Chapter 7

Democratising Local School Systems: Participation and Vision

Richard Hatcher

Introduction

In the three years or so that Michael Gove has been secretary of state for education under the Coalition government he has transformed local school systems. It is a remarkable achievement. It also presents its critics with a challenge. What should a local school system look like? What should be the role of a local authority and its relationship with schools? Who should have a say in local education policy-making, and what structures would best enable it?

In the first section of this chapter I describe the situation that a Labour or Labour-LibDem government is likely to inherit if they are elected in 2015, and situate education in the wider context of local government theory. In the middle section I discuss the position that Labour currently puts forward. In the final section I present some ideas for a democratised local school system. The most radical of Gove's reforms, built on the foundations laid by Labour, has been the spread of academies, currently over half of all secondary schools and approaching ten percent of all primary schools, and likely to continue increasing until 2015. The intended consequence has been the disempowering of local authorities in education. The loss of schools has resulted in a loss of income as

academies take with them a disproportionate share of the central support grant. This is compounded by the huge government reduction in local authority budgets. The result has been that local authority central support teams, which supported schools in need and were the authorities' principal instrument for influencing the schools by developing and disseminating good practice and innovation, have been decimated and in many cases virtually disappeared.

It is widely believed that the ultimate aim of the Tories' academies and free schools programme is to allow state-funded schools to be owned and run by private companies for profit. In May last year Michael Gove, giving evidence to the Leveson inquiry into phone hacking, was asked whether he hoped free schools would be able to make profits in a Tory second term. He replied:

> 'It's my belief that we could move to that situation but at the moment it's important to recognise that the free schools movement is succeeding without that element and I think we should cross that bridge when we come to it… There are some of my colleagues in the coalition who are very sceptical of the benefits of profit. I have an open mind.' (*Guardian* 29/5/12).

One sign that running state schools for profit is on the agenda is the arrival in England of companies which run chains of for-profit state schools in Sweden and the US. Kunskapsskolan sponsors four academies. IES, another Swedish chain, has a contract to run Breckland Free School in Suffolk. Two of the leading US for-profit chains, Mosaica and K12, have been approved by the DfE as "lead sponsors' of academies.

To have destroyed so much of the postwar education consensus in three years is an impressive achievement. It invites the question: would a Labour government elected in 2015 pursue progressive educational goals with similar single-minded determination? The Tories have followed Milton Friedman's advice to use a crisis – in this case the financial crisis – as an opportunity for rapid and radical change. And yet, judged against the fundamental strategic objective of having secured by 2015 at least a substantial bridgehead into the state school system by private companies running schools for profit – in David Harvey's terms, an enclosure of the commons, accumulation by dispossession – Michael Gove's counter-revolution has failed. According to Friedman, 'a new administration has some six to nine months in which to achieve major changes' (quoted in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* 2007, 7). But it turns out that the privatisation of the school system is a much longer and more difficult task, partly because it would be electorally a vote-loser, partly because it is uncertain whether it would in fact be sufficiently profitable. In contrast to the school system, privatisation of the NHS has proceeded much further: in many ways it is less visible, less tangibly local, less accessible to opposition, than for-profit takeover of a local school; and it has proved very attractive to large companies because the profits are assured and large-scale. So an incoming Labour government in 2015 would not have to deal with an entrenched private schools-for-profit sector. What it would have to deal with as a fundamental issue is the role of local authorities and their relationship with schools.

The changing role of local authorities under the Coalition
The roles that the Coalition government has envisaged for local authorities were spelled out in the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*. They would have

'a strong strategic role as champions for parents, families and vulnerable pupils. They will promote educational excellence by ensuring a good supply of high quality places, coordinating admissions and developing their school improvement strategies to support local schools.' (DfE 2010, para 16)

Local authorities have generally retained their role in coordinating admissions, though this can mean little more than acting as an administrative clearing-house. Their capacity to ensure a good supply of high quality school places is limited both by lack of funding and by their lack of power to force academies to expand. The two key issues I want to take up are 'school improvement' and the notion of 'champions'. First, school improvement.

'School improvement'
According to the White Paper, 'it should be clear that the primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools' (para. 22) and that 'our aim should be to create a school system which is more effectively self-improving' (para. 7.4). The perspective of a self-improving school system based on school-to-school support in which local authorities play only a marginal role has been advocated by a number of influential academics who are close to government, most notably by David Hargreaves in a number of publications for what is now called the National College for Teaching and Leadership (Hargreaves 2010; 2011; 2012).

  Schools have been involved in local networks for mutual support for many years. But the decline in the capacity of local authorities to directly support schools, coupled with the increased pressure on schools to raise attainment or at least maintain standards (particularly with the advent of forced academisation and the

replacement of the Ofsted criterion of 'satisfactory' by 'requiring improvement', which has put thousands more schools at risk of intervention), has led to a qualitative growth of collaboration among schools, ranging from *ad hoc* temporary support (perhaps through permanent new school support alliances) to permanent collaborative structures such as federations. This growth in collaboration has an ambivalent political character. On the one hand, it is a positive development based on a commitment to the wider community of schools – 'collective moral purpose' is the common phrase – rather than just individual competition. On the other hand, it tends to be entirely subject to and limited by the government's school improvement agenda, and may take the form of forced collaboration as a result of a school being taken over as a forced academy by an existing academy.

  But the main practical problem with a self-improving school system is that support tends to be patchy and uneven. There are three reasons. One, as Ron Glatter suggests, is the countervailing pressure of competition.

> 'Considerable scepticism should therefore greet attempts to elaborate such laissez-faire approaches, for example David Hargreaves's concept of a "self-improving school system" which is being promoted by the National College for School Leadership, now an executive agency of the Department for Education. As a major OECD review of over 200 studies on introducing markets in school education pointed out, collaboration can be a fragile process in a competitive climate: "[R]esearch from different contexts suggests that cooperation is a vulnerable strategy and requires continuous mutual agreement. Competitive behaviour can be decided on by an individual school and has a tendency to spread with time".' (Glatter 2012, 413-4)

Another reason is the shortage of capacity among schools to offer support to other schools because they are under such pressure themselves to maintain and improve their performance and devoting resources to other schools may put them at risk. But there is also a fundamental design flaw in a self-improving school system: the absence of a local authority capable of identifying and coordinating need and available expertise in the schools.

Present government policy places local authorities in an impossible situation. The lethal cuts in their central support teams mean that local authorities no longer have the capacity to provide much support to schools directly and are largely reliant on brokering support for schools. Yet, extraordinarily, local authorities are held responsible by Ofsted for all schools in their area, including academies and free schools.

> 'Ofsted will inspect the effectiveness of local authority education functions in promoting improvement, high standards and the fulfilment of educational potential of children and young people in schools.' (Ofsted 2013, 11)

The Framework is explicit that this responsibility is not restricted to maintained schools: it covers 'supporting and challenging educational provision in a local authority area' (7). (It has been strongly criticised by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers: SOLACE 2013).

In addition to the compulsion from Ofsted, the large majority of local authorities have been reluctant to abandon involvement in their local school system for other reasons: a commitment to the idea of a local schools system which is more than a fragmented aggregation of schools, the desire to link schools to other services and policies of the council, such as social services and safeguarding

or economic development, and a sense of local civic identity.

A new partnership between schools and local authorities
Many local authorities have responded to the new situation by
constructing a new partnership with local schools which is a new
departure in two fundamental respects. First, it is designed to
include all the schools in their area, including academies and free
schools. This new partnership strategy is based on one positive
basic principle: that there is such a thing as a local school system
which is more than an aggregation of local schools and which is
worth defending. Therefore there needs to be a coordination of
provision, including academies and free schools, in the local area
covered by the local authority, as against fragmentation. The
second innovatory principle is much more contentious. These new
partnerships are under the control of headteachers, not the local
authority. The local authority is a participant but in a non-voting
capacity (similar to Schools Forums).

  Two recent research-based studies, one published by the
Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS 2012;
Crossley-Holland 2012), the other by the DfE in association with
the Local Government Association (Parish *et al* 2012), contain
surveys of a number of authorities which have put this new model
in place. A further case in point, not in these reports but typical of
them, is Liverpool. In 2012 the Liverpool Learning Partnership was
initiated, designed to bring together all the headteachers in the city
in a new partnership with the local authority but which is clearly
controlled by the headteachers. In July 2013 *From Better to Best*,
the report of the Mayor of Liverpool's Education Commission,
which was chaired by Estelle Morris, was published. The first
recommendation of the report, which is endorsed by the city's
headteachers, is that the 'Liverpool Learning Partnership should be

acknowledged as the lead agency in the development of the strategic vision for education in the city.' (51)

  This is a radical new development. Of course it has long been the case that headteachers, not local authorities, have exercised the power at individual school level. But this is the first time in the nearly a century and a half history of the local authority system that headteachers have been invited to exercise collective control over education policy at authority-wide level. It raises two fundamental questions of education policy at the local level. One is, who should be involved in making local education policy and what influence should they have? The other is, what should local education policy comprise? In short, leadership by who, and leadership for what?

Who should be involved in making local education policy and what influence should they have?

In the new partnerships power lies almost entirely with the headteachers not with the local authority. Decisions are taken by a representative board of heads with one or two local authority representatives (perhaps the Cabinet member for education and a senior officer) present in a non-voting capacity. The question of educational principle is this: why should the development of the strategic vision for education in a local authority be the responsibility principally and almost exclusively of headteachers? What should be the legitimate roles in policy decision-making in the local school system of elected local government and of parents and other stakeholders in the community?

The roles of parents and communities

The new partnerships described in the ADCS and Parish *et al* reports, and those (from my own research) in Liverpool, Bradford and Birmingham, all exclude representatives of parents, teachers

and other school staff, local communities, and even school governors. Instead, both reports endorse the 2010 White Paper's conception that 'local authorities have an indispensable role to play as champions of children and parents' (DfE 2010, 34). The term 'champion' in this discourse signifies that the role of the local authority is to speak and act on behalf of children, parents – and communities – but not to enable them to speak and participate in decision-making for themselves. Parents and other key stakeholders are excluded from the partnership, the key local site where policy is discussed and decided. Exploiting democratic legitimacy has only a vacuous rhetorical force in the absence of actual representation of democratically expressed views. The new partnership is a closed managerialist network. The reason is that wider participation – by parents for example – would open the possibility of the partnership becoming a contested space in which managerial and state interests are challenged, putting at risk the partnership project of managing 'school improvement' on behalf of government.

What is at stake here is the relationship between representative democracy and participatory democracy, and specifically fundamental and contested issues of democratic rights in local education policy-making at the authority-wide level, revolving around the politics of voice and the politics of knowledge: whose voices, whose knowledge and what kinds of knowledge count in educational governance.

What should local education policy comprise? Leadership for what?

I turn now from the question of democracy raised by the new partnerships to that of the educational policies that they promote. The term 'vision' frequently occurs in official policy documents about the new role of local authorities. The ADCS report

recommends seven key features of the effective future local authority. First is 'An inspiring and inspirational vision and values for the local authority area developed with schools…' (Crossley-Holland 2012 14). Liverpool's Education Commission report is typical of local authority new partnership documents: 'Education should be built on a strong strategic vision for young people and education in the city.' (Mayor of Liverpool's Education Commission 2013, 35)

  The question is what sort of 'vision'? The crucial divide is whether the new partnerships restrict themselves to being local relays of the government's performance agenda or attempt to develop and promote a vision and policies for their local school system that go beyond, and put into question, neo-liberal education policy. The ADCS's seven features of effective local authorities essentially accept, and are restricted to, 'official' school improvement and this is typical of its case study local authorities. In some local authority documents there are indications of two additional elements, which can be categorised as enrichment and employability. So, for example, the Liverpool report speaks of an 'Enhanced Curriculum' supported by 'a Pupil Promise which sets out the learning experiences and opportunities the city's schools will offer its pupils' and which 'should go beyond the national curriculum entitlement…' (46). It also states that the curriculum should link to the economic regeneration of the city.' (35).

  What is absent is any notion of critical education. I will return to this point, but just to give an example: education for employability can include fostering a critical understanding of the world of work, or it can be in Patricia McCafferty's words (2010, 541), 'the increasingly pervasive embedding of rhetoric and practices of 'enterprising education' as 'an aspect of a 'neoliberal pedagogy'.

We don't yet have any detailed research-based evidence of the policies pursued by the new partnerships, nor of the extent to which headteachers in the new partnerships actually exercise leadership. The ADCS report *The future role of the local authority in education* (Crossley-Holland 2012, 15) urges local authorities, though they lack power, to 'Maximise use of influence to shape the system'. But we don't have evidence of the extent to which local authorities are able to exercise influence over partnership policy decisions, or whether, even if they can, their 'vision' amounts to much more than a lowest common denominator agreement to coordinate support for schools in categories or 'at risk'.

The new partnerships in the local government context
To understand the nature of these new school-local authority partnerships it is useful to situate them in the wider context of developments and debates in the field of local governance theory and policy. The new local education partnerships represent a form of network governance. According to Janet Newman (2004, 71), 'Governance theory starts from the proposition that we are witnessing a shift from government (through direct control) to governance (through steering, influencing, and collaborating with multiple actors in a dispersed system).' Networks 'are the analytic heart of the notion of governance in the study of public administration.' (Rhodes 2000, 60, quoted in Davies 2011, 11). The typical pattern is of horizontal network governance relationships being subordinated to hierarchical control by the state, whether acting within the network or regulating it externally (Davies 2011, 59-60).

In the case of the new education partnerships, control is exercised largely externally by government through the coercive power of the performativity regime, policed by the regulative powers of Ofsted

and the DfE and the threat of forced takeover by academy sponsors. However, a recent change in Ofsted gives it a new permanent interventionist role in the new local partnerships by making senior HMIs each proactively responsible for one or several local authorities. The combination of the responsibility of local authorities for school improvement in all the local schools and Ofsted's power to inspect local authorities, together with the well-known pressures they impose on schools, will ensure that the education partnership network is predominantly if not exclusively an instrument and relay of the government's performance agenda through a process of what Bob Jessop calls 'regulated self-regulation' (Jessop 2002, 199).

  The coerced acquiescence of local authorities is part of a wider change in the role of local government. According to Colin Copus (2013, 393):

> 'Encouraging public service provision through complex networks has enabled central government to corrode the governing capacity of local government to such an extent that we are left wondering: do we still need elected local government?'

Councils have abandoned their political governing role and now focus just on service delivery, determined by government targets and savagely reduced budgets.

> 'The tendency for councillors to focus on service provision rather than governing (highlights the tensions between the technocratic (managerial) processes and forces and the counteracting political elements. It also highlights the strength of connection between local government as a service-orientated body rather than a governing institution.' (Copus 2013, 396)

What will Labour do?

I have sketched the situation of local school systems which a Labour government would be faced with if it were elected in 2015. What do we know up to now of the response of the Labour leadership?

 First, a Labour government would continue with the cuts in local council budgets. Ed Miliband, speaking at Labour's National Policy Forum in Birmingham on 22 June 2013, stressed that 'our starting point for 2015-16 is that we won't be able to reverse the cuts in day to day, current spending unless it is fully funded from savings elsewhere or extra revenue, not from more borrowing.' (quoted on LabourList website)

 But the cuts are not the only Coalition policy that Labour would retain. Academies and free schools, the spearhead of the Tories' neoliberal offensive, would continue to exist under a Labour government, as advocated by Lord Adonis, an uncritical supporter of Gove's policy (Adonis 2012), even though there is no evidence that academies do better than local authority schools if you compare like with like (see for example Wrigley and Kalambouka 2012). The most recent statement by Stephen Twigg, Labour's shadow secretary of state for education, is 'No School Left Behind', his speech at the RSA on 17 June 2013.

> 'We need to demonstrate that we put high school standards over and above any dogma regarding school structures. If sponsored academy status is the best solution for a failing school, it should happen.'

Twigg continued:

> 'there will be no bias for or against a school type – so new academies, new maintained schools, new trust schools – all options.'

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Free schools will also continue, but rebranded as 'a parent-academy programme to allow parent groups to set up new schools' (Steve Reed MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Education Committee, *Progress Online*, 22 August 2013).

Twigg has made a number of vague statements about the role of local authorities in school improvement but without specifying what powers they would have.

> 'We need stronger local oversight for all schools so that struggling schools are spotted much sooner, local support is on hand to drive up standards, and schools have a clear relationship with their community.…we will ensure that every school plays its part to raise standards across their area and meet the needs of their community. Schools working in collaboration. A proven recipe for success. Networked schools in a networked world. No school left behind.' (RSA speech)

Quotable soundbites, but how will it be ensured that 'local support is on hand' and that 'every school plays its part'? Twigg has asked David Blunkett, education secretary 1997-2001 during the Blair government, to lead a review into 'the local oversight of schools', looking at the role of the local authority, when presumably this will be clarified.

One positive step Labour has announced is to allow local authorities to intervene in academies and free schools. According to Reed,

> 'It is critical that we are tough with schools that are failing their pupils – so Labour would introduce new powers to allow local authorities to issue notices to improve for all

schools, including free schools and academies. This will reintroduce local democratic accountability in place of the Tories' centralisation of control in Whitehall' (*ProgressOnline* 22/8/13)

In his chapter in the *Purple Book*, published by Progress in 2012, and disingenuously entitled 'Letting the people decide: redistributing power and renewing democracy', Twigg advocated more power to scrutiny committees, but the idea has not resurfaced since.

> 'Progressives should campaign for local authorities to have more power to scrutinise local providers both within the public and private sector. Councillors should have the legal power to insist bodies and companies give information to scrutiny committees and attend scrutiny meetings.' (Twigg 2012, 277)

Twigg has also made a number of statements on community empowerment, in his 2013 RSA speech:

> '…we will deliver a radical devolution of power from Whitehall. It is not feasible, nor is it desirable, for thousands of schools to be accountable only to the Secretary of State. Local communities will have a greater say about education in their area.'

In an email to *LabourList* on 17 June 2013 Twigg put it more bluntly: 'Key decisions about schooling should be taken in the community.' However, and typically, he did not specify what decisions or how communities would be able to take them.

Several pro-Labour education campaign groups have sought to influence Labour policy as the general election approaches. A

comprehensive set of policy proposals was published in 2013 by CASE (the Campaign for State Education), supported by, among others, the SEA (the Socialist Educational Association) and the journal *Forum*, under the title *A Better Future for Our Schools* (available on the CASE website). It rightly notes that 'Opportunities for local communities to have any influence over their local school system are being diminished and decision-making is being concentrated in the DfE.' and asks 'How can we make Education accountable to local communities?' Its answer is to

> 'Establish clear responsibilities for local authorities in planning, commissioning and monitoring of all schools in their area; Ensure that local communities are empowered to play an active role in the planning, commissioning and monitoring of Education provision in their area.'

These proposals are no more specific, and go no further, than those of Twigg. And, like Twigg, and perhaps as a concession in the hope of influencing him on other issues, the CASE manifesto accepts the continuance of academies and, worse, sponsor chains. It says, 'Place all publicly funded schools within a common administrative and legal framework'. This might be interpreted as meaning that academies and free schools would be fully integrated into the local authority system. But they can't be as long as they are owned and controlled by private sponsors, and the following sentence makes clear that sponsors would still remain with only one limited new constraint:

> 'Require all state funded schools and any linked trusts and sponsors, the DfE and all government agencies to be accountable for their decisions and for the use of public money by complying with freedom of information and publishing data of all kinds.'

Richard Hatcher

Towards a democratic participatory local school system

We are at a critical time. As Goveism becomes increasingly discredited and the general election in 2015 draws nearer, there is a growing sense that we need to seize the opportunity to not just critique the education policies of the present government and its New Labour predecessor but to develop and discuss what an alternative might look like. But there is also a growing concern that the Labour leadership is failing to take advantage of this opportunity by refusing to put forward a coherent and radical set of policies or to engage in serious public and professional debate about alternatives and that, if elected in 2015, it will content itself with limited reforms which ameliorate some of the worst Coalition policies while leaving key elements of Goveism intact.

Finland: empowered local authorities in partnership with schools

Finland is widely regarded on the left as perhaps the most successful progressive school system today. As Andy Hargreaves pointed out in his research report on *School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland* (Hargreaves *et al* 2007), 'One of the main features of educational leadership in Finland, (similar to other Nordic countries following decentralisation) is the strong role played by local municipalities.' Hargreaves' report is worth quoting because it offers a model of how empowered local government and schools can work together.

> 'The more than four hundred municipalities (or, in the case of upper secondary vocational education, their consortia) are the owners of the majority of schools, they finance their schools (to a significant degree from their own revenues) and they are the employers of teachers (including school leaders). Furthermore […] they also play a key role in curriculum planning and development.' (28)

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'…principals are responsible for their own schools but also for their districts, and […] there is shared management and supervision as well as evaluation and development of education planning. […] These reforms are seen as a way to align schools and municipalities to think systemically with the key objective of promoting a common schooling vision and a united school system.' (5)

'Helsinki, for example, is setting a new vision for 2012 (with benchmarks after three years) with every school discussing what the vision along with desired objectives might mean for them.' (13)

'Redistributing leadership within the municipality, between municipal authorities and schools, between schools and within schools, all at the same time, significantly changes the way leadership functions throughout the local system. […] In this new web of horizontal and vertical interdependence, new behaviours also emerge. Principals start to consider and address broader community needs rather than competitively defending the interests of their own organisation.' (28)

The re-creation of an all-inclusive local school system

Finland provides an example of a national system of inclusive local school systems governed by empowered local authorities in partnership with schools. A similar approach in England would require three major changes of national government policy. (Of course, these are not the only changes that a Labour government should make.)

First, the re-creation of fully inclusive local systems of state-funded schools by the re-integration of academies and the integration of free schools, and an end to private sponsor chains. No state-funded schools should be 'sponsored' or controlled by

private organisations. (This is not intended to affect denominational schools, which is a separate argument.) David Wolfe, the education legal expert, has demonstrated that funding agreements can be overridden (Wolfe 2013). Governing bodies of schools which were previously academies should be re-formed to ensure that they have the same composition as maintained schools. If a school wants to continue a partnership with an ex-sponsor, as with any external organisation, it should be able to do so, but this does not require any power to be handed over to it from the reconstituted governing body – and let's see how many of these millionaires and over-paid officials who run chains of academies retain their enthusiasm for education when they are asked to support schools but not control them!

Second, local authorities need power and resources. The most obvious examples are the control of admissions policy and the provision of school places. But they also need the capacity in terms of powers and resources to support schools in addressing problems and to intervene effectively in schools which are under-performing, principally by initiating, coordinating and funding collaborative school partnerships for improvement with more successful schools.

They also need the capacity to promote progressive pedagogic and curriculum innovation. Local authorities have to be able to restrict the exercise of school autonomy if it conflicts with wider community interests in social justice – by for example pursuing polices which serve to disadvantage other schools – through dialogue if possible but with reserve powers if necessary. And of course a re-empowered local authority requires an end to the massive cuts imposed by central government.

And third, local school systems need freeing from the tyranny of

Ofsted, which needs replacing by a rigorous and supportive inspection system, perhaps of headteachers and local authority officers with external moderation, as an integral element of an authority-wide 'school improvement' strategy.

'School improvement' is now largely the responsibility of the schools themselves, supporting each other when needed. But without central coordination it can be patchy, uneven. Some schools are left behind. So there is a vital role for the local authority in identifying schools which need additional support, coordinating provision, and providing direction.

But the role of the local authority has to go beyond supporting schools in difficulties and raising test and exam scores to promoting a local vision for all schools, developed in a dialogue with schools and communities. An education that inspires children and young people with a love of learning and enables them to gain the knowledge, skills and values to make the world a better place, and can effectively challenge the massive social inequalities in the school system. There is a history of local authorities playing an important role of visionary educational leadership: Alec Clegg in the West Riding 1945-74, a pioneer of creative child-centred teaching and the role of the arts; Leicestershire under Stewart Mason from the late 1950s through to the 1970s, a pioneer of comprehensive schools with progressive teaching and internal democratic regimes; the ILEA from 1965-1990 developing policies to tackle inequalities of 'race' and gender; Birmingham's enriched experiential curriculum under Tim Brighouse 1993-2002.

Today's context requires both building on and radicalising this tradition. Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2011) in their book *Radical Education and the Common School: A democratic*

alternative, say that

> 'The radical traditions with which we identify are those which reject the presumptions and aspirations not just of neoliberal forms of capitalism, but much of what capitalism itself stands for… We would wish to support radical approaches to practice that […] call into question the moral and existential basis of acquisitive consumerism and economism…' (151)

They envisage the role of the local authority 'as a leader and facilitator of the development of a local educational project, a shared and democratic exploration of the meaning and practice of education and the potential of the school.' (125) They propose four imperatives as the basis of the curriculum.

> 'The first is a focus on the purposes of education, organising the curriculum around that which is necessary for a sustainable, flourishing and democratic way of life. The second has to do with equipping young people and adults with the desire and capacity to seriously and critically interrogate what is given and co-construct a knowledge that assists us in leading good and joyful lives together. The third argues that while knowledge must transcend the local, it must, nonetheless, start with the cultures, concerns and hopes of the communities that the school serves.' (81)

Fourth is a curriculum that emphasises connectedness.

  For Fielding and Moss, 'the development of radical education and the common school needs to go hand-in-hand with the renewal and development of democratic local government, which in our view has to include an active and innovative role in education.' (127) The democratisation of local government in England requires not

only a new partnership with schools in which the local authority plays a leading role in service provision, it also requires, as Colin Copus argues, a revival of the democratic role of local councils, in terms both of representative and participatory democracy. Councils need

> '…to move beyond a focus solely on public services to a role which stresses the capacity of local government to control, shape and direct the local political environment and the local state (Cockburn 1977). To do that local government has to be conceptualised as having a governing role within the overall political system. That role requires debates about local government to stress the political and governing elements rather than service provision, so that the development of a normative model of local government democracy is one which sees citizens as political actors (passive or active) and links this to the governing, policy-development and representative role of local government. […]
>
> 'The political aspect of local government however, extends beyond the frontiers of representative democracy and the processes associated with it into a more comprehensive democratic contribution. Local government provides a framework within which greater variety of policy and political contributions can be made – both representative and participatory in nature.' (Copus 2013, 394)

  The basic principle is this: every citizen has a stake in, and therefore should have a say in, their local school system as well as their local school. Potentially the most powerful source of support at the local level for more progressive and egalitarian education policies by schools and local authorities is pressure for them from parents and communities, and the most effective strategy for developing and mobilising it is their participation in local education

policy-making, but this is precisely what is ruled out by their deliberate exclusion by headteachers and local authorities from the new managerial partnerships they are currently constructing. As Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (2009) argue, in 'a resilient social democracy' (107):

> 'Community organizing in education goes far beyond parent involvement and its traditional one-on-one deals between individual parents and the educators who serve their children. It is about mobilizing entire communities and public networks to agitate for significant reform. When fully realized, it is about changing the power dynamics of an entire city by creating new civic capacity for previously disenfranchised populations.' (59)

There is a rich tradition of community organising for education in the US: see the examples in Hargreaves and Shirley's book (60-62) and also in books by Jean Anyon (2005) and Pauline Lipman (2011). The closest example in England in the last decade is local anti-academy campaigns. But campaigns are generally temporary. They need to be complemented by institutional forms which enable permanent popular participation. I would suggest there are three:

- Opening up the authority-wide Partnerships to popular participation

- The creation of Local Education Forums

- Democratisation of the structures and procedures of the local authority

Participation in the Partnership

The authority-wide Partnerships between schools – actually, headteachers – and local authorities need to be opened up to

participation by parents, teachers, support staff, other professionals, school governors, and members and representatives of the local community, so they can come together to discuss and take positions on key issues of education policy and practice. This could take a number of forms: perhaps a public authority-wide Education Forum which elected representatives to the Partnership board. This would be a radical democratic innovation, though it would be the logic of the aspirations that Stephen Twigg has voiced.

One small step in this direction is Bradford's Public Forum for Education. This is an open forum meeting five times a year where everyone, including parents and carers, young people and professionals, is welcome to come along and contribute. Senior councillors and officers join the debates, listen to views, and report back to the Forum what action they have taken as a result. The next step towards democratisation would be to link the Forum structurally, through elected representatives, to Bradford's Education Improvement Strategic Board, which was established to oversee the development and implementation of the Council's policies and comprises councillors, officers, headteachers and governors and the Leader of the Council as chair.

Local Education Forums
Increasingly local school systems are being organised into groups of schools, in clusters and networks, cooperating together to serve a local area, perhaps as small as a neighbourhood, perhaps the size of a town. There needs to be a body – we can call it a Local Education Forum – which brings together parents, local residents and community organisations, together with staff and school students. Its purposes would be two-fold. One, to harness the energy and expertise and enthusiasm of the community to enrich learning in the local schools and build the culture of a local learning

community. Two, to enable the community, as a stakeholder, to participate in local education policy-making along with the professionals. It would also elect representatives to the authority-wide Partnership.

Democratisation of the structures and procedures of the local authority

Public participation in discussion of education policy is meaningless without the ability to influence local authority policy. The local authority would need to resource, actively promote, and engage with the Forums. But the existing structures and processes of local government – the Cabinet and Scrutiny system – also need to be opened up to popular and professional participation. At present they are largely immune to any direct involvement by headteachers, teachers and governors, let alone parents and other citizens. There are two key measures needed to democratise the present structures. First, the Education Scrutiny Committee should be opened up to representation and input from the Partnership and from the Local Education Forums.

Second the local council should establish an Education Committee. The Cabinet system which replaced Council Committees was introduced into local government by Blair in 1997 in order to centralise power and enable faster decision-making. The result has been a profound democratic deficit as power is monopolised by a small minority of councillors. The previous Committee system – which is still legal and which some councils still use – has two major advantages. First, it means that far more councillors are involved in policy-making. At present, Cabinet members responsible for service areas have no committee of colleagues to work with, leaving them isolated and too dependent on officers. Second, and crucial from the point of view of

participatory democracy, council committees can co-opt lay members onto the committees and sub-committees. This was common practice among especially the more radical Labour Councils in the 1970s and 80s, where the co-opted members were often elected by various groups as their representatives, with voice though without vote. It was an important factor in the effectiveness of these Councils in tackling issues of gender and ethnic equality. This is exactly what is needed today to tackle the key issues that councils face in education. These committees could be set up now, even with the Cabinet system in place. There is nothing to stop the Cabinet member for education from setting up an advisory committee with other councillors on it and inviting the local education Partnership to elect representatives to it.

 Of course, democratic participation in the formation of local authority policy without the ability to translate policy from the local authority level to the school level, and to intervene on key issues if dialogue fails, is pointless. It has to be recognised that for the schools this is a very sensitive and contentious issue. The existing and emerging Partnership model is controlled by headteachers. Why should they agree to handing power back to the local authority, and in particular one which is itself subject to popular participation and pressure? Schools may be reluctant to concede local authority influence over anything more than admissions policy and the provision of school places. The only way that schools could be persuaded to accept this new settlement is if in return they felt confident that they could have a meaningful influence in co-constructing local authority policy, through the Partnership, through a participative Education Committee (Bradford's Strategic Education Board is a step in that direction) and through a reconstructed Scrutiny Committee.

 Public participation in policy-making in local schools systems does not mean intervening in issues which are properly matters of professional judgement. Nor does it imply that public views are inevitably progressive. In both cases it is a question of deliberation and negotiation between, and among, public and professionals, and the mobilisation of collective popular and professional support for progressive policies.

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