

Chapter 3: Critical perspectives in and approaches to educational leadership in England

Ruth McGinity (University College London, UK) and Kay Fuller (University of Nottingham, UK).

Key words: *Structure, agency, identities, power, neoliberalism*

What this chapter is about

This chapter provides an account of the field from a critical perspective which will enable you to undertake an analysis of power which is relational and situated within the English context. In undertaking this analysis, we take seriously the notion that “knowledge production is located in specific spaces, bodies, times and assumptive practices” (Courtney, McGinity and Gunter, 2017, p. 153). The chapter will first address some of the key structural and discursive policy frames that have developed in England over the last 40 years as contrivances for understanding and theorising professional practice using critical perspectives and approaches.

Key questions that this chapter addresses

1. What are the key discursive and policy frames that have emerged out of neoliberal logic in England?
2. How have these shaped the ways in which professional practice has been:
 - a. enacted in the field of practice, and
 - b. conceptualised in the critical field
3. In what ways are these accounts rooted in traditions of knowledge production (what is known and worth knowing) that centre social justice as an organising principle.

Introduction

The story of educational leadership in England requires us to understand there are multiple, competing or aligned versions of what it means to both be a leader and ‘do’ leadership as a form of professional practice, as well as perspectives of it as a field of study. This distinction between being, doing and conceptualising is integral to the way we might understand the field through thinking with, and drawing on, critical perspectives and approaches. In addition, to make sense of how critical perspectives construct and conceptualise professional practice within England specifically, it is

necessary to locate such analyses in the bigger picture of how policy plays out in localised contexts. Here critical scholarship has a strong tradition in developing analyses of the relationship between *structure* and *agency* to consider how power operates to privilege or marginalise, advantage or disadvantage. Particular sets of *identities* and practices are produced to be theorised through a framework of equity.

What makes critical approaches to and perspectives of leadership worthy of study from a national point of view is a context-specific analysis. We will show how the field makes use of conceptual and theoretical tools and methodological approaches which produce analyses rooted in the peculiarities of the English system, whilst they simultaneously speak to global phenomena (in both policy and practice). This phenomenon is the political, ideological and social project of the nebulous set of practices and forms conceptualised as *neoliberalism*.

Throughout this chapter, you will be asked to actively engage with and reflect on the issues we raise through our examples to help develop understanding and awareness of critical approaches and perspectives of education leadership in England.

Definitions Box:

Critical perspectives: Critical perspectives require you to analyse the way in which a context might impact upon what is happening and how power is enacted and experienced as a result.

Critical approaches: Critical approaches are tools that might help you to do this type of work – they can help you methodologically to undertake this type of analysis.

Structure: is the way in which society is organised which influences or limits the choices and opportunities available to individuals. For example, these can be cultural, political and/or institutional.

Agency: is the capacity of an individual to behave and act within a particular environment.

Neoliberalism: a set of economic and ideological practices and processes that forefront the growth of markets combined with deregulations of the state's role in the development and provision of public services, such as education.

Knowledge Production: The theoretical and practical way in which ideas and understanding are developed to make sense of the world and how this relates to particular positions and identities.

Key structural and discursive policy frames

In order to unpack the way professional practice is conceptualised using critical perspectives and approaches, we need to identify the key structural and discursive policy frames that provide the contextual environment through which leading and leadership are practised in England.

Within the critical tradition, structural features must be considered and analysed when investigating professional practices and identities (agency). A crucial aim in critical approaches and perspectives is to illuminate how policy processes (structure) and professional practice (agency) might intersect to either reproduce or limit the effects of educational inequalities. Focussing upon equity in this way establishes social justice as a foundation for critical approaches and perspectives.

Critical scholars understand social justice in research means maintaining a focus on (in)equality. So do functionalist scholars (see Gunter and Raffo, 2008), whose often-normative work is tightly coupled with reform movements, particularly those from the late 1990s and first decade of the new millennium. In such accounts, attention is given to what leaders do (and how they might do it more effectively) producing analyses that are theoretically superficial and relying on prescriptive and descriptive models often divorced from context. These accounts lack theoretical engagement with analyses of how policy processes and professional practice might mitigate or perpetuate inequity within the system. Despite this, claims of social justice pervade the language of policy reform and reveal how a concept might be understood as a site of 'discursive struggle', where the allocation of value becomes diluted from its original meaning and intended use.

Critical scholars have identified this problem as a significant characteristic within functionalist knowledge production where claims for social justice motivate normative accounts whilst lacking empirical, methodological and theoretical grounding. As such, social justice as an organising principle underpinning knowledge production in the critical field represents an important departure from functionalist modes of enquiry into leadership and policy. Using England as an example, we can show how structural and discursive policy frames can work *against*, rather than *for* equity within the system. These frames are both distinctive and particular within this national context but are also part of a loose-fitting, global phenomenon of neoliberalism.

Here, we establish the significance of neoliberalism on policy reform processes over the last forty years in countries such as England because structural analyses that follow are associated with neoliberalism as a conceptual and ideological framework. As such, it informs critical perspectives

and approaches in the field of educational leadership. For the purposes of our argument, what matters here is that neoliberal approaches in England have produced a set of policy drivers that have common features against and within which the field of education leadership has developed. We briefly describe below some key policy frames in order to reveal how critical approaches and perspectives enable analyses of how and why professionals negotiate practices and identities (agency) within a given structural context .

Key structural and discursive policy frames (definitions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Decentralisation and autonomy</i> – Greater financial autonomy for headteachers (the diminution of the middle tier). Examples include Education Reform Act 1988 and the Academies Act 2010.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diversification</i> – peculiarly English; augmentation in range of school types as another feature of market logic and school choice – competition.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>High-stakes accountability</i> – agenda to mitigate excesses of autonomy and to facilitate market logic (through inspections, testing and league tables – all working to produce a slate of information to be used as a basis of school choice).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Performativity</i> – emphasising the importance of system, school, and (head)teacher ‘effectiveness’ measured through pupil performance in high-stakes tests.

The Education Reform Act (1988)

In England, a key date for policy reform is 1988. The Conservative government (under the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher) introduced the Education Reform Act (ERA). A major set of reforms signalled a watershed moment in embedding neoliberal logic into the policy landscape, ushering in the marketisation of education in England.

In essence, policies promoted practices that enabled market mechanisms to operate within the education system. What resulted was schools being run more akin to businesses, with the competitive logic that such an approach would require. In the first instance, the ERA paved the way for greater autonomy in the system through policies aimed at decentralising specific functions from local government control and handing school leaders previously curtailed powers. This started with greater financial autonomy (what was termed Local Management of Schools) in setting budgets and associated practices such as recruitment and resource allocation. Successive governments from New Labour (1997-2010) to the Conservative-led coalition (2010-2015) followed suit and a slew of

policies designed to give greater freedom to leaders and their schools characterised the period, leading to a situation where budgets, pay and conditions, curriculum and admissions have been decentralised.

Business sponsorship of schools

A key policy associated with the ERA that facilitated this ideological and material shift, was the provision for schools to be sponsored by businesses, in what were named City Technology Colleges (CTCs). Although these never took off in great numbers (15 were established between the inception of the policy in 1986 and the end of successive Conservative administrations in 1997) the principles by which they were founded (business sponsorship, and freedom over budgets, pay and conditions, curriculum and admissions) lay the ground on which Academy schools would be based and would go on to redefine the landscape of schooling (and leadership) in England.

School-type diversification

Diversification, thus, became another bedrock of the English school system. England already had a number of types of schools (comprehensives; grammars; secondary moderns; faith schools, and private or independent schools) but the reform strategy to increase autonomy within the system led to the Academies Act of 2010 and a huge increase in academy schools and their assorted varieties (free schools; studio schools and university technical colleges, along with stand-alone, converter and more recently groups of academies called Multi-Academy Trusts). What this means, in terms of the logic of neoliberalism, is that it shores up a central component of marketised education systems – enabling competition through school-choice policies. Structurally, school choice becomes one of the most important policy mechanisms for embedding inequality within the system, where empirical research strongly suggests there exists a hierarchy of provision; broadly speaking, poorer children are located in less successful schools whilst richer children attend more successful schools.

High-stakes accountability and performativity

The 1988 ERA also introduced high-stakes accountability mechanisms enabling the system to run competitively as a quasi-market and holding to account the professionals working within it in a performative regime. In England, three key mechanisms produce a performative regime (Ball, 2003):

- 1) the form and function of the inspectorate
- 2) high-stakes, summative testing
- 3) league tables.

The third of these resulted from the ERA legislation whereby the media, in particular, produce ranked tables of school performance based on the second mechanism (high-stakes, summative testing regimes). The school's inspectorate is significant structurally, because through this, schools are rated on a scale from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding' increasingly based on the same high-stakes, summative test performance. Schools might, therefore, find themselves deemed 'failing' and, as a result of the 2010 Academies Act, be subject to closure and re-opening as an Academy. This matters because there is fragility built into the system via high-stakes accountability, where parents who can vote with their feet take vital funding with them (in England, a per-pupil funding system means the money follows the child), that leaves certain types of schools with certain types of children (empirically, children from poorer homes) more or less vulnerable to the more extreme vagaries of a quasi-marketised system.

These inter-connected policy frames produce a context in which there is concomitantly something quite global (neoliberal logics) and something quite situated and specific to England, that provides the environment in which critical perspectives in and approaches to educational leadership have been formed. We will consider the impact of these structural features of the English system on professional practice in the next section.

Activity box - Critical perspectives and approaches:

Critical perspectives require you to look at the way in which a context might impact upon what is happening and how power is distributed and experienced within such a context. For example, how might reforms giving greater autonomy to schools affect how a school leader does their job? Why and how are some school leaders in a more advantaged position than others?

Critical approaches are tools and ideas that might help you to do this type of leadership work – they can help you methodologically to undertake this type of analysis.

Gunter (2009, p.xx) gives us four key aspirations for our research and analysis that we might consider when undertaking critical work:

1. Emancipate those who are disciplined through objective power structures by questioning the power base of those located within privileged elite positions;
2. Problematise language, practice, beliefs and what are current and taken for granted assumptions about organisational realities and structures;
3. Reveal the existence of contradictions and dilemmas within organisations and the productive contribution of conflict;
4. Support practice through moving beyond tasks and techniques by conceptualising action within a social and political context.

Task:

Consider the policies for greater autonomy above. Think about a school serving children from poorer homes with lower attainment levels. That school is understood as a less successful school. In turn, children from wealthier families are less likely to attend this school. Their parents use school choice policy to choose another more successful school. Over time, the school is identified by the inspectorate, Ofsted, as failing and forced to become an academy. As a result, the headteacher loses their job, and many members of the senior leadership team resign.

Taking this example, answer the following:

1. Who has the power in this situation? Who is disadvantaged?
2. Why does this matter?
3. Are descriptors such as 'successful', 'unsuccessful' and 'failing' useful terms by which to understand what happened? If so, why? If not, why not? What alternative ways are there to describe and explain what is happening?
4. Does autonomy in this scenario mean the new academy school is likely to do better than the failing school it replaced? If so, why? If not, why not?

What does this mean for school leaders and how we study them, their identities and their actions?

Making sense of professional practice requires us to conceptualise it as a set of relational processes situated within specific contexts at particular times. Professional practice can be made sense of, in the critical scholarship part of the field, only in relation to the structural (cultural, institutional,

political) features in and through which practice is mediated. As such, a typology of leadership characteristics is unnecessary. Instead, using the framework of structure and agency reveals the complex, contingent and subjective nature of professional practice. The critical scholar can undertake detailed, theoretical and often qualitative enquiry as a means of considering the ways in which educational leaders respond to and make sense of their work and professional identities.

Much functionalist research is designed to produce sets of, and models for educational leadership actions and behaviours. They are described as more or less 'effective'. These models include different conceptualisations of leadership as variously *distributed*, *transformational* and/or *instructional*. Professional practice is presented as a means of assigning labels to behaviours drawn from empirical studies. These descriptive interpretations facilitate further studies that produce similar lists of types and behaviours favoured by governmental and reform strategists. As such, accounts of professional practice will differ depending on where you look. What you are likely to find are multiple sources using normative descriptors, like distributed leadership, with little attention paid to the contextual and structural features that produce practices and actions in the first place.

This is because the normative position is to identify how leaders might lead in ways that make them capable of delivering centrally designed reforms. Within such accounts of professional practice, social justice often takes on more than it can conceptually bear; it becomes a discursive catch-all for the effective work of leaders and leadership, without the necessary engagement of what it means to undertake socially just leadership as a means of challenging inequitable processes and practices.

Professionals are constrained in what they may think and do because of the structural conditions described above. A high-stakes accountability system might produce professional practice that lacks critical reflexivity and instead privileges the delivery of quantifiable educational outcomes, squeezing out the spaces for thinking as well as doing things differently. Professional practice is not so performative that meaningful agency is reduced, but rather, in England, the intense policy reform agenda that privileges functionalist analyses of practice means that agency and identity have been presented in scholarly accounts and outputs tied to purposes and outcomes of the reform agenda in unproblematic ways. The following section serves as an example of how this occurs.

The National College for School Leadership

The now-defunct National College for School Leadership was established by New Labour in 2000 as a training ground for school leaders to undertake professional qualifications related to their practice. Gunter (2012) shows how the National College became a powerful government-sanctioned institution that performed statecraft in the re-culturing of school leaders' professional practice as deliverers of New Labour policy. As a result, preferred leadership practices (types) and actions (tools) developed alongside the literature that described leadership as variously *distributed*, *transformational* and *instructional*. Practices were described and identified in terms of being successful at the job. These descriptive types were embedded within both government-produced literature on successful school leadership as well as in functionalist accounts and research on effective leadership practices.

The National College of School Leadership provides an example specific to England. However, it is an illustration of the power inherent in (re)packaging leadership development ideas and research as marketable products to cultivate practice for effective, efficient and measurable outcomes. In doing so, it delivered school leadership agendas derived from neoliberal logics. Whilst the College itself now no longer exists, arguably many of the conditions that produced it persist, and so it offers a useful lens through which to explore these conditions, in which the National College minimised spaces for resistance, emancipatory activism and producing exemplars of what leading, and leadership might contribute to and achieve.

Why does this matter?

Critical approaches produce accounts which centre contextual and structural features and utilise power as a lens through which to theorise professional practice. In doing so, the field has developed analyses which use methodological and conceptual tools that move beyond normative and prescriptive typologies. Instead, they provide ways of sense-making regarding what it means to be a leader, doing leadership, under particular and often historical sets of circumstances. This is important for three reasons.

Firstly, critical approaches bring with them (as with normative and functionalist approaches) conceptual frameworks for making sense of practice which are located within the scholarly tradition of knowledge production within the field. This means that research conducted with (and on) participants produces data that is subjected to the field's own analytical traditions where for

example, theory is used to make sense of why an educational leader might say or do something in relation to questions about their practices and identities. These theorised accounts might be used as a means of making sense of how, for example, intersecting oppressions operate to privilege and marginalise different leaders in different ways (Fuller, 2019). To push further, they might be used to make sense of how these intersecting oppressions are interpreted by participants as more or less structural, and what this might say about the possibilities and limitations available to act or think differently.

Secondly, spaces and critical dispositions for thinking and acting differently are not common within the field. The restrictive structural conditions that have been discussed in this chapter have to a large extent produced scholarship which reveals the totalising nature of educational reform processes on professional practice. However, accounts demonstrate how different groups within the system (teachers, leaders, governors, for example) are not critically-reflexively engaged with their work in ways that would realise the emancipatory potential of critical dispositions. So thirdly, whilst attempting to address the limitations of this for professional practice, such analyses expose the liminal space that exists between research and practice – where accounts of thinking and doing things differently are partial but the theorising and analysis that are produced as a result is both useful and productive for researching professionals.

Some accounts reveal critical dispositions to act and think differently, and their approaches focus upon a) theorising the relationship between structure and agency (Gewirtz, 2002) as b) an acknowledgement that identity is integral to professional practice (Courtney, McGinity and Gunter, 2017) to c) accounts centring social justice perspectives as mechanisms for emancipatory action (Thomson, 2010) which d) reveal the way power operates to produce privileged and/or marginalised experiences of policies and practices in highly situated and contextualised ways (Ball, 2003).

Reflection: In *'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity'* Stephen Ball (2003) argues that:

“Performativity... is a new mode of state regulation ... It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance” (p. 215).

Reflection

Consider the relationship between *structure* and *agency* and how *power* operates to privilege or marginalise, advantage or disadvantage professionals and others in the school population.

1. What are the structural features that might contribute to the 'performative regime' described by Ball?
2. How might you negotiate the tensions between external policy-driven activity and professional identity?
3. In your current context, what might be your 'red lines', the limits of policy compliance?

The importance of theory for advocacy and resistance

The field is constructed through analytical interpretations of both the limitations of and possibilities for professional practice. As a result, intellectual resources are deployed to develop perspectives and approaches that enable theorisation to take place. The use of theory in developing critical perspectives of professional practice in the field of educational leadership is well-established (Courtney, McGinity and Gunter, 2017). Theoretical work reveals key questions that underpin critical perspectives, that is who benefits from and who loses out as a result of how practices and processes play out in the professional field. In this sense, one of the main features of critical scholarship is the re-politicising of practice within a deeply normative and de-politicised space. By deploying theoretical work, spaces of resistance can be identified and supported by critical scholars as a means of pushing back against the highly compliant agency expected as a result of the structured policy context. As such, analyses of power and identity are enabled and developed despite the many and varied limitations born from normative privileging of practice as outlined throughout this chapter.

Below, we recount a case of headteachers' engagement in critical practitioner reflexivity in their collective acts of resistance of education policy. Figure 1 shows a timeline of headteachers' collective actions in the context of national and global events.

Worth Less? A case of headteachers' engaging in critical practitioner reflexivity taking collective action in England

Over the course of four years (2015-19) headteachers have questioned systemic inequalities in school funding. In 2015, Jules White, headteacher of local authority maintained Tanbridge House School for pupils aged 11-16, founded the Worth Less? Campaign for fairer funding in West Sussex. He was subsequently both fêted and intimidated for this achievement.

Selected reports from the regional, national and professional press are presented as a timeline in the context of political and educational reforms in England, (Figure 1). They reveal the unity of

headteachers (local authority-maintained schools and academies), headteacher unions, parents and pupils in the protest. Social media platforms were used to inform the public, mobilise supporters and publicise the campaign.

Headteachers wrote to politicians (from 2015) and parents (2016 and 2019) to describe the impact real terms funding cuts had on the work of schools. Their actions included resignation (2017), invoicing the government for the funding shortfall (2018), open criticism of government (2018) and a march (2018). Headteachers carried out menial tasks to save money (2019). Parents and pupils supported the protest (2018) and in more affluent areas supplemented school funding (2019).

An e-petition, started by St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Blaydon headteacher, Andrew Ramanandi, with 113825 signatories, secured a House of Commons debate between politicians recounting headteachers', teachers', support staff, parents', school governors' and pupils' experiences of real terms spending cuts (Hansard 2019). Some attributed them to education reforms from 2010; others to reforms during the New Labour government (1997-2010). Members of parliament spoke against the funding cuts as former teachers, school governors or board members of multi-academy trusts as well as across political party elected representatives of their constituents.

The effects of inadequate funding of schools in England included geographical disparity in funding; deficit school budgets; loss of staff through restructuring and redundancy (teaching and support staff); replacement of staff including school leaders with less experienced, less expensive personnel; reduced resources for provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); supplementing provision for impoverished children out of headteachers' own resources i.e. paying for uniforms and food; reducing costs by personally paying for or doing school cleaning (Hansard 2019).

In the context of other welfare cuts connected with an austerity budget from 2010, headteachers had backfilled provision. Headteachers were 'crossing red lines' (Thelma Walker MP in Hansard 2019). This was a 'crisis largely in disguise' precisely because of headteachers' reluctance to take collective action. They were 'loth to get involved in what they consider to be politics, or in any way to use the children they serve and teach as pawns in a political debate [...] headteachers do not want to speak about the situation quite so much, simply because, understandably, they fear competitive disadvantage' (Tim Farron MP in Hansard 2019).

The headteachers' protest has been reported as polite and unprecedented, though some saw them as hypocritical. Ministerial responses were seen as inadequate, offensive in suggesting schools

should receive funding for the 'little extras' (Hansard 2019) and invalidated headteachers' concerns.
The campaign continues.

Figure 1 – Timeline of headteachers' Worth Less? campaign activities

2008	<i>Global financial crisis</i>
2010	
May 2010	<i>Conservative- Liberal Democrat coalition government formed</i>
June 2010	<i>Austerity budget</i>
July 2010	<i>Academies Act – funding from central instead of local government</i>
2015	
April 2015	Worth Less? headteachers launch campaign in West Sussex – a traditional Conservative-led local authority
May 2015	<i>Conservative government elected</i>
2016	
September 2016	All West Sussex headteachers write to parents/carers about funding cuts
2017	
February 2017	Headteacher resigns over cuts in Berkshire
2018	
January 2018	Headteachers invoice government for funding shortage (local authority schools <i>and</i> academies)
July 2018	Founder of the Worth Less? campaign, Jules White, intimidated by MPs
6 September 2018	Government issues advice to schools about teacher conduct not being party political
25 September 2018	Headteachers criticise government
27 September 2018	Headteachers march to Downing Street
October 2018	Parents support protest for fair funding
4 November 2018	School staff at centre of BBC2 <i>School</i> documentary respond to 'little extras' budget
6 November 2018	Jules White attends the Education Select Committee on schools and colleges funding
3 December 2018	Funding awarded to grammar schools to expand
21 December 2018	Jules White receives award
2019	
January 2019	E-petition, started by Andrew Ramanandi in a Labour led local authority, attracts 113825 signatures
4 March 2019	Debate about school funding in Parliament
8 March 2019	Headteachers write to parents
8 March 2019	Headteachers carry out menial tasks to save money
April 2019	School children protest against cuts
May 2019	Parents protest against schools closing early as a result of cuts
June 2019	Institute of Fiscal Studies says £3.8bn is needed to reverse cuts
Spring 2019	Association of School and College Leaders publish research on school funding
13 July 2019	Middle-class parents supplement funding in state schools
22 July 2019	Schools have to find 2% of teachers' pay award

Activity:

Social, economic and educational policies simultaneously influence and contextualise educational leader identities and practices as they and others construct them. Use the timeline to consider being, doing and conceptualising educational leadership.

1. What does it mean to *be* a headteacher?
2. What did headteachers *do*?
3. Use a multilevel perspective to examine individual and collective actions. How did their actions influence their identities and vice versa?
4. How might we draw on critical perspectives to *conceptualise* what is happening in the English education system?

Consider the following:

5. *Structure and agency* – what examples of headteacher agency and policy structure can you identify? How do these inter-relate and interplay?
6. *Critical practitioner reflexivity* – what pushed headteachers to take collective action?
7. *Power* – to what extent did headteachers subvert existing power relations in their collective resistance against economic and educational policy that produced real-terms budget cuts in their schools?
8. *Social justice* – who benefited from the economic and educational policies? Who lost?
9. *Emancipatory activism* – In what ways might their collective action be interpreted as such?

What does all this mean for critical perspectives of educational leadership in England?

The field of educational leadership, like most academic fields, does not easily lend itself to notions of the nation-state when considering the processes of knowledge production. The imposition of borders seems obstructive where the unfettered flow of intellectual resources and ideas is required to sustain high-quality scholarship and debate. What follows must be read with this caveat. The productiveness of using a national lens to think about the field is tied to implications for understanding professional practice in particular context, histories, cultures and politics. In addition, internationally recognisable conceptualisations of economic, political and ideological practices and processes feature within and across multiple national contexts. Here these are defined as the logics

of neoliberalism. Although highly influential in the development of reform strategies, its global effects are not felt identically, or indeed at the nation-state level. How such a nebulous set of ideas and practices play out in localised contexts is integral to analyses offered by critical approaches to and perspectives in educational leadership.

In England, this means the two key structural and discursive policy frames identified in the chapter as first, decentralisation and autonomy; and second, diversification and high-stakes accountability have produced a set of contextually specific analyses. These simultaneously identify global trends playing out in localised circumstances and enable analyses that theorise why this might matter to professional practice locally, nationally and internationally.

The importance of resistance

The field has been historically and contemporaneously marginalised by normative agendas in policy, research and practice. There is a tendency to eclipse instances of resistance that exist within accounts offered through research produced by the field as well as the documentation of activism occurring in real time and reported through media channels. We have demonstrated that in our case study of the headteacher protests against funding cuts. Here, we witnessed professionals making public and high-profile statements about the conditions in which they were doing their jobs. Budget-holding becomes even starker in the day-to-day business of running a school. The protest was impactful, not least because, as a group, Headteachers are not well known to protest, despite the existence of a highly unionised teaching profession. In addition, reports exist, such as those described by Hatcher and Jones (2006), of acts of resistance to other aspects of the performative regime, particularly where schools are forced into academisation.

These campaigns indicate that professional practice is not immune to the critical disposition to think and act differently. When ordinary professionals are pushed to respond in extraordinary circumstances, the notion that professional practice in England is highly compliant must be contested. This matters because it is possible to forget. The structural conditions described in this chapter, and how agency might manifest as a result, demonstrate the way knowledge is produced and how concepts (such as social justice) gain purchase to become functions of policy in normative and unintended ways. As such, it is productive to look to the scholarship of Michael Apple, who implores researchers, within their own professional practice, to become 'critical secretaries' (Apple 2013 p. 15). Accounts of compliance and resistance are important in making sense of conflicting and

complex experiences in professional practice. They can be used to challenge the ways in which social justice has been appropriated by and for normative purposes. In offering critical approaches and perspectives, scholars in England speak to their counterparts globally, in support of professionals engaging with the ways knowledge production operates and understanding how such processes might be useful for them in making sense of their own practices and lives within a highly prescriptive, performative and fragmented system.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an account of critical perspectives in and approaches to educational leadership in England. Vital to this contribution is our demonstrating that structure and agency intersect in multiple ways to prompt analyses of professional practice in neoliberal times. Such analyses, which draw on strong traditions of knowledge production in theorisation, conceptualisation and methodological approach, are essential to the construction of critical scholarship. What distinguishes critical scholarship is a commitment to making sense of such processes through a framework of equity, unpinned by an examination of how power operates within and across the system. This is useful because it offers a means to understand and make sense of the different ways in which professional practice is described, experienced and collectively deployed to support or challenge the way inequality is (re)produced through the system. This focus upon social justice is essential to critical approaches and perspectives, and whilst these frameworks of enquiry are similar for critical scholars in field work across the globe, there are contextually specific aspects to the conditions in which professional practice is enacted and understood in England that make it worthy of its own, singular contribution in this book. What remains important, is that this account is read in consort with the other contributions as a means of further developing an understanding of both the general and specific nature of critical scholarship and how this can be used to strengthen analyses across the field as a means of addressing Apple's (2013 p. 15) call to "bear witness to negativity and point to contradictions and to spaces for possible action". It is through these spaces that greater understanding and ultimately change, might follow.

Further reading:

Ball, S. J., (2013). *The Education Debate*. 2nd ed. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Courtney, S., and McGinity, R., (2020). *Conceptualising constructions of educational leader identity*, In: A. Heffernan and R. Niesche (Eds.). *Researching identity and subjectivity in educational leadership*. London: Routledge.

Gunter, H., Hall, D., & Bragg, J., (2013). Distributed Leadership: A Study in Knowledge Production. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 41(5), 555–580.

<http://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213488586>

Stevenson, H. P., (2007). A case study in leading schools for social justice: when morals and markets collide. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(6), 769–781.

Maguire, M., Braun, A., and Ball, S., (2018). Discomforts, opposition and resistance in schools: the perspectives of union representatives. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39:7, 1060-1073, DOI: [10.1080/01425692.2018.1443431](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1443431)

References:

Apple, M., (2013). *Can education change society?* New York: Routledge.

Ball, S. J., (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215–228. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>

Courtney, S., McGinity, R., and Gunter, H., eds., (2017). *Theorising professional practice in neoliberal times*. London & New York: Routledge.

Fuller, K. (2019). "That would be my red line": an analysis of headteachers' resistance of neoliberal education reforms. *Educational Review*, 71:1, 31-50.

<http://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1522042>

Gewirtz, S. (2002) *The managerial school: post-welfarism and social justice in education* (London, Routledge).

Gunter, H. (2009). Critical approaches to leadership in education. *The Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 2(2), 94–108.

Gunter, H.M., (2012). *Leadership and the reform of education*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Hansard (2019) School Funding, UK Parliament, House of Commons 4 March 2019, Volume 655. Available at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-03-04/debates/2EB33517-190D-4882-8682-4953D09C5CB0/SchoolFunding> [accessed 22 July 2019]

Raffo, C., & Gunter, H. (2008). Leading schools to promote social inclusion: developing a conceptual framework for analysing research, policy and practice. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(4), 397–414.

Hatcher, R., and K. Jones. (2006). Researching Resistance: Campaigns against Academies in England. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54 (3): 329–351.

Thomson, P. (2010). Headteacher autonomy: a sketch of a Bourdieuan field analysis of position and practice. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(1), 5–20. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17508480903450190>