereby the nature of learning is central, but framed by a conception of teaching and the sort of leadership and schools necessary to sustain it that are both deeply connected with the nature of the communities served.

6. Drawing on Gorard's earlier (2000) description of the crisis account of schools, mentioned in chapter 2, *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b) argued originally that what had developed was a *crisis narrative*. Reflecting the personal account in chapter 2, and the interviews, it had become obvious that there was more than just an *account* over which people had choice. Rather, there was a variety (a bricolage) of *discursive practices* (Foucault, 1969) with their own terms and relative values – achieving

excellence, relentless focus on standards, being complacent about them or not, taking responsibility, being bold, and so on – that restrained and limited the public discussion of schooling, even for the critics of government policy, and from which there was no escape. Besides making many teachers and other people feel worse – accepting a personalised negative ontological judgment about themselves – it meant, in alliance with the performativity culture, that what needed to be done in urban schools, and specifically their problems, could not be discussed more openly because of the way they would be framed in the media and the effects they may have on pupil (and staff) recruitment. This is arguably more than the ‘discourse of derision’ described by others (Ball, 1994; Maguire *et al*, 2006; Archer *et al*, 2010), because of the way it encapsulates and restrains the thinking of everyone involved.

7. The push of much national improvement policy (for example, Excellence in Cities and later the *National Challenge* [Riddell, 2009a]), framed in terms of ‘pressure with consequences’ (ie replacement of management teams or closure of the school and/or re-opening it as a new academy, a theme that was to continue – see 2009a, and DfE, 2010), elicits a mechanistic response to the intense outside pressure by concentrating on short term targets (for example a small rise in 5 A*-Cs), as has been said, at the expense of all others. Such improvement strategies located all the blame for lower performance with internal school factors, as Harris *et al* (2006) were later to express it and, I contended, made the sort of holistic approach advocated for urban school improvement impossible.

In support of the contentions and claims to knowledge in phase 1

All the publications in phase 1 bring together texts and other research from a wide range of fields – economics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, school effectiveness and school improvement - to inform and support their principal contentions and claims to original knowledge. Some illustrative sources are cited briefly above. But there are further arguments and evidence to consider in support of the central concerns of phase 1 with the achievement of social justice through the long term improvement and development of urban schools. Some of these – and the context for them all of course - continue to develop.

The importance of context

The first argument is whether the theory for improving urban schools in phase 1 is still vulnerable to the many criticisms made generally of school improvement projects, particularly those driven by central government. A major one of these is that context is virtually ignored or side-lined by Government projects or a performativity-driven view of change (Slee *et al*, 1998 [virtually all the contributions, but especially the introduction]; Thrupp, 1999; Maguire *et al*, 2006; Archer *et al*, 2010; Barker, 2010; Coffield and Williamson, 2011 and many others). This, it is said, renders such policies unrealisable or even harmful.

However, **context** is **central** to what urban schools need to do according to the phase 1 publications and needs to be framed in their internal processes.

School ownership and democracy

At the same time, it can be argued, the nature of nationally mandated change at secondary school is **undemocratic**, avoids discussion of the *purposes* of education and schools and undermines comprehensive education (Wrigley 2003, 2006; Fielding and Moss, 2010; Barker, 2010; Coffield and Williamson, 2011).

Enrolling parents and the community in a long term vision, as advocated in phase 1, is again, just the opposite – a long term exercise in democratic involvement. Further, developing and sustaining an urban pedagogy and curricula, as advocated, requires the deep **engagement of a school's staff**, and doubly so theirs with the community – the school itself must *drive* the sort of change being advocated. It must be the school's agenda.

This cannot be nationally 'mandated' or prescribed through top down approaches: this just does not work (Fullan, 2003), or at least not for long (McKinsey 2007, 2010). The external evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (Earl *et al*, 2003) - a top down mandated change - is particularly interesting in this connection. It concluded that considerable classroom change had occurred in terms of actual activity, in response to the mandate, but there remained questions about whether teachers had absorbed the strategies at what Fullan (2001) calls the third or deepest level of implementation, that of understanding the pedagogical principles involved – had teachers taken to them as their own? Only then, he says, can an appropriate bespoke response be made to the specific requirements and needs of actual groups of children - as advocated throughout phase 1.

Collaboration

Some of the other recommended ways of working in bottom strata schools have been advocated in many places and could be seen as commonplace nearly ten years after the publication of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b): **working closely with other children's services**, for example (Mongon and Chapman, 2008; Tisdall *et al*, 2006, and many more). The further claim was made in 2003a and 2007a that **collaboration was essential between schools and across phases** to aid the *coordination* of services to families, who, having children at a number of schools, needed coherent support. This became more of an expectation with *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2004), of course, though the current national expectation on this matter may less clear.

Inter-school collaboration generally was compulsory in some places in the first few years of the Labour Government, especially after the introduction of 'Excellence in Cities' (DfEE, 1999), later becoming more of an expectation for everyone (see DfES, 2005b) in relation to standards. This was just as *Schools for Our Cities* in particular had recommended, based on Fullan's (2001) work in Ontario and elsewhere that had suggested that collaboration at an appropriate level – for Fullan this was the school district – was essential if **improvements in attainment** were to be sustained. Fullan argued that schools by themselves need some outside stimulus from time to time, as none historically has established an uninterrupted upward trajectory – something especially hard in the urban environment. Teachers' own learning is best developed, supported and implemented in classrooms collaboratively, between and in schools, as he says and phase 1 advocates.

Sustaining improvement

Reform needs to be 'tri-level' (McKinsey, 2010), including at a 'middle tier', and, in Fullan's terms, there needs to be 'coherence making' at all levels (not just teachers'): the interplay of staff, professional development and collaborative learning make possible 'deep reform' and the development of the sorts of learning cultures referred to in chapter 6 and 7 of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b). There may not be sufficient resource in one school to help take forward work in one subject or curriculum area. Buying in an input from a stranger may help the 'ignition' stage (McKinsey, 2010), but continuing input, of various sorts, is needed to help sustain and review improvement. Fullan saw this coming through a group of schools. The second McKinsey Report (2010) contained the most recent major endorsement of inter-school collaboration: it regarded it as essential to positive long term 'irreversible' change, as the report terms it. It should be said at this point, though, after citing this report several times, that there are questions to be asked of the data, beyond the scope of this submission.

Contemporary expectations of collaboration

It is not yet clear what the Coalition Government expects concerning collaboration, beyond the contested requirement for successful schools to pair with less successful ones (DfE, 2010). It could be argued that the developing trend towards academies and free schools, and the apparently diminishing role of local authorities, further atomises the service, making notions of collaboration more difficult to realise. Discussion of the nature of the 'middle tier' is also beyond the scope of this submission (see Crossley-Holland, 2011), but the collaboration and external partners that schools continue to need to seek – according to the above arguments - will now need to be sustained by schools' own

funding , which is indeed the IQEA model in ‘Seaham’ (Clarke *et al*, 2005), ‘Stockborough’ (Ainscow *et al*, 2012), and, possibly, the ‘Challenges’ outside London (see Brighouse, 2005, for London). For some schools, there may be more of a national collaboration through academy chains such as ARK and Oasis, or private sector consultancies such as Tribal (*vide* their ‘inspiring schools partnership’ described at <http://www.tribalgroup.com/education/SchoolImprovement/InspirationalSchoolsPartnership/Pages/default.aspx>).

All such models are compatible with the development of urban pedagogy and curricula, depending on whether a more prescriptive national orthodoxy emerges from the new phase of inspections (see below). But the broader issues of collaboration and sustaining improvement will have to be considered at some point by the Coalition if, as they seem to be saying (DfE, *ibid*), system change is what is needed. What does seem to be apparent from what they *say* (but see chapter 5), unlike in the years when the phase 1 publications were being written, none of this will be top-down, government-lead. If no national guidance is to be available, then the Government has dispensed with the some of the McKinsey (2010) advice about appropriate clusters of interventions, particularly at ‘ignition’ stage, where there are ‘non-negotiables’ to establish. These are all matters to watch; further speculation is not appropriate here, but without systems, improvements simply will not happen everywhere.

Leadership models

At the time of submission, there has been much public discussion of school leadership models (eg Barker, 2011) that stray into a conception of the heroic, visionary innovator, bringing ‘top down’, no-nonsense, quasi-autocratic leadership and high levels of

discipline, in say, schools like Mossbourne, with its apparent pupil 'pledge' to learn (school website). This is especially relevant for the future, given that the former Principal of Mossbourne is now HMCI.

However, this is not what is argued for in phase 1. The problem with visionary leaders is that they leave: 'charismatic leadership is negatively associated with sustainability' (Fullan, 1993:37). The discussion about leadership of the learning school, throughout phase 1 but in detail in chapter 7 of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), was based on many alternative notions of the learning school current at the time (eg Senge *et al*, 2000), where leaders do indeed maintain the vision, but by focusing and encouraging staff in learning.

Publications subsequent to phase 1 have continued to reinforce more democratic notions based on working with, in, and 'complementing' the community (eg Mongon and Chapman, 2008). These authors' work for the NCSL found that 'successful (leaders) for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils' demonstrate 'contextual intelligence', by which is meant 'a profound respect for the context they are working in... (as) they had chosen to work in these contexts' (ibid: 8). This is the springboard, and a necessary condition, for 'enrolling the community' (2003b, chapter 6; 2007a), though chapter 7 of the book itself cautions against pathologising leadership. Other authors (eg Wrigley, 2006; Fielding and Moss, 2010) reflect the notion of leaders working with the community to develop and enrol parents in the vision. However, while opposing the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda on schools, what Wrigley (*ibid*) in particular appears to suggest is a route which, despite professed democratic values, could give teachers back almost complete control of what happens in schools, needing to do no more than consult

parents, to judge from the examples. A wider analysis, again beyond the scope of this submission, could identify this sort of 'progressive' view in objections to current reform, which nevertheless ignores systemic issues, particularly those arising from school stratification and the learning disadvantage predominating in some schools.

Urban pedagogy in practice

Aspects of the accumulated recommendations in chapters 5-7 of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), for schools to *consider* and *try*, have been seen in schools: for example, Claxton's work through Building Learning Power projects (2002) and the ELLI project (Deakin-Crick *et al*, 2004); the development of the 'cadre' of staff (or a working party), to help bring about change (Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins *et al*, 2001; the 'SIG' in various chapters of Harris *et al*, 2006; or inquiry group in Ainscow *et al*, 2012); and parental enrolment (*ibid*).

Building a 'learning community' has been recognised good practice in schools in challenging circumstances for some time (eg Muijs *et al*, 2004).

The notions in urban pedagogy continue to develop, for example, with the publication of the results of the TLRP's Learning *How to Learn* project (James *et al*, 2007), and reinforcement of the book's view of being able to 'learn without limits' (Hart *et al*, 2004). Some of its rejections of, for example, (limiting) notions of multiple intelligence and of learning styles have been confirmed (Coffield *et al*, 2004). But the essence of the proposal (2003b, 2007a particularly), that these children above all need to be skilled learners as they will not as easily become so at home, absolutely remains, irrespective of how our understanding of this has developed since. This is essential for reducing learning disadvantage.

Of course, all these actions deal with potentially the 'proximal', rather than the 'distal' factors considered by many writers about disadvantage (eg Dyson and Raffo, 2007, and the DCSF Review under the last Government [2009a]). These came more into the frame with phase 1.

Can schools under pressure develop urban pedagogy?

But for those bottom strata schools facing challenging circumstances (2003b), using guides such as Hopkins *et al* (2001), or indeed those at risk of not meeting their floor targets as part of the 'National Challenge' (2009a), it remains a question whether they could escape the short term nature of crisis response required to the intervention that arrives with these schemes (and will continue to do so). Could they engage with the actions phase 1 says they should *consider*, depending on their analysis of the needs of the communities they serve?

In the short term, they certainly could not have developed an understanding of their communities, depending on their starting points, and in the *very* short term, with another Ofsted monitoring visit on the horizon, they would need to focus on the external measures of quick improvement. But the broader answer to the question of whether bottom strata schools could feasibly do what is advocated in phase 1 is best provided by a project set up during the third term of the Labour Government. This was the *Extra Mile* project, developed by the DCSF's 'education advisers' (staff employed to do just that to schools, LAs and the Department) and involved schools such as those described in phase 1, including in the bottom strata - but presumably those beyond the need for crisis response. It was in one sense a more classic school improvement project: schools considered effective were asked to develop *together* what seemed to be working to

narrow the attainment gap between high attainers and those pupils entitled to free school meals.

The project was reviewed in some detail in phase 2 (Riddell, 2010), but interestingly, this project developed a classic 'characteristics' menu (DCSF, 2009b): using local role models, developing new language repertoires (written and spoken), cultures of 'mutual respect' and non-negotiable standards of behaviour (including for teachers), providing cultural opportunities beyond those usually available, ensuring all new staff tour the community and learn what is going on there (all as in chapters 5-7 of 2003b), working much harder on personal incentives and encouragement for children living in poverty, using pedagogies that connect with issues of local interest and are truly interactive (as for example in Moll and Greenberg, 1992, cited often in phase 1), and much more outreach and extended school activity. The schools also work on the pupils' resilience, one of the aspects of effective learning (Claxton, 1999) discussed in *Schools for Our Cities*, and developing a high expectations/no excuses culture. All the aspects of this project, though expressed in slightly different terms in phase 1, could happily be endorsed as potential components of an urban pedagogy.

There may very well be schools doing *all* of what is recommended – perhaps modern day echoes of the Everton community project (Midwinter, 1972) - but in the contemporary context of performativity in the urban environment, with the higher floor targets, they would have to attend to the basics of satisfying Ofsted, the DfE and, most likely, the academy's sponsor. And this is also likely to affect the extent of how 'distributed' the leadership is, to return to the previous point, as advocated in *Schools for Our Cities*. Muijs

et al (2010), in their case study examination of leadership in relation to social inclusion, found this underdeveloped.

The Community and community schools

The notion of **community** can be complex in urban areas, and may be becoming more so now. The working assumption in the phase 1 publications was that the community was what was physically round the school. With much larger numbers of schools available for daily travel, in places like London (Ball *et al*, 1995; Butler with Robson, 2003), though with social groups accessing them differentially, it becomes possible for some schools with a particular brand to play to community aspirations that exist on a much wider basis - depending on the schools adjudicator. Schools like Mossbourne may be able to take some children from a wider range of communities than the estates they were originally built for. It seems hard not to argue that the last thing fractured communities need, however, where they exist, is fractured schooling, certainly by secondary. But there is a related issue: the match between the model in phase 1 and what urban communities themselves say they want for their children by oversubscribing particular intakes. This may, in the London context, be another, *non-spatial* community, based on educational lifestyle choice. This would make exploring modes of learning in one community more complex, but not impossible. Schools should not avoid it, it could be argued, and should not assume their brand has done the pre-selection for them.

But this also could make the contribution a school in turn makes to its communities more diffuse – extending services out of school time to adults who may find it difficult to travel, for example, may dilute their impact. And any alignment with wider social and economic strategies (Dyson, 2011) - not really considered in phase 1, beyond the school being able

to enhance their *educational* contribution by reconceptualising the community as its starting point – becomes even more difficult.

Coda: for the future

There seems to be continuing interest in researching and writing about urban education, as Archer *et al* (2010), Pratt-Adams (2010) and Riley (2010) all show - the subject matter is still current almost ten years on. And discussion by these and other authors (eg Brighouse and Fullick [2007]; Pinks and Noblit [2007]) argues for the specificities of an urban education response. Urban Education was the theme for the 2011 European Education Research Association conference in Berlin. Disadvantage in urban areas and its causes and social consequences continue to be vital areas of study, not the least because of their consequences for government policy: Wacquant (2010) compares what happened in the French *banlieus* with down town Chicago; several school systems studied by McKinsey (2010) were urban ones. The contribution, particularly of *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b), remains relevant in terms of school restructuring and the possible courses of action available to urban schools, but less so in terms of its analysis of the possible use of government policy.

All the publications in phase 1, specifically chapter 8 of the book (2003b) and the article on the national challenge (2009a) were critical of aspects of the interventionist policies of the Labour Government of the time, while seeking how national policy could be *mined*. Much of *this* analysis is now out of date: little mention was made of the academies 'programme' in phase 1, for example, and privatisation more generally, partly because these developments were still in their infancy. But other aspects of recommendations to Government - particularly in chapter 9 of *Schools for Our Cities* - remain absolutely

relevant. These include the need for a different sort of pressure on schools, including by ending the crisis narrative and developing a public positive message about urban schooling (rather than just bits of it), allowing schools the *time* for curriculum development and a national consideration of contemporary visions for comprehensive schooling, beyond the 'common school' (Simon, 1955; Fielding and Moss, 2010) which can never be refound in urban areas. These recommendations are relevant and unachieved.

4. CONTENTIONS AND CLAIMS TO KNOWLEDGE: 2007-2010

Phase 2 publications explained

Of the five publications in phase 2, four – the book, *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief*, and the three conference papers published on line by the British Education Index as part of the proceedings of British Educational Research Association annual conferences – were produced as a result of one research project that began in 2004, was grant aided and was concerned with the development of social capital for working class students. The three papers - 2007b, 2008 and 2009b – progressively presented the findings as they were being processed and analysed. The claims to knowledge and contentions arising from them – to be considered shortly – related to the data as presented at the time. The basic notions behind the analysis were in place by 2007, and so it is difficult to differentiate in that sense conceptually between the three papers, though it is explained when and how the findings were presented as this chapter proceeds. The papers and the book will be referred to as the principal phase 2 publications.

The 2009 article was commissioned for a special issue of *Improving Schools* on, in effect, the Blair legacy. It will be considered after the principal phase 2 publications.

Genesis of the principal Phase 2 Publications

To recap, the process of school stratification described from 2003b onwards in the phase 1 publications had been brought about by a combination of the quasi-market introduced in school places from the early 1980s (Whitty *et al*, 1998) and the actions of middle class parents within it, of a more skilled and persistent nature than that of working class ones, as chapter 3 explained. This had been known about (in research terms) since the

publication of the now famous ‘Circuits of Schooling’ article in 1995 (Ball *et al*). The effects of stratification and the application of Pollard’s (1996 with Filer) notion of *epistemic identity*, which brought –again – relative learning advantage and disadvantage to the processes of schooling themselves, depending on class and ethnic origin, were the twin foundational pillars for the discussion of what bottom strata schools could do in responding to the children and communities they serve.

Research in the 1990s provided much insight into how the introduction of market forces had shaped and changed the behaviour of school staff as well as provided a context for that of parents (Ball, 1994; Gewirtz *et al*, 1995; and possibly Woods *et al*, 1998). Building on the same datasets, however, the research focus repositioned to wider aspects of social structure, and how this advantaged certain social groups and not others. Ball’s ground-breaking *Class Strategies in the Education Market* (2003a) began to analyse the resources that (on the whole) middle class parents brought to the educational process, together with the processes of their strategising. This was fairly quickly followed by Reay *et al* (2005) and, after the work had begun that led to *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* (2010), Vincent and Ball (2006). This was reinforced by Gillies’ 2007 book on working class parenting.

This research was set against the same policy context described in chapter 2 and the national discussions of how schools should improve described in chapter 3. These were not just *technical* matters about what parents *chose* to do: middle class parents could access resources that advantaged their children that were only available to them because of their social position. Part of being middle, as opposed to working, class, meant that you largely tended to strategise in particular ways, drawing on these resources, and focused

on educational, social and occupational trajectories. If you were of working class origin, you tended to do so this less. In this sense, personal proclivities were themselves an important part of social structure and together constituted an important mechanism for allocating opportunities, in the sense considered by Bottero (2005). The schooling of children takes place against a highly asymmetric distribution of opportunities, and improving attainment for all could not be seen just as a matter of adjustments to pedagogy and more inspiring leadership.

A key resource available to middle class parents was the 'hot' knowledge, as Ball (2003: 85) described it, about school characteristics and performance of a certain sort, within the context of school choice. Importantly, this was derived through their social capital – the weak ties described by Granovetter (1973), that is, those people ('like us' – Ball, *ibid*: 60) who may be known through work, acquaintance, friendship or hobbies. In one sense, social capital is one's networks in the sense used by Putnam (2000) and Halpern (2005), but to be advantageous, these networks need to be of the right people. Bourdieu classically (1986) argued that social capital is relational and is brought to certain 'fields' to gain advantage, such as school places (Grenfell and James, 1998).

Class Strategies in the Education Market was published a few months before *Schools for Our Cities* went to print. The orientation of phase 1, it has been argued, was towards *action* (p5), particularly to reduce disadvantage, mining national policies where possible. So the identification of potential mechanisms for developing social capital for working class students, that could support them in ways analogous to that of middle class students, seemed a natural development from the identification of urban curricula and pedagogies. Was it possible to discover these, or, because of the inscription of all capitals

in the social structure of advantage and disadvantage, was this hopelessly naïve? Is it possible for governments – the potential driver behind social reform discussed in the last chapter – to in effect modify social structure? And what would the role of schools be, particularly in the bottom strata?

The outcome of these musings was a successful bid to the British Academy for a small research grant (SG-40335) which ran from April 2005 until March 2007. The research was to include:

- Studying the mechanism for the realisation of social capital for middle class children;
- Assessing the potential for development of social capital in nationally and locally funded projects;
- Refining a relevant notion of social capital;
- Developing policy and project advice for policy makers and practitioners.

The grant supported the personal costs of transport and subsistence to interviews and of producing transcripts.

Research and the research methodology behind phase 2 publications

Interviews in independent schools

The research project was a small yet ambitious one, particularly in view of the complexity of the data to be gathered and the resources of a sole researcher. The first and principal source of data was interviews; the first groups of these were with parents of children attending independent schools. Three schools, in which the author had known contacts, were approached – two in the South West and one in the North West of England. In the event, it was not possible to interview in one of those in the South West, due to a change

of headteacher. The remaining schools were asked to suggest parents who would be willing to be interviewed about the development of their children's ambitions and aspirations, and the resources brought to bear by parents, including social capital. The author wrote to them individually with a list of topics and all but one agreed – the parents from eleven families in two parts of the country. So this was a micro-study and certainly an 'opportunistic' sample (Cohen *et al*, 2010: 176). All the interviews were lengthy (many an hour and a half), with the shortest being just an hour.

The themes fell out of the interviews without the need for more than a simple coding exercise. These are reflected throughout the principal phase 2 publications and were quite broad: the ambitions parents had for their children; how these were expressed and discussed; action to encourage particular ambitions; resources drawn on from outside the family, including people; concern about their children's peer group(s); choosing independent education and the manner in which they talked about their children.

Interviews took place in parallel with senior staff at the two schools, focusing on their expectations of their pupils, hence *the institutional habitus* (Reay *et al*, 2005) of each of the schools, and the practices that underpinned them, including the use of alumni and the influence of teachers on pupil ambition.

Evidence across the interviews was examined for consistency, but also triangulated, both with previous research (for example, concerning what middle class parents had said as part of the big, mainly London Data sets, used by Ball [2003a] and others, and previous and current research about independent schools), and across the school staff and parent interviews. For example, if parents claimed they behaved in certain ways, evidence of this was sought in the staff interviews. What the parents from two different parts of the

country were saying was also compared. And, in connection with some of the things said about children by their parents, the some time was spent later looking at discussion threads and chat rooms on line, particular to identify some prevalent recurrent narratives.

All the claims made about these parents and the schools in the 2007b, 2008, 2009b papers and the book, *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief*, were tested in this way.

Consistencies in what the parents were saying – South West, North West and from previous research – was remarkable, leaving aside the specific contexts and particular incidents.

This research had clearly alighted on social processes described here and elsewhere, though obviously only provided snapshots of it, as the book's title says, rather than a comprehensive national picture. And the schools seemed to have similar practices to those presented elsewhere (eg in the Walford, 2003 collection), bearing in mind that both schools belonged to the 80% of schools that belonged to the Independent Schools Council: they weren't special or outdoor or international schools, but largely were among those available to parents living locally that could afford fees or attain bursaries (and whose children could pass the entrance exam). Neither were they among the 'top', really well known schools, like Eton or Harrow. Research into independent schools has not been all that common – despite the enduring popularity of fiction about boarding schools (see Midwinter, 1998) – and researchers elsewhere have reported informally how difficult it has been to gain access. Finally, the practices the schools reported were similar to those found by Curtis *et al* (2008) in state schools that were good at sending students from deprived backgrounds to prestigious universities.

The findings about the schools and from the parental interviews were first presented in the 2007 paper, *Developing Social Capital for Working Class Students: Aspirations and Identity*, without the chat room evidence, and then again in the 2010 book, with it.

Interviews in universities

The second group of interviews was conducted in three universities. These, again, were opportunistic – universities that were willing to do it at all, but would also allow access to at least one academic admissions officer, an administrator or head of admissions and at least one member of their widening participation teams. The author's own social capital was drawn on once again and interviews were conducted at one of the Oxbridges: a dean of admissions at a college and the acting head of admissions; a different Russell Group University: an academic admissions officer for a particular subject, the head of admissions and the head of widening participation; and finally a post-92 university: the head of admissions, an academic admissions tutor for a school, and members of the regional AimHigher Team based there.

The themes again were obvious: how the admissions staff (academic and administrative) described their work, how they ran the admissions process to be fair to all candidates, coaching by schools and colleges (and seeing through the 'polish'), acceptable examination grades and offers, and how the first two universities in particular described and found the 'academic potential' they were seeking for their undergraduates, though this was identified at a later stage.

AimHigher staff described the nature of the regional and sub-regional programmes and their 'intervention model', developed to decide which schools would get which programmes and at what intensity.

The interviews were prepared for by analysing a vast amount of university literature – prospectuses of various sorts (university, subject, college where applicable), both paper and on line – and the interview evidence was again compared with what the interviewees' universities had said in print about themselves. All were compared to the then current Schwartz Report on admissions (DfES, 2005c). Again, there was consistency between interview data and university documentation, but also, leaving aside some specifics such as whether candidates were interviewed, with what other universities and the mission groups said about themselves. Again, these research data provided snapshots of no doubt what is the much wider social process of sorting and sifting young people into universities and courses.

The findings from the university interviews were presented first in the 2009b paper *Continuity Of Expectation: Middle Class Parents, Independent School and 'Good' University, Or, How Social Structure Aids Reproduction* and by this time included the comparison of what universities were saying about the candidates they sought with how the parents had described their children.

Interviews with policy makers, project leaders and managers, volunteers, and young people

The final groups of interviews were held first with the named officials responsible for particular policy streams or aspects of them – Excellence in Cities, the Secondary Strategy,

the Gifted and Talented Strand/Programme, Connexions, New Deal for Communities/Neighbourhood Renewal – and then a series of local project managers or leaders, staff and volunteers, identified partly with the help of senior officials, sometimes at Director or Director General level. These were supplemented with discussions with academics who had researched in germane areas and with some charities active in the policy areas.

Again, these interviews were prepared for and followed up by analysis of extensive policy documentation, from the level of finalised white papers to letters to schools and local authorities. It is meaningless to say that the people interviewed were ‘representative’, as they were running particular programmes. That they said certain things about their work was indicative of intention, and certainly of a model of policy implementation, but it was nevertheless considered critically, often drawing on the extensive statistics provided by central government. Nor were there themes, in the traditional research sense.

Finally, given the theorising in all the phase 2 publications, it could be argued that the research could have been improved by interviewing young people themselves (as Jones, 2010, said in his review of the book). This would have added, no doubt, to the triangulation of what independent school parents were saying about their children, but the focus there was on the social process being overseen by the adults, the (general and national) results of which are certainly known. However, interviews were held with sixth form students in connection with a particular project that was not included in the publications in the end, and also a group of ‘disengaged’ students, identified by a national charity. This seemed particularly apposite, because the volunteers, staff and project managers working with them, together with the national documentation, had developed

on the face of it a fairly deficit list of their attributes and it seemed only just that they had an opportunity to respond. The findings from the interviews with national and local managers of provision for the 'disengaged' were first presented in the 2008 paper *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief In "Disengaged" Students*, but were re-presented with the outcome of the young people's interviews in the 2010 book.

Contentions and claims to knowledge from phase 2

The managed model of social reproduction

There *were* findings about the use of social capital by the parents. The parents interviewed cited opportunity after opportunity taken to draw on their wider weak ties: a godfather who was a Cambridge professor advising on the admission process; the influence on their children of a wider group of professional adults who were members of a sports club or church, whose children had made up their minds already about or were pursuing professional careers; discussions with other parents with children at the same primary school; or with wider groups of adults through being a (state) school governor; support available from known professionals at times of crisis, for example, in connection with special needs or rejection by a professional football club; and the arrangement of work experience, particularly when this was relevant to university and career choice. These were all certain sorts of social capital, only available to these parents because of the social and economic positions they held, and the roles they thought they should because they might be useful, such as primary governor (all detailed in 2007b and 2010). There were echoes of Lareau (2000) here.

So there were some models emerging for considering what might be considered for working class students. Nevertheless, wider themes arose from consideration of the data, as enumerated above. First, the parents interviewed were extremely proactive on their children's behalf, with specific instances they reported often being echoed by school staff. Their 'hot' knowledge (Ball, 2003a) was used in a determined way – Ball's strategising – and all of them had reflected on their children's 'life projects'; reported discussions at home were often intent on developing them, with a particular focus on attaining at least a first degree, but not from just any university. What also emerged from re-reading the interview transcripts was the considerable concern of these parents with their children's peer groups, and a number of reported interventions. Reflections on these incidents included references to people 'not like us' – other children and their parents, a lack of academic prowess, and inappropriate ambitions.

Parents' views of appropriate trajectories were echoed by all the school staff interviewed. There was a small number of universities considered suitable and a 'drip feed process' began relentlessly in year 8 or 9, focused only on getting children there. The process was micro-managed through appropriate subject choice (and work experience where needed), university exposure, coaching in the various stages of the application process, attendance at academic events, and visits from alumni – people like them – who had achieved appropriate ambitions from the right universities. So the constant message to the children was: here is the ambition; people like you have done it; this is how you too will do it.

So there was an intensive, social process with intent here, with usually clearly articulated intentions and outcomes. The parents interviewed, of course, because of the way they

were selected and what they knew of the focus of the interviews, may represent the apogee of proactive parenting, with perhaps many falling short of this. And one of the schools at least represented was known for its Oxbridge entry. But here was a model of social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997) that was very explicitly focused on securing outcomes for children the same as or better than those of their parents – I began to think of this as a *managed model of social reproduction*, an original term to focus on the intent, though the term did not emerge as such until the book (2010).

The earliest thinking about this, however, was done for the 2007 paper, and this took the young persons' points of view – what the key messages were about aspiration emerging in each of the contexts of their lives, given the nature of the social world/community, and the 'control of the peer group' seen by parents and staff as a key ingredient of going independent. I coined the original notion of *aspirational identity* early on, drawing again on Pollard's notion of *epistemic identity* (Pollard with Filer, 1996): it was deemed to develop as a result of iterative interactions between the young people's developing self-narratives and what people in each of the contexts in which they moved said about what was an appropriate aspiration for them, and, more particularly, *what the young people were like*. This was the point of the model developed and reproduced as Figure 1.

This is a similar process to the development of habitus, of course, of which our identities are a part. Each person carries a series of embodied dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which provides the framework for interpreting and incorporating new social experiences, and which changes as a consequence. This also struck me as a strikingly similar process to the 'duality' described by Woods *et al* (1998: 142) whereby

the values and beliefs of staff in schools emerge (about what is right and what they should do) in response to the market:

The values and beliefs that... guide ... the institutional responses of schools, are neither entirely personal nor entirely social constructions. They are shaped by the interactive processes of the person who continually absorbs and responds to the context in which he or she acts... (For) school personnel... this includes the internal dynamics of the school, professional communities of teachers, and broader social and political trends.

No doubt something similar could be said about independent school staff and how they created the context shown in Figure 1 – a system within a system. Habitus is social structure in the head (Ball, 2003b) after all; the workings of adults for outcomes for children portrayed in all the principal phase 2 publications are social structure in process – they are indeed snapshots.

There was even more to it than that, though. The descriptions that academics (and administrators to a lesser degree) gave in the two ‘prestigious universities’, as the book termed them, of the ‘academic potential’ they sought from candidates for undergraduate admission – interest and enthusiasm for the subject; reading round and beyond the A Level syllabus; clear and analytical thinking; being careful listeners to, and critical assessors of, arguments put to them; able presenters of their own views (the 2009b paper and chapter 6 of the book) – are mirror images of the descriptors of their children used by the parents. The similarity only occurred to me while editing the university transcripts, so the concepts were emerging as part of a properly grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). How the parents described their children – gifted; having a photographic memory;

good at languages, sport, art; had an early interest in linguistics; studious; always reading, including 'The Times from cover to cover' – echoed what the academics were saying almost word for word. These were socially available scripts, as Goodson *et al* say (2010), and were therefore another emplotment, but they were echoed widely in chat rooms on the internet, for example, on *Mumsnet* and the like, again as the 2009b paper and the book (2010) both show. But key to my theorisation – and understanding the model of aspirational identity I developed – is the role of narrative and self-narrative in identity *formation*.

My contention therefore, is that the independent school/prestigious university nexus, underpinned by social processes and commonly-framed narratives, maintains social advantage from one generation to another. Given the considerations in the last chapter of the book in particular on social mobility, and the connection between attendance at prestigious universities and disproportionate access to wealth, power and influence, this nexus is *exclusive* in the classic sense of denying opportunities to others. As chapter 8 of the book argues, it reduces social mobility.

What can be done for other children?

The aim of the original research proposal had been to discover how to construct social resources for working class students that could impact on their educational and occupational trajectories. I then took my model for the development of aspirational identity (Figure 1) as the model for critiquing policy interventions of the mid 2000s, as described in chapter 2.

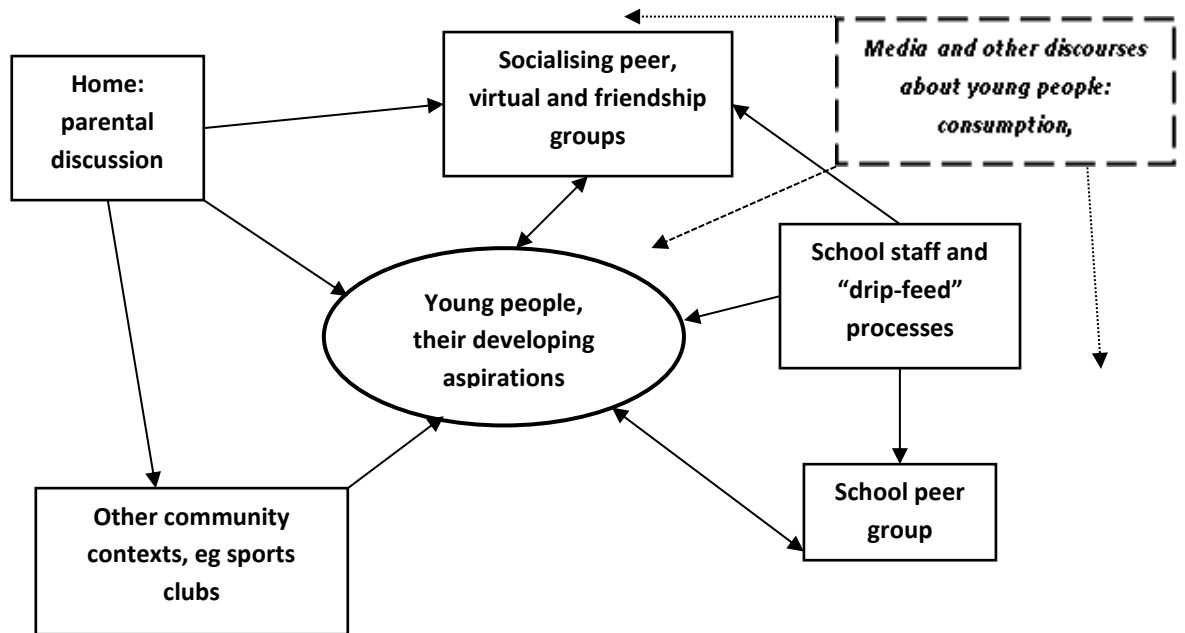


Figure 1: Influences on the development of aspiration: 2010: 48

The 2007b paper and chapter 5 of the book examine how aspirational identity might develop in working class communities without the policy interventions, and leaving out the need to improve pedagogy and attainment. Considering the same iterative process in the construction of identity described above, the paper and the book considered mechanically what might be happening in each aspect of context, particularly in relation to an aspiration for university (incidentally, this was also the basic process applied to ‘disengaged’ students in the 2008 paper and chapter 7). The text, especially by the time chapter 5 was being considered, took the position of those working class parents who were not at the extremes of need – unemployed, drug dependent and so on – and those who did have regular work. After all, using OPDM (as it was) figures in chapter 8 of the book, even in so-called ‘workless estates’, it was only 29% of adults who were economically inactive. And at the same time, to test the assumptions behind the process, it was assumed that the parents were loving towards their children (and who, reflecting the research, were generally more attentive than middle class ones – Gillies [2007], Siraj-Blatchford [2010]), wanted them to succeed at school and were positive in general towards school staff.

Given that one of the key criteria considered so far was what would be happening in terms of the talk about aspiration, and the narratives about what 'people like them' did and were like in each of these contexts, the best that could be said was that the narratives would be mixed. Not all their peers in school would want to go to university and attain a professional occupational status; the under-expectation of teachers considered by Ofsted (1993) was echoed in Raphael-Reed *et al*'s recent research (2007) in a low-participation part of Bristol and interview evidence from interviews with AimHigher staff; and their schools most likely would not have the mono-focal drip-feed process to university admission found in the independent schools (or the exceptional state ones in Curtis *et al*'s 2008 research). At home, parents may well be ambitious for their children - and by 2010 the aspirations diagram (Figure 1) had included the media box in which narratives about university ambition would be common – but universities would not recognisably be part of their world (Raphael-Reed *et al, ibid*) and elite universities in particular would be completely 'other' to these parents according to Reay *et al* (2009). The informed discussions about the connections between school, university and professional choice, described by independent school parents would most likely not be taking place there. And the various complementary activities (sport, music and so on) these parents described – the various activities 'making up the middle class child' as described by Vincent and Ball (2006) – would also not be taking place. In the community, they would be meeting adults in occupations in the lower reaches of the NS-SEC categories and people of their own age who considered earning money (where this was possible) was preferable to staying on into education and training. The predominant discursive practices, to use Foucault's (1969) formulation, would not include university attendance as the *only* option to be considered.

So, it was argued, to emerge from, at best, the ambiguous messages about going to university, the student from a working class background with a firm focus on university in their habitus (even if they were not like fishes in water – Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), would be unusual, as is

known from the statistics, and would have had to have unusual personal attributes and determination, as Reay *et al* (2009) indeed say.

The question for the then Labour Government was whether their interventions into schools and with young people, beginning from the very prescriptive basis of their policies, discussed in chapter 2 and 3, would change the balance to favour university attendance in the various contexts shown in Figure 1. The principal interventions examined – through policy documentation and interviews - were the gifted and talented strand of, at first, *Excellence in Cities* (only referred to as a programme from 2008) and AimHigher, as has been said. These were treated as one policy continuum as, in their most developed form they were managed as such, and the best possible outcomes needed to be considered to see if policy could work. *Every Child Matters* was also briefly considered, as it was seen by some officials as a social intervention – though not mentioned as such by others - and potentially provided an opportunity to remove barriers to achievement.

‘Provided an opportunity’ is a good phrase to describe what was found. At their best, these two, originally massive programmes, could provide a continuum of experience for potential university students, without family experience or conception of what that might mean, from the later years of primary school, when they might find themselves working alongside academics, through to residential tasters of university academic and student life by the time they were post-16, and about to go through the UCAS process. They could have been part of a gifted and talented cohort, in schools where pedagogy had been considered carefully to match their potential performance; they could have been involved in out-of-school enrichment activity – much of it very challenging, but very real and relevant such as working with the companies planning Crossrail – where they could have met other young people from backgrounds similar to theirs, similarly identified as potential university attenders. They could have exchanged phone numbers with each other and communicated later through Facebook, and sometimes have met up at the summer schools

(some did all this). There was thus a potential for an alternative, high aspirational peer group. In many schools, the gifted and talented coordinators were deliberately 'inducting' these young people into the 'cultural traits and mores of the middle class' (Radnor *et al*, 2007: 292) because of their perceived importance for university entrance, as were the schools involved in the *Extra Mile* project discussed in chapter 3.

These young people's parents could have been involved in a variety of progressive visits and workshops run by universities local to them (of all mission groups), through university and AimHigher events, often organised on a regional and sub-regional basis involving current students from similar backgrounds. These would deal with academic matters as well as such things as finance. So there could have been attempts to develop the sorts of informed discussions at home that appeared to be taking place for independent school students. There could have been a developing alternative and wider peer group, and schools, with the right sorts of expectation of their students, could also be putting them through a sort of drip-feed process in the way that those visited by Curtis *et al* (2008) certainly were.

The word 'could' applies because all these programmes and events would only occur for students attending very high tariff schools, the ones qualifying for all the AimHigher programmes. So many students, no less deprived, would not get them, as AimHigher staff all freely agreed. The full gifted and talented programmes seemed to be largely concentrated in phase 1 and 2 *Excellence in Cities* areas, and this would again leave out many deprived children nationally, as has historically been the case with many targeted initiatives (Power *et al*, 2005) - though they would have a more mixed and aspirational peer group elsewhere. Further, what was provided through AimHigher would depend on what the local universities considered their strengths. In one large region where interviews took place, the programmes available locally varied *considerably*.

It was therefore argued in the book most clearly that, at best, a newly ennobled, incomplete cohort of working class students would obtain university places, including prestigious ones, as first

time attenders. This might correspond to the small stream of working class students leaving the former grammar schools, by no means representative or complete, as we know from Jackson and Marsden (1966) and Halsey *et al* (1980). Similarly, it was argued in chapter 8 of the book, that concerned itself with social mobility, that it was difficult to see how this ennobled stream would *transform* the elites that led government, the civil service, commerce, industry and the armed forces.

The independent school/prestigious university nexus, and transnational company recruiting habits (Brown *et al*, 2008), would make it difficult for these elites to look much different in class terms. The Milburn Report (Panel on Fair Access, 2009) might not be saying very much different in thirty years' time. Nevertheless, it was argued that the various initiatives being taken under the umbrella of the Brown Government's white paper on social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2009), including for example the *Inspiring Communities* project that, among other things, would try to lay the foundations for 'high aspiration', were worth supporting because they would make a difference for many young people. The question was how *socially extensive* their effects could be.

Nevertheless, although elites might remain similar, or not, that is not necessarily the case in other strata of society. The Milburn Report, quite rightly, had made a big issue in its first chapter about the different opportunities available to the cohort of people born in 1958 (including Milburn himself) and that born in 1970, and, using Sutton Trust figures (2009), showed the imbalance by social origin in the complexion of major professions (and incidentally, showing again the efficacy of the *managed model of social reproduction*). But a key ingredient of actual, realised mobility is that there are proportionately more opportunities available for 'better jobs', as the Labour Social Mobility White Paper (Cabinet Office, 2009) said, particularly, as chapter 8 of *Aspiration* argues, if the independent school/prestigious university holds. This is exactly what had happened post-Second World War. There was a huge expansion of the white collar bureaucracies in the public and private sectors, with a contraction of the working class from 80-90% of the population at the

end of the nineteenth century to about a third (Roberts, 2001). The confidence of Milburn was based on another prediction, namely that there would be seven million *new* professional and managerial jobs by 2020. The source for this figure is not attributed in Milburn, but seems to be based on a UKCES figure (see, for example, UKCES, 2010), from recent interview evidence (see chapter 5). But the consensus seems to be that, even post-recession, the balance in the occupational structure of the UK is likely to change, and on the assumption that professional expansion is filled with UK citizens, it is much more likely (and necessary) that they will be from a broader mix. ‘Promotion’ in social mobility terms, has always been more likely to adjacent strata (Woods *et al*, 2003) than straight to the top. More fundamental change might take a generation longer if Milburn’s aspirations are realised.

These developments were occurring at a time when funding was plentiful, however; now it is not and is not earmarked for certain uses by schools and LAs. Many former initiatives have already disappeared at the time of writing (early 2012) and, at the same time, there was still an assumption in the mid-2000s (chapters 2 and 3) about central government interventions being the way to change society. This is not the current *stated* model of the UK Government – see chapter 5 – and so any changes in inter-generational social mobility will depend on the millions of possibly disconnected actions of millions of individuals and interested organisations.

The claims about aspirational identity and the managed model of social reproduction

It is necessary to be clear about what was being claimed in the principal phase 2 publications and what was not. The ‘snapshots’ described are intended to illuminate how it was more likely in particular social contexts that certain aspirations would arise rather than others. As St Clair and Benjamin (2011: 502) later put it: ‘...aspirations arise from, and are embedded within, social contexts where they have performative value’. ‘Aspiration’ in the context of phase 2, means ‘realisable ambition’, that is, young people (and parents and their schools) not only understand particular social, educational and occupational trajectories, they are aware of each of the steps

involved and what it takes to realise them (and believe they can). This was what is different about the social contexts of these middle class families.

Other claims have been made on the basis of research about aspiration since 2010. St Clair and Benjamin (2011) have their own diagram to show the social contexts for the development of ambition (p506) which – somewhat similarly to phase 2 – includes family, place, individual and school, together with a box showing the ‘feedback’ relationship between aspirations and outcomes: good examination results may modify or confirm particular aspirations they say. The report of the related major project commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Kintrea *et al*, 2011), makes the distinction (p13) between ‘ideal’, ‘realistic’ (as young people in their sample modified their views with age) and ‘educational’ aspirations. This is helpful in one way, trying to explain moving beyond the ‘fantasy’ stage (chapter 7 of the book), but does not capture the relative social power of the managed model of the micro-managed trajectory.

Significantly, the social contexts for middle class children are in complete contrast, as was maintained in the 2007 paper and chapter 5 of the book, with those of the working class families and communities that are the subject of Kintrea *at al*. Despite recording significant differences between the disadvantaged communities they were studying in London, Nottingham and Glasgow, they concluded that it ‘... appears that what it takes to succeed is well understood neither by many parents nor by young people in the areas that we surveyed’ (p69). In the more restricted sense of the word (without knowledge of the steps of the trajectory), this does not mean that young people, or their parents, did not have high aspirations in more disadvantaged communities (= ambitions or dreams). Kintrea *et al (ibid)* found this, as did Siraj-Blatchford (2010), and in earlier research for *AimHigher*, Atherton *et al* (2009). However, there were differences in aspiration between ethnic groups, as both Siraj-Blatchford and Kintrea *et al* found, with white working class families (and communities), having the ‘lowest’ ones. The power for

agency of known and understood trajectories has been understood by psychologists for some time (Claxton, 1999).

So phase 2 was not claiming that outcomes were *inevitable* either. On the contrary, the discussion of the *managed model of social reproduction* (chapter 4 of the book) makes it clear that how it was represented there represented the *apogee* of, no doubt, a spectrum of the proactivity needed to enliven social structure, while being part of it, even in those independent schools, and the outcomes of the trajectories would be influenced to a degree by it. In addition, from the earliest findings of the EPPE project (Sylva *et al*, 2010), it was found that one of the significant contributors to pupil outcomes, broadly but not exclusively in the sense of higher attainment, was what they called the 'home learning environment' (HLE). This included proactive parenting practices such as reading to children, going to the library, playing with numbers, painting and drawing, and being taught letters, numbers and songs and rhymes (p61). Other activities were less positively correlated with positive outcomes. Though there was certainly a positive correlation between higher socio-economic status and the quality of the HLE, if parents did provide such, as some certainly did, then this was more important than either their socio-economic status or their qualifications. This echoes Strand's (2011) study of a south London borough.

So this is a very important aspect of agency. But there is a further question, given this reported lack of understanding about what needs to be done to succeed in disadvantaged communities: what social/psychological processes does the exercise of such agency relate to and how is it articulated? Kintrea *et al* and St Clair and Benjamin (*ibid*) criticise the notion of 'low' aspirations in some communities being taken by Labour (and now the Coalition) Government as the basis for policy interventions, as had Watts and Bridges (2006) before them, a number of contributors to the Archer (2003) collection, including Archer's own (p119-136), Archer *et al* (2010) and Pratt-Adams, (2010). It could be argued that this is the 'progressive' version of keeping the working

class in its place, rather than a more right wing one of just saying that none of them deserve it and universities take too many students anyway.

But one of the interesting aspects of the semi-structured interviews with children and parents, undertaken as part of the overall EPPE project, and related to the HLE, was the desire to 'encourage the respondents to provide a narrative account that would demonstrate a sense of direction and meaning in their experiences' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010: 467). Some families, with low socio-economic status provided 'highly instrumental attitudes towards education', relating doing well at school to particular occupational (and hence social) trajectories, for example, in medicine, on the one hand, and minimising the perceived harmful effects of living in certain communities (though this latter was not what Kintrea *et al* found) on the other. In other words, providing an effective HLE was seen as a means to realise aspiration; it was similarly seen as part of the trajectory.

There is some link, therefore, between what is known to be effective HLEs, and the aspirational orientation of parents, particularly with regard to careers. Goodman and Gregg (2011), writing about the results of the other major JRF-funded research that published in 2011, noted that attitudes towards education differed widely by socio-economic status (with 81% of the richest mothers as opposed to 37% of the poorest hoping their nine year olds would go to university), but that nevertheless, after 'controlling for long-run family background factors and prior attainment' (p3, summary), young people were more likely to do well at GCSE if their parents thought it likely they would go on to university, and they themselves thought they would apply and be successful. The question of what comes first in all these findings, which are correlations, is an interesting one as Goodman and Gregg say, and they report other psychological factors, such as orientation to one's own 'ability' at school, as seeming to be significant as well.

But the 'presence' of aspiration is significant. Despite the whiff of worthiness in the notion of raising aspirations, as the 2007 paper put it, they are clearly important in some way for, or at least

seem to be associated with, outcomes. St Clair and Benjamin's suggestion about there being a feedback loop between aspiration and outcomes may capture this. Whatever the precise nature of the connection, however, and despite the caution counselled by Goodman and Gregg, aspirations do seem to be legitimate focus for policy interventions, not just in the sense of giving children from more deprived backgrounds higher ones (or better 'ideal' ones in Kintrea *et al*'s sense of it), but addressing the lack of awareness of trajectory, and how it may realistically be realised. As Goodman and Gregg put it, 'focused work is... required to convert high expectations into reality'. This reflects the gifted and talented coordinators' views, of course, in Radnor *et al* (2007).

In essence, therefore, the recommendations of *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* would be supported by this additional more recent research, though it needs to be understood that interventions to modify the social contexts of young people's lives – that could perhaps have been achieved by the policy interventions of the last government discussed earlier - should be considered also. These *would* entail modifications to the workings of social structure; to consider them would require abandoning the more determinist assumptions of some sociology. Otherwise, 'success' will depend too much on the (more) determined individual efforts of young people from working class backgrounds alone – as now. In this connection, the instrumentalist comments made by the parents interviewed in Siraj-Blatchford (2010) do seem to be echoed in the concentration on specific careers to keep them motivated reported by working class students at 'Southern' (elite) university in Reay *et al* (2009). A specific focus is required, rather than just the reported sense of entitlement commented on in chapter 6 of the book.

There is one final piece of research that needs commenting on, even though the social model considered in phase 2 of the publications is by no means a determinist one, and allows and depends on agency. This is the quantitative analysis of widening participation undertaken for the national Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) by Anna Vignoles (cited in David *et al*,

2008). The key relevant finding was that, despite the differences in attendance at university between young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds, there are similar participation rates once prior achievement from Key Stage 2 to 5 is taken into account. 'Students with similar levels of achievement... are more or less equally likely to participate, regardless of background' (p8). This finding has helped produce a rich narrative for Russell Group universities to the effect that the problems with widening participation were the schools', not theirs.

This issue was not dealt with in phase 2, but in fact the research behind it would tend to be sympathetic to this view typical of Vice-Chancellors. If you accept the admission staff's view that, by the time they apply for university, young people must be ready within a year to assume the full rigours of undergraduate study, then there is not much the university can do by then. This also assumes the current pattern of undergraduate degree, of course, and perhaps that it is a mere technical matter how schools improve attainment through better teaching.

But the core of the matter is *why* less advantaged backgrounds mean lower attainment – both the proximal and distal factors – though this is not invariable, as we have seen. This is the substance of much of the discussion in chapter 3, but for now, both the Kintrea *et al* and the Goodman and Gregg research establish some associations between social and occupational aspirations and outcome. It is *not* just a simple matter say of better teaching, though this is important; the attitudinal and other aspects of the various social and personal contexts between which young people move also need to be considered and, where possible, addressed. Universities should most certainly be part of *this* process.

'Disengaged' Young People

In one sense, the 2008 paper and chapter 7 stand slightly apart from the rest of the findings for phase 2 as these principally concentrate on the managed model and the independent school/university nexus as a powerful mechanism for allocating and reallocating advantage between generations. The term 'disengaged' was taken from the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) that had recently been adopted across government to replace 'disadvantaged' in order, it seems, to emphasise that becoming so from the educational process was likely to engender a number of other *risks* for some – special educational needs, drug or alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, mental and physical ill health, life expectancy, long term unemployment and so forth. In other words, a process of social concentration that absolutely mirrors, in a negative way, that process of concentration of all the aspects of advantage enjoyed by the young people attending independent schools.

But the application of the model worked, in the sense that the cumulative, iterative process by which aspirational identity develops seemed to be repeated upside down for these young people. There was sufficient material from the interviews (and literature) to provide some model of what was happening in each of the contexts of these children's lives, leaving them without aspiration at all in the sense earlier explained. This was just how they were described by the various adults working with them, in Connexions and in the voluntary sector. And the process was an upside down mirror in other ways too. Although the process of social reproduction is relatively safe for the parents interviewed with children at independent schools, that is not how the parents saw it. They saw it, as elsewhere (eg Ball, 2003a), as an uncertain agentic process, full of guilt, resting on their shoulders. The disengaged young people similarly saw their circumstances as a result of their own, negatively described pathologies – they had 'failed', they get 'discouraged', they just did not seem able to do certain things. And, knowing what successful students had been like at school,

and that considerable amounts of money – beyond their means - were necessary to live the dominant media narratives of the good life, seemed to make them more pathological.

Successful processes, as described by those dealing at the hardened end of the spectrum of need, as the book describes it, involved focusing on what the young people could do, giving them team and other activities (sometimes outdoor) through which they could experience success.

Invariably, the staff these young people would engage with well in the projects would be people like themselves, from similar backgrounds and, often, with similar experiences in their pasts.

These people had often worked as volunteers before being recruited, and in practice this meant they worked in the voluntary sector, which more and more in the 2000s had come to rely on their services being purchased by the statutory sector. It remains to be seen, within the context of funding cuts, whether this balance will continue to exist over the next ten years and what provision will exist for this most marginalised group of marginalised young people. There is not the space to address this issue here.

Schools in Trouble Again (2009)

As a final footnote to this chapter, brief mention will be made of the 2009 article about the ‘National Challenge’ that had been announced in 2008. This was the most recent in a long line of policies for ‘schools facing challenging circumstances’ referred to often. The peculiar developments of this particular initiative had been the lifting of the floor target to 30% 5 A*-Cs, not including English and Maths at that time, and the perceived necessity now of ‘structural transformation’ for schools – being changed into an academy or trust school – should repeated attempts to improve performance prove unsuccessful. The substance of such initiatives have all been discussed – chapter 2 and 3 – and reflected in earlier publications, for example, the chapter in the Clarke edited collection (2005b). It remains to be seen, at the time of writing, whether the continuing structural transformations – and they will continue with the ending of the ‘satisfactory’ grade as part of school inspection from 2012 – will in fact bring about some transformation in

attainment, with the floor target now 50% (35% was thought fanciful in 2009!). At least so in a way that is different from what would have occurred under more traditional interventions, managed through local authorities.

The problem is, to keep the repetitive nature of what is about to be said to the minimum, that schools will do all in their power to respond to short term targets when this is being insisted on by outside agencies, but this might be to the detriment of sorting out a long term vision, as set out in *Schools for Our Cities* (2003b). And the stratification of schools, with bottom strata schools most at risk of floor targets, is rooted in the circumstances of the communities and the society they serve; unless attempts are made to modify their worse effects – much harder in harsh economic times – the results will be similar. On a personal note, many of the schools which were struggling when I was Director of Education in Bristol – more than ten years ago now – still appear to be doing so. Education is not isolated from the physical, economic, social and psychological circumstances in which it takes place; perhaps this best summarises my work to date.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

There is never a best time to bring a book to press. Literally weeks after *Aspiration, Identity and Self-Belief* had gone to print, the then Government published its cross-departmental response (BIS, 2010) to the Milburn Report on social mobility (Panel on Fair Access, 2009) – despite its being understood informally that there might not be one because of the recommended interventions into hitherto independent bodies, such as the professions (and, of course, universities). A review of this lengthy response document would have complemented the final chapter on social mobility in the book and would have completed a sketch of the policy aspiration framework that would have been in place for the next few years.

The follow up work that had commenced with BIS officials, however, was overtaken by the general election of May 2010 that led to the formation of the Coalition Government and, potentially, a new approach to policy development. There were some similar priorities between the two governments, for example on the pursuit of greater social mobility, according to the Coalition Programme (Cabinet Office, 2010), but there were not many officials willing to be interviewed for some time.

The starting point for phase 1 and 2 of the publications had been a sense that responses to inequity did not address the deeper social issues that underlay it. So a key point of my interest from 2010 has been whether the successor policies on social mobility would do more than ennoble a continuing stream of working class students – and whether, for example, this might enable the purported seven million new professional and managerial jobs by 2020 to be filled by UK citizens.

There was another matter of great interest, however, and that was the model of change, or *policy realisation* as it has already been termed (Riddell, 2011) that was beginning to emerge. The era of top down, prescriptive, imposed policy change had ended according to the last Government – and

it was possible to observe some of this 'direction of travel', as one official described it to me, from the progressive devolution and un-designation of huge central budgets until 2010. But there was also an ideology, to its critics, or a methodology, to its supporters, behind the former way of doing things, as has been mentioned. Barber's take on it (2008) was slightly different from the original paper from the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2006), with its much criticised 'washing machine', including by Coffield *et al* (2007) and current officials. Even when the hand on the central tiller became more responsive to the people it was affecting, or so the story went, there remained interventions of various sorts, including at the micro-level.

The new government clearly stated – early on - its intentions to end the old 'top down' ways (Cameron, 2010). The Prime Minister said he did not see it as the role of civil servants to intervene in public services, and the model of change through policy formation being progressively presented by officials and special advisers was one of sharing responsibility with other organisations and sectors (eg business) to bring about fundamental social change, like increasing mobility. Invitations to participate in great drives are then issued to everyone, including schools. A series of reports on what needed to be done and best practice were commissioned early on in the Government on major issues such as child poverty (Field, 2010). The idea was that some extra resources would be provided through interventions such as the pupil premium, key social players such as pre-schools and schools would be told what good practice is, but they would then decide themselves what to do. They and their work overall would be monitored by a series of independent, arms-length bodies (and Ofsted of course). Arguably, on this view, Government does not see itself as solely responsible for social change, in contrast to the Brown Government.

This research has not finished. After a series of interviews, the first conference paper was published (Riddell, 2011), which is not included in the publications for this submission. It presents the above model, among other things, and includes a critical account of the work related to the professions. But again there are even deeper matters here. First, is the policy realisation narrative

true? Interviews since the 2011 paper have suggested a much closer examination of the differences between what the Government says and what it actually does (as always). For example, the educational developments described above make it unclear who or what will intervene when things go wrong.

And deeper than that, much of my work has provided a critique of the limitations of the prescriptive national reform that the country saw from the late 1990s onwards, partly because of its lack of understanding of the structural features of our society. But, if the government of the day is not intervening, how will any change occur, and, fundamentally what is then the role of the state? Is it possible to achieve any change at all which modifies or reverses the current balance of (in)opportunities in our society? Or are we limited, as a society, to making small modifications to what is a blind, unsteered, process of social development? In this context, it is difficult to be optimistic about any social democratic project.

Current plans are to proceed immediately with two further articles: one on the government policy model – stated or unstated – for change and one to review the Government’s work on the professions, which is largely voluntarist as the 2011 paper says. These are already setting the scene for the development of another book, this time on the state and education policy in the new era. Interviews are being sought with great social interveners who do not belong to the state in any way; this fits well with Ball’s recent phase of work (2007, 2011) on the new philanthropy and what we might term the Bill and Melinda Gates approach to social change. Is it this context that we need to consider now for improvement?

There is one remaining wider, and perhaps even deeper, question. Aspects of social structure exist in our collective heads. If we are to change the balance of opportunities by attempting to alter social structure, as has been argued here is still necessary, particularly in phase 2, what are the interventions *in our heads* (or those of some of us) that we should approve in the new era? Are they the sorts of prosthetic devices referred to by Bruner (1990)? Is it more than aspiration?

And if the Government no longer sees it as its job to do these things – see above - whose could it be and what does democracy – and activism - mean in these circumstances? These are the questions that are occupying me for the next phase of my work.

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