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**Learning From the Past:
Crisis and 'Re-invention' in the Making (and language) of Social Policy**

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Introduction

There has been a strong trajectory of work in the making of social policy that has focussed on the movement of ideas to inform policy from one place to another. In particular 'policy transfer' and 'policy learning' give us the tools to examine the way that social policy making is in many ways about the search for appropriate policy knowledge, as means of dealing with the increasing globalisation of policy making and the perceived 'need' on the part of policy makers to find a 'quick fix' to realise their policy goals. This has given us a much repeated mantra that there is 'nothing new under the sun' as the language and metaphors of policy are repeated around the globe.

One of the most identifiable features of this phenomenon over the past twenty years has been the development of the evidence movement. We are all familiar with evidence-based policy and indeed with evidence based practice as policy is played out in the contexts of social policy practice in schools and social work departments. It is argued here and elsewhere (Hulme 2006, Hulme and Hulme 2008) that the evidence movement is linked very much to the politics of the market and in many ways replicates its modes of operation. Its contracted nature with anointed and favoured research centres and think tanks have produced a generic market oriented language of policy with a global reach: the knowledge economy, global competitiveness, and notions of 'best practice' and effective practice permeated education policy throughout the world and are invariably linked to market reform.

In the wake of the 2008 crash, we find ourselves in a timely moment to undertake the re-examination of the relationship between evidence and policy as the global financial crisis begins to challenge the previously 'programmed' links between the definitions of problems and the established responses to them available to policy makers in social policy. It is difficult at this stage to analyse the extent of fundamental policy change through anything other than the metaphors of policy. However, it is argued here that the crash has inflicted 'conceptual damage' to the discourses that had formed a firm link between the market and education policy for 20 years. The language of the market is beginning to recede from education policy. In its stead there is evidence of a use of much older metaphors, recalling responses to earlier systemic crises.

Do the newly re-invented metaphors of social and education policy such as the 'global new deal', 'connectedness and fairness', indicate the breaking of the link

between a market oriented evidence movement and the point the way to a deeper more democratic and participative form of policy learning?

Can some older notions of policy be usefully re-learned for our changed circumstances? Loose coupling (Cuban 1988) of policy, evidence and knowledge and the language with which it is presented?

Systemic Crises and Policy Change: Learning and 'Unlearning'

Models of policy that have conceived of movement: around the globe or across time have been very closely associated with a notion of fundamental crisis producing major policy change. The policy transfer literature in the mid 1990s was developed in part in the context of Colin Hay's 1996 work on the state in crisis.

For Hay, Fundamental change, in politics and social policy is premised on a sense of 'systemic crisis'¹ which challenges the political economic and social parameters of policy making. The wide ranging platform of neo-liberal market reforms pursued by Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s and to a large extent re-moulded and continued by New Labour, can be seen to have their origins in the challenges to the British state presented by the movements in the global economy, precipitated by the oil crisis of the mid 1970s.

In the late 70's early 80's there was of course a sense of economic crisis, a perception of inadequacy in terms of existing policy knowledge combined with the rise of new ideological coalitions. The sense of 'economic' crisis at this time became 'unstoppable' when both new problems such as skills shortages and old ones such as funding the NHS, were perceived to be beyond the reach of established policy solutions such as neo-Keynesian intervention and corporatist state bargaining. Policy makers did not have readily made responses. Almost simultaneously, the political balance of forces was disturbed in the rise of the 'New Right' and the Conservative victory in the UK in 1979, and the Republicans in the US in 1980. These shifts challenged the fundamental core values of old policy elites and created spaces for new intellectual leadership from coalitions of interest on the right of politics led by new right policy entrepreneurs such as Hayek and Friedman.

Those of us who attempted to extend the idea of policy transfer as a model of policy making drew on the concept of policy learning in characterising policy change in response to crisis. In short, departure from an existing policy requires learning on the part of policy makers or, 'the penetration of political objectives and programmes by new knowledge' (Haas, 1990: 316)². Thus, policy -oriented' learning is primarily about the use of evidence and policy knowledge to define political interests and to refine the strategic direction of change.

Such knowledge and evidence is provided by epistemic communities, which acts as a 'trigger for learning' and catalyst for change in helping to break policy makers' habits and their tendency to look for continuity and stability in policy. Ernst Haas (1990: 41)³ defines them as groups of professionals 'usually recruited from several disciplines', linked by specialist knowledge and acting as a conduit for that knowledge in the service of policy makers. They may 'share a common causal model and set of beliefs' such as the neo-liberal think tanks in the 1980s (e.g.

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Institute for Economic Affairs, The Social Market Foundation and the Heritage Foundation) but can also be compared to a community of scientists 'like biologists' than to groups bound together by ideological principles.

Policy transfer was then the enactment of policy learning. The moving of ideas and structures of policy from one place to another in the service of informing new policy. In the light of the current comparable but far deeper 'crisis now facing policy makers at national, international and global levels with the major systemic disruption to financial markets and the consequently to the social and political markets that maintain public services and given time to reflect on the patterns of social policy making, it might have been more effective to introduce the notion of 'unlearning' or policy amnesia.

To refer very briefly to the Thatcherite reform of the 80s, the epistemic communities around the conservative governments spent much time uncoupling the previously programmed responses of government to social and political problems. The new knowledge supplied was not very new at all, recalling and reconstituting economic and social doctrines from the 1930s and the nineteenth century.

The challenge for social policy makers is to 'unlearn' the programmed market oriented responses. Despite the iterative nature of crisis and re-invention, there are of course key differences. The absence of a new political and intellectual leadership, even one pedalling very old ideas. A further difference is the embeddedness of the evidence movement for policy makers and practitioners.

The evidence movement, uncertainty and education after the economic crisis

The following examines the changing relationship between evidence, policy and practice in education. It is a timely moment to undertake this task as the global financial crisis begins to challenge the previously 'programmed' links between the definitions of problems and the established responses to them available to policy makers in education.

The development of evidence-informed policy in education in the UK is well documented. It has its roots in the marketisation of public services in the 1980s. Its rhetoric about responsiveness to 'relevant', practice-oriented research grew from the managerialist reforms of the Conservatives with its attendant emphasis on 'outcomes' as indicators of efficiency and effectiveness in response to the 'policy crisis' but was developed and implemented by the New Labour government as an extension of its management of public sector markets. It is a prime example of reinvented policy, partially transferred from the past and selectively blended with elements of practice from the USA and from the health sector.

The evidence-based movement that has produced policy such as 'what works' and 'best practice' involves a rejection of older forms of 'old school' decision-making based on anecdotal professional experience, and a view of medicine and in turn education as a life long, problem solving process involving responsiveness to practice-related research and regulated by performative managerial technologies. It is founded on the notion that policy and practice should be based on the development of US style-quantitative data bases.

The move towards evidence-based policy development in the UK, set out in the 1999 White Paper *Modernising Government*, was an integral aspect of New Labour's agenda for change. The White Paper emphasised that government departments

'must produce policies that really deal with problems, that are forward-looking and shaped by evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms'(Greenhalgh and Russell, 2005:35).

However, this was never an open ended notion of 'policy learning' by looking for the most rigorous evidence. In a much cited quotation Keynes claimed, 'There is nothing a government hates more than to be well informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult' (cited in Solesbury, 2001:7). Referring to evidence based practice (EBP) as 'games of truth', McCormack (2006:89) argues 'some of these games are driven by governments under the guise of greater effectiveness, but in reality are more to do with efficiency, risk minimisation, control of the professions and centralisation of decision making'. Thus ensuring that policy knowledge is about sustaining quasi markets.

The evidence movement draws on the rationalist synoptic ideal of policy making offered by Lindblom and Simon in the 1960s, and Hecllo in the 1970s trajectory. Schwandt (2005:95) suggests, 'There is a strong tendency for evidence-based approaches to social practices to view these practices as imperfect devices for the delivering social services. Practices are regarded as in need of repair by evaluation (and research) that can deliver the necessary science-based solution to the problems of practice'. As Parsons (2002:43) explains, 'Evidence is portrayed essentially as a problem of how knowledge can be utilised and managed'. More than this, however, EBP is underpinned by a particular view of knowledge. Lomas et al (2005:3) suggest, 'Evidence is knowledge that is explicit (codified and propositional), systemic (uses transparent and explicit methods for codifying) and replicable (using the same methods with the same samples will lead to the same results'. Again this is very much imbued with the logic of the market, evidence is a commodity, a product to deal with the problem of risk ensuring the strong link between what we had come to know as economic priority with social priority.

The evidence movement can be seen to represent an aspect of a 'global market' for policy knowledge (Deacon 2007, Evans 2004, Hulme 2006 Hulme and Hulme 2008). The development of the market for policy knowledge has witnessed the developing influence of policy think tanks (Stone 2004) international non- governmental organisations (EU 2007, OECD 2007, UNESCO 2006) and international research centres producing evidence to underpin 'policy learning'(Haas 1990) on the part of decision makers at international, and national levels. There has always been a 'loose coupling' between evidence and policy. The literature below highlights a movement in which highly selectively chosen evidence informs arguments for policy but not the making of decisions themselves.

The 'collective narratives' of evidence-informed and 'effective' policy have been generated by multiple research centres and international organisations and have consequently developed a global reach as decision maker at all levels have sought to minimise risk, increase efficiency and develop 'effective' techniques of public sector management. The 'global market' for policy knowledge replicates the structures of global political economy with its franchised research centres, offering 'bespoke' packages of cause and effect solutions to decision makers in western liberal democracies. This has often involved the advocacy of market-based solutions for public services (e.g. de-regulation, privatisation, new public management, public-private partnership). Ball has described this search for market oriented policy models as a ritual, a technique of government to reassure the public and the policy communities that the government is managing public services by drawing on stable, tried and tested techniques drawing on the expertise and methodologies of the private sector and global organisations such as the world bank.

However, the 'covering over' of uncertainty and unpredictability in policy making is no longer 're-assuring'. The market oriented staples of policy have been rendered unsafe in the global crisis. Instead, the language of much older 'interventionist' regimes has been recalled by Ministers. The Prime Minister recently heralded the need for a 'global new deal'.

Such changes may challenge the nature of evidence sought to inform policy and to underpin practice. The established model of evaluation of public services in order to produce a science-based, quantitatively measure, replicable, market-friendly solution may not be seen as risk free any longer.

From Government to Governance

The loose coupling of evidence and policy extends beyond the 'contracting out' of knowledge production to 'anointed' research centres, there is a concomitant focus within the evidence movement on how problems in practice can be 'repaired' (Schwandt 2005) through the management and 'utilisation' of 'replicable' professional knowledge.

Rather than a rational technocratic process of 'formulating' and 'delivering' referred to in policy documentation: a much more subtle form of self-regulatory governance is called up which resonates strongly in the evidence-informed discourses of professional practice, ranging from integrated working to 'new professionalism'. The evidence movement has helped to transform the business of managing global 'risk society' by developing powerful individualising and 'responsibilising' discourses across the public services. Governmentality studies (Dean 1999) suggest a view of power underpinning this trajectory, as 'guidance' or 'leading', a matter of 'giving shape' rather than overly determined implementation or delivery. In applying this model to the practice of teaching and related professional areas, this involves interrogation of new forms of visibility of teachers' work; new codes for knowledge production, new forms of classroom practice, and finally work on the self in creating the new professional identity of the 'evidence-informed teacher.'

The use of evidence in defining professional practice has ensured that establishing oneself as an evidence-informed 'best practitioner' involves the 'enfolding of authority' (Dean, 1996) wherein the responsibility for risk minimisation is transferred to from policy makers and those who inform their decisions to professionals, consumers, clients, service users.

The current thrust of evidence informed policy on professionalism, the move towards 'new professionalism', 'integrated professionalism' require a level of creativity and re-imagining which require a re-negotiation of the relations of partnership which have for so long been shaped by conceptions of the evidence-informed teacher.

Old and New Policy Metaphors

However it is possible to denote the looser coupling of market economic language and metaphors to education and social policy and the 'reinvention' of some very old language of crisis management. It is very tempting in sketching out these notes which may point to future work, to recall J. K. Galbraith's classic work on the 1929 crash. Galbraith noted the *Vision and Boundless Hope and Optimism* in policy makers responses to the catastrophic crisis of 1929. Perhaps the 'new

interventionism, called up by yesterday's 'national plan' in the legislative programme for the remainder of parliament is more expediency. Another re-incarnation of what Peter Taylor Gooby noted on Monday in referring to Healey's deal with the IMF in the late 70s as optimism in the face of 'hand to mouth crisis management'.

Despite this though, it is possible that the economizing of educational discourse may have reached its peak and rather like the economised evidence base that underpinned it, it may now look preposterous, bloated and bankrupt.

'*Effectiveness*'- I have already noted the challenge to notions of effectiveness that unpin the evidence movement. There are signs that this is penetrating the decision making sphere. The EBM invariably led to the quantification of education outcomes and its leading exponents were the aptly named Capita. Capita, had since 1998 been at the forefront of the 'national strategy' for effective education. Notably, this involved setting down the National literacy and numeracy strategy and providing very prescriptive teaching materials for its delivery. Over 300 million has been given to Capita over the last 3 years. Last week the government announced the severing of the link with Capita in education. Instead money will be given to schools and teachers and head teachers will have greater authority over its use on the national literacy and numeracy strategy.

What Works and Best Practice There may be evidence of a return to the language of professional autonomy, so absent from the discourses of EBP. In particular, the language of teacher's rights, have been used by government within the national plan. More subtly, notions of creativity which involve embedding reflective research and inquiry into teacher education and CPD at master's level have opened up that deeper and more reflexive notions of professionalism are being called up.

However, if this is happening at all, it is contended within the government's education epistemic communities. Michael Barber, expert partner at McKinsey and Company, trustee of National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts and Former Head of Tony Blair's Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, fought back for the EBP What Works approach in *the Guardian* on June 30 2009.

In what is surely a backlash against the new emphases, he writes:

We are developing a globally- comprehensive quantitative knowledge base.
We know what works- evidence informed, school- led innovation that leads to higher performance.

In an explosion of 'old metaphor' he argues that: What works has not been implemented because of the persistence of the

'Absurd view that because some things can't be measured, we should measure nothing.

There is a further 'persistence' of 'wrong' policies - protecting teachers 'rights' to 'teach as they wish in the citadel of their classroom' and the 'demonstrably 'false' view that 'creativity consists of each teacher making in up in the classroom'

Some of the staples of the global evidence movement are now rendered critical. '*Global Knowledge Economy*' and *Global Competitiveness* begins to look fantastic in the current economic conditions and the 'choices' that underpinned it may no longer be open to us. Even 'impact measures' with which we are so familiar in higher

education such as *value added* and *capital itself*, applied to *social capital* need to re-considered.

'New Old' Policy Metaphors

Two recent central government publications highlight the re-invention of a more hopeful and optimistic vision: K. MacLean (2009) *Public Service Reform. Making Government Work Better*, Cabinet Office and *Excellence and Fairness Report* (2009) HMSO Government Strategy Unit Homepage.

'*Excellence and Fairness*' develops the notion of '*new professionalism*' for '*all people who work in public services*'. It refers to a drive to "*unleash the creativity of those who work at the front line*" to work more effectively across professional boundaries. Does this denote a more holistic approach to policy on professional practice, one which is *connected* to contexts?

The McLean report identifies three 3 drivers for public service reform: Citizen empowerment, '*new professionalism*' and strategic leadership for government, iterating the new emphasis in the public service frontline. '*Public services need to provide everyone with the 'best first chance in life'*'. Can this mean that in order to be excellent *and* fair that we can all be '*best*' now?

The discourses of '*new professionalism*' embedded in build on earlier initiatives which are still being made and remade in education , notably *Every Child Matters*(2003) which require a greater connectedness and a more holistic approach to building new language and common understandings between professionals or indeed connecting institutions and individual professional actions. These initiatives, attended b y discourses such as '*distributed leadership*' workforce re-modelling require a greater connectedness but offer no means of delivering it. There is no market based evidence for this. Indeed, they run against the grain of the evidence based approaches that have defined and regulated professional action within profession specific silos for so long. Hammersley Fletcher and Adnett argue that schools and teachers are so used to imposed change that they are 'unsure how to respond when given a remit to think about their educational practice and performance in ways that are creative and educative.

It may be re-discovering hand to mouth crisis management language but there is a '*new-old*' emphasis in the policy rhetoric of New Labour since October 2008. The Prime Minister called for a '*global new deal*' in the wake of Obama's election in November and this week ahs witnessed the launch of New Labour's *National Plan*. A legislative programme which overtly recalls the Old Labour language of George Brown and 70's crisis management. It is of course, language the Galbraith would recognise.

To accompany new professionalism, there is '*new entitlement*' to users of public services (running against the grain of responsabilisation rhetoric) and a new housing programme. Yvette Cooper and Ed Balls in last 48 hours have referred to *Employability* through a White Paper guaranteeing training or place in education (paid for by 1 billion a year Capita cuts). The employment White paper promises '*job subsidies*' to name but one echo of the past.

The use of such new-old metaphors does not indicate a break with the market based evidence movement of the past. It may well be as the original policy transfer work

outlined a means of achieving a quick fix in response to changing circumstance for a government faced with almost certain defeat next year. However, the issues outlined above do point to some pressing issues about where policy makers look for evidence when their programmed responses are redundant or bankrupt.

Achieving the goals of public policy in the face of crisis will require a different sort of evidence, a deeper and richer kind than the market economised evidence movement has supplied in the past. Providing policy knowledge in areas where there is only very old historical precedent requires a wisdom the evidence movement is yet to reveal.

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