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Closing the door on conflict: the current state of social justice in education policy

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This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any degree, qualification or course.

Signed ...........................................
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Abstract
As a universal social policy, education is a key battleground for social justice. It is an arena in which the most disadvantaged children in society can be either given a hand up or slapped back down. There are key choices to be made over whose claims to justice to prioritize: the rights of all children to a mainstream education or the rights of a majority to an undisturbed one; to include in or exclude from an unjust education system or to redesign it to be fair to all. The current government, however, is not making those choices but avoiding them. They are doing so in order to avoid facing the fundamental inconsistency of their attempt to marry market economics and social justice. Old Labour sought out and tried to remedy social injustice. New Labour believes that by closing the door on conflict they can make social injustice disappear.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Alongside issues such as poverty, housing, employment, justice and the rule of law, I view education as a key area of social policy from which some important conclusions about
the equality and fairness of a society might be drawn. I believe, along with others (Griffiths, 1998; Gewirtz, 2001) that striving for social justice in education should be a central, if not the central, concern of educational research. This is, I would argue, a crucial time for social justice in both the education field and in social policy more widely. Race (2004) quotes Jones (2003) who, in a recent history of British education, has argued that the danger for the current Labour government

“is to close the door on the past, and put serious policy conflict behind it” (p.174)

If this is indeed the end destination of current political and cultural trends then any notion of education as a social justice ‘project’ may be under threat. Emancipation has always been won through struggle. If conflict itself is removed from political discourse than the possibilities for achieving social justice are severely curtailed.

In this introductory chapter I set out the philosophical and methodological approaches I have taken to these issues. I go on to establish the theoretical and policy contexts in which this work is situated. Finally, I provide an overview of the structure of the rest of the dissertation.

**Methodology**

Since I intend to provide an analysis of current education policy it is important to first set out the view of policy analysis which I have taken. My starting point is to attempt to clarify (as Ball (1994) recommends) what I mean by policy. Ozga (2000) has suggested that policy
Part of the argument I am putting forward here is that, although this *should* be what policy is, this is no longer the case. Policy as “the product of compromises” (Ball, 1994, p.16) has increasingly been replaced by policy in which

“Words are ordered and combined in particular ways and other combinations are displaced or excluded.” (Ball, 1994, p.16).

In other words, the conceptualisation of policy as discourse (Ball, 1994) has become increasingly important as the reliance of government on ‘spin’ has grown. Consequently I would argue that a focus on discourse has become crucial to policy analysis.

The concept of discourse has become popular in social research because of its power in explaining how social problems and their solutions are constructed and reconstructed by the language used to describe them (Fairclough, 2000). Discourses are

“practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak … Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault, 1977, p.49 quoted in Ball, 1994)

When applied to social policy, it is also important to understand ‘discourse’ as

“about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority.” (Ball, 1994, p.21)

The policy analyses which follow each involve one of the dominant discourses of current educational policy and consider the voices it is drowning out. In Chapter 2 this is a powerful
and pervasive authoritarian discourse which demonises certain young people, leading to exclusion and marginalization. In Chapter 3, I examine the apparently ‘socially just’ discourse of ‘inclusion’, favoured by New Labour but fundamentally undermined by tension with other policy priorities. Finally, in the concluding section, Chapter 4, I draw together the threads of the underlying discourses of third way philosophy and market economics.

Moving on from ‘policy’ to its analysis, Ball (1994) has also suggested that if ‘policy’ is accepted as a complex and multi-faceted notion then

“The complexity and scope of policy analysis … precludes the possibility of successful single-theory explanations. What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories” (p.14, emphasis original)

I can accept Ball’s point that the fragmentary nature of the policy process means that no single over-arching conception is possible. However, I would be more cautious as far as the idea of a ‘toolbox’ of theoretical approaches is concerned. This approach carries the risk that

“A post-positivist interpretation of policy analysis, if taken to the point of saying that we can dispense with paradigms, results in actually ignoring political and economic realities.” (Parsons, 1995, p.72)

A high proportion of practical policy analysis (for example Williams, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001) finds it necessary to, at least implicitly, make use of rational-purposive or stagist conceptualisations of the policy process in order to carry out analysis at all (Parsons, 1995). This is, to some extent, also true of the analysis I present here.

This approach leaves me open to a charge of ‘critique from above’ (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). That is, to distancing my sociological perspective from those of the practical actors and failing to adequately appreciate the practical difficulties experienced by teachers
(Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). Superficially this criticism is quite valid. However, it contains an unacknowledged assumption that teachers are the only practical actors involved in the production of social justice (or injustice) in education. I intend to engage with the ‘tensions within and between different facets of justice’ (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003) by means of an overt focus on the competing needs and wants and relative power of the groups involved: teachers, parents, policy makers, other educational professionals and, especially, children themselves.

In order to do this I intend to adopt a methodology of ‘reflective equilibrium’ (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). This approach, adopted from philosophy, involves

“the systematic attempt to move ‘back and forth’ between our putative ethical theories and our considered intuitions in matters of practice.” (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003, p.22)

with the aim of achieving the greatest possible coherence. In adopting this methodology I am drawing on an epistemology of critical social science (Fay, 1975) rooted in an ontological position of critical realism. In so doing, I am contending that not only is unbiased objectivity impossible (Sayer, 2000), but that setting out and acknowledging my own biases and agendas actually strengthens my research (Griffiths, 1998).

I will start then by ‘getting off the fence’ (Griffiths, 1998) and making my political and ethical position clear. It is relevant then to mention both my purposes and intentions in writing this dissertation and something of the experiences which have defined my interest. Although I am primarily writing as an academic exercise, I am also writing to further my understanding of the social justice implications of current education policy and in the ultimate hope of achieving change in the education system. I am thus espousing an explicit
emancipatory agenda. My interest in such an agenda springs from my own and my family’s extensive experiences on the receiving end of UK education, health and social care systems. These experiences have been both positive and negative encompassing prejudice and acceptance, discrimination and fairness, hopelessness and hopefulness. All have involved issues of social justice.

**Theoretical Context**

Throughout this dissertation I will argue that New Labour has developed a weak conceptualisation of social justice in order to avoid fundamental conflict within its philosophy. It is important, therefore, at this early stage to set out what I mean by ‘social justice’, since the term has been acknowledged as having multiple meanings (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). This section will, therefore, establish where my view of ‘social justice’ sits within the literature.

The chain of development of the conceptualisation of ‘social justice’ which I have adopted begins with Young’s (1990 cited in Gewirtz, 2001) assertion that redistribution is an insufficient starting point for a politics of social justice. Gewirtz’s (2001) later developments are founded on Young’s (1990) argument that a fully formed view of social justice must additionally address the concepts of domination and oppression. She set out ‘five faces of oppression’ which, she argued, need to be considered in any developed notion of social justice: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young, 1990 cited in Gewirtz, 2001).
This view has been developed into a model of social justice which includes, at least, three strands: distributive justice, cultural justice and associational justice (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). Distributive justice is largely the traditional notion of social justice (Gewirtz, 2001), one which might be described as concerned with quantity. It is concerned with issues of exploitation, economic marginalization, deprivation and the distribution of cultural and social resources (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). However, this group of concerns is complemented by the more quality-orientated ideas of cultural justice and associational justice. Cultural justice includes issues of cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect while associational justice requires involving subordinated groups in decision-making (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003).

This model has the key benefit that it acknowledges the situated nature of knowledge (Haraway, 1991 cited in Vincent, 2003) while maintaining a common focus between multiple understandings of social justice. Thus it allows for the concept to evolve and change over time and between places, a flexibility which is, I believe, vital to a robust conception of ‘social justice’. At the same time these different aspects of social justice are all rooted in some type of conflict, dispute or disagreement. In some cases this is conflict over resources, in others it is conflict over power or conflict between different cultural perspectives. But the notion of discord is key to this view of social justice.

Building on this work, Gewirtz (2001) has gone on to argue that social justice is “a family of concerns about how everyone should be treated in a society we believe to be good.” (p.49, emphasis original)

In accepting this view, it is important to face the reality that discord occurs within as well as between families. What I mean by this is that accepting that the concept of social justice is

\[1\] I would particularly emphasise the relevance of this last concern to education.
plural and multi-faceted means accepting multiple claims to justice can and will conflict (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). In turn this requires acceptance that social justice is an ongoing process which may never be truly finished.

Using this model as a foundation, Gewirtz (2001) has set out five questions which, she suggests, educational policy researchers concerned with social justice should consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How, to what extent and why do education policies support, interrupt or subvert:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. exploitative relationships (capitalist, patriarchal, racist, heterosexist, disablist and so on) within and beyond educational institutions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. processes of marginalization and inclusion within and beyond the education system?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. the promotion of relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality or produce powerlessness (for education workers and students)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. violent practices within and beyond the education system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. practices of cultural imperialism within and beyond the education system? Finally, which cultural differences should be affirmed, which should be universalized and which rejected?</td>
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Gewirtz (2001)

I have chosen to focus on questions 2 and 3 as the basis for the two chapters which follow. I feel it is important, therefore, to take a moment to explain why I have focussed on just two of the questions. I do not deny the importance of exploitative relationships, practices of violence or of cultural imperialism. However I feel that they are such broad concepts that they require further narrowing and focussing before they can usefully be applied to the task of analysing policy. Consequently I limit the scope of this dissertation to these two questions, which in themselves address a wide array of issues.

*Policy Context*
Tony Blair’s 1997 pre-election ‘Education, education, education’ soundbite has become a cliché. However, it does emphasise the importance placed on education policy by the current government. The reasons why New Labour places such importance on education policy and their implications will be addressed to some extent in Chapter 3 and revisited in Chapter 4. For now, I want to set out a brief overview of the continuities between the Conservative policies which preceded that soundbite and the New Labour policies which followed it.

The landscape of education policy which has evolved under the last 7 years of New Labour government is not really all that new. As Tomlinson (2001) has argued there is in fact considerable continuity between the educational policies of the previous conservative government and Tony Blair’s administration. It has even been suggested that a broad continuity, at least in areas such as the provision of nursery education and a concern with standards, extends back further to the previous Labour administration of 1974-1979 (Kendall and Holloway, 2001).

There are certainly numerous examples of Conservative policies which have been adopted, developed or just tacitly accepted by New Labour. For example, the National Curriculum introduced by the Education Reform Act 1988 still prescribes what is to be taught in schools. Similarly, parental ‘choice’ of schools has been extended and developed from its beginnings in Conservative legislation (such as the Education Reform Act 1988 which reduced the powers of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to restrict choice) by legislation introduced by New Labour (for example the Education Act 2002 which created the framework for co-ordinated admissions schemes). Both parties now propose to extend it still further. Conservative legislation (the Education Reform Act 1988) also established the Office
for Standards in Education (Ofsted), an organisation which has been hugely influential in both the development and implementation of education policy.

Pollitt (1990 cited in Massey, 2001) has suggested that since 1979 a general shift in the focus of government from impartial public administration to a ‘New Public Management’ has occurred. I intend to build on this argument to suggest that the significant difference in education policy between the New Labour government and previous governments is not one of content, but of the stifling of conflict.

To illustrate my argument I will focus on those areas of education policy concerned with the most powerless: children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), those excluded from school and those in danger of exclusion. I have previously argued that these policy areas should be grouped together and viewed as falling along an inclusion/exclusion continuum (Dunn, 2004a; see also Booth, 2000). These areas have always been the site of considerable social injustices and a source of almost continual conflict: between social classes\(^2\) and, as a result, between political philosophies. Now, however, we are meant to believe that the government’s inclusive policies are tackling ‘social exclusion’ and there is no longer any tension between policies in this area. For example, according to Estelle Morris (then School Standards Minister) it would be “dogmatic” to argue that progress towards inclusion might need to impact on the right of schools to exclude pupils (House of Commons, 1997, Cl.583). This area of educational policy is, then, a fruitful one to examine in search of conflict, struggle and the current state of social justice.

**Structure**

\(^2\) I acknowledge that concepts of class are “notoriously vague and tenuously stretched” (Pakulski and Waters, 1996, p.2 quoted in Ball, 2003).
I argue throughout this dissertation that the New Labour government has repeatedly shied away from attempting to remedy social injustices. Instead they have continued to pursue policies which actually support and maintain injustice whilst denying their essential conflict with policies intended to correct it.

In Chapter 2 I further this argument through the example of exclusion from school. I describe how New Labour has made initial attempts to address the problem. Strong vested interests inevitably responded with strenuous objections promoted through the media. The government response has been to softly back pedal and avoid conflict which might reveal inconsistencies between its policies and risk damaging its re-election chances. However, the government has done this not by retreating but by declaring victory. The current government inherited an extremely high level of exclusions in the late 1990s and claims that it has succeeded in reducing it – meeting targets early (SEU, 1998). However, as I will set out there is considerable cause for doubt as to the legitimacy of this claim. I will argue that the government has discouraged measurement of exclusions in order to avoid conflict. In so doing, they are supporting and encouraging processes of marginalization by pretending they do not exist.

Chapter 3 focuses on the ‘inclusion’ of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The basic structure of the system which is meant to provide for the ‘special needs’ of up to one in five pupils (Croll and Moses, 2000) has changed little since the introduction of the ‘statementing’ system by the Conservative government (in the Education Act 1981) following the Warnock report (HMSO, 1978 cited in Rogers, 1980). Some limited progress has been made in reducing the use of special schools (DfES, 2003; Norwich, 2002 cited in CSIE, 2002)
and placing their pupils in mainstream schools. I will ask whether this constitutes inclusion and whether ‘inclusion’ really equals social justice. I will suggest that these policies fail to promote relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality and in fact perpetuate the powerlessness of these pupils. This is primarily occurring, I will contend, because of the government’s control of the ‘inclusion’ discourse which avoids real debate or discussion about the ‘social justice’ of social policy.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I will briefly draw together the underlying threads of my overall argument. I will argue that a key tension between market economics and social justice remains unresolved at the heart of New Labour’s education policies. This tension has unsettling implications for the whole ‘third way’ philosophy on which New Labour’s electoral success was founded. Thus, I will suggest, it is a conflict on which many in the New Labour government would like to close the door.

**Chapter 2: Processes of Marginalization and Inclusion**

In the second of her questions Gewirtz (2001) asks: How, to what extent and why do education policies support, interrupt or subvert processes of marginalization and inclusion within and beyond the education system? In this Chapter I will use the example of exclusion from school to illustrate how the current government has shied away from attempts to
interrupt processes of marginalization. Instead, I will argue, education policies have disguised, and at times supported, exclusion while appearing to tackle it.

**The Problem of Exclusion**

The current government inherited what was generally acknowledged (DfES, 2003) as a very high level of exclusions from school. In 1997/8, some 12,298 children were permanently excluded from school in England (DfES, 2004a). Hayden (1997) estimates that having risen dramatically over 4 years from 2,910 in 1990-1 permanent exclusions had peaked at around the 12,000 per year level by 1994-5. This trend had attracted considerable attention from researchers, teaching unions and campaigners (see for example SHA, 1992; ACE, 1993).

When the New Labour government came to power in 1997 education was, famously, its “three” [sic] priorities. Another high priority was what was termed ‘social exclusion’. As Tony Blair expressed it:

“For 18 years, the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government. They have been left out of growing prosperity, told that they were not needed, ignored by the Government except for the purpose of blaming them. I want that to change. There will be no forgotten people in the Britain I want to build.” (Excerpt from Tony Blair’s first speech as Prime Minister 2nd June 1997)

This agenda led to the early establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit to look at the causes of ‘social exclusion’ and what might be done to address it. It was inevitable, then, that its first report would focus on exclusion from school.
This first report, ‘Truancy and School Exclusion’ (SEU, 1998) set the following target:

“5.3 The overarching targets of the strategy are that by 2002:

• there will be a reduction of one third in the number of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions from the current level;” (p.26)

The report’s authors set out the steps which the government proposed to take in order to meet this target (SEU, 1998). I have grouped these strategies into the following four areas:

• improved data collection and monitoring [paras 5.5 and 5.6]

• market pressure through publication of data on exclusions (with safeguards intended to discourage schools from excluding pupils to improve their league table position) [paras 5.7, 5.8, 5.11 and 5.12]

• a focus on prevention (including targeting resources e.g. through Education Action Zones and requiring LEAs to provide fulltime education for excluded pupils) [paras 5.10 and 5.16-5.18]

• creating pressure on schools by asking Ofsted to carry out special inspections of high excluding schools [paras 5.13-5.15]

It is important to realise that all four of these strategies are focussed more on schools and their management than on the behaviour of individual pupils. This, along with the setting of the target itself, might usefully be characterised as consistent with an ideology of social democracy (Trowler, 2003) rooted in notions of inclusion, social
justice, community and collective responsibility for children. It was an ideology which inevitably provoked opposition.

The Objections

It seemed immediately clear that the target to reduce exclusions was going to be controversial. As Kendall and Holloway (2001) put it

“This ambitious target may be achievable but not without conflict, with many teachers and parents concerned at the impact of non-excluded ‘disruptive’ pupils on the educational standards of their classmates.” (p.173)

Such opposition was almost immediately apparent in the press. The Independent reported David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, as saying:

"Setting artificial targets for the reduction of truancy and exclusions will not, of itself, achieve anything unless heads are given the support they need to deal effectively with those pupils who ruin the education of their fellow pupils." (The Independent, 12/05/98, emphasis added)

This response focuses on individual pupils as the source of the problem. This focus has been common where opposition to reduced exclusion or greater inclusion has been expressed. For example, the introduction of legislation in Wales giving excluded pupils the right to appeal on their own behalf was described as “sparking fears it will become difficult to expel troublemakers” (Times Educational Supplement, 12th December 2003). In a further example, the NASUWT conference recently called for an end to the policy of inclusion for pupils with behavioural difficulties, claiming that their inclusion is to the “detriment of the majority of children” (BBC news, 16/04/2004).
As well as focussing on the individual, the examples above carry heavy overtones of blame and implicitly conceptualise exclusion as ‘punishment’. According to Wright et al (2000)

“Definitions of punishment are clearly embedded within teacher opinions on the function of school sanction.” (p.32)

Wright et al (2000) also see these as interwoven with notions of deterrence, retribution, asserting authority and masculinity. Hayden (1997) has suggested that these attitudes may be, in part, the result of a perceived gap in the range of sanctions available to teachers since the abolition of corporal punishment in 1986. While that may well be true, I would see it as one aspect of a broader issue. Brown (1998) has charted a historical process of exclusion whereby young people have increasingly been set apart and marginalised by other social groups. There is certainly evidence to support the contention that a discourse which demonises the young has existed for some time (Cohen, 1973) and extends well beyond the education system (for example ‘yob culture’ and similar perceived law and order issues)(Levitas, 1998; Fairclough, 2000). It is a discourse which falls within a neo-conservative ideology (Trowler, 2003) emphasizing individual responsibilities and behaviour. This discourse has been prominent in debates about exclusion from school throughout the life of the New Labour government and I will return to it throughout this Chapter.

The Objectors – Part 1: Teachers and Teaching Unions

Prominent amongst those objecting to the aim of reducing exclusions were the teaching unions. As is evident above, newspaper articles routinely quote union leaders in
pieces on exclusion. However, it is also the case that articles are often prompted by press
releases from teaching unions in the first place. For example, on 28th May 2004 the Daily
Telegraph ran an article which quoted Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of
Teachers and Lecturers (ATL). In it she expressed her fear

“that the Government’s ‘relentless pressure’ on schools to reduce their exclusion
rate was forcing her members to teach badly behaved pupils, who made it
impossible for others to have a decent education.” (May 28, 2004)

This article immediately followed and closely reflected a press release from ATL (ATL,
2004).

Clearly then, the teaching unions are one interest group who have been and are
continuing to exert pressure on the government not to try to reduce exclusions. The teaching
unions can be seen as one forum through which the relationship between teachers and the
government is mediated. It is important to try to understand this interaction between teachers
and government since this evolutionary process of policy implementation (Trowler, 2003) is
at least as crucial as any number of idealistic statements from ministers in understanding the
actual impact of education policy on processes of marginalization and inclusion/exclusion.

I have already touched on the authoritarian discourse which forms part of the reason
for the opposition emanating from teaching unions to attempts to reduce the use of exclusion.
However, now I want to turn to the more complex question of teacher’s views of the
exclusion reduction target in the context of other education policies. The teaching unions have
been, and continue to be, implacably opposed to the idea of increasing the numbers of
disaffected young people remaining in or returning to mainstream classrooms (which would
be an inevitable consequence of real reduction in the use of exclusions). At least part of their
opposition seems to spring from a genuine, and reasonable, concern that the demands being made of teachers exceed the resources available to them. The main teaching unions have regularly complained about excessive workloads and inadequate resources (see for example ‘Shorter hours cannot last without extra cash ’ TES 05/03/2004). In addition it has been pointed out that teachers have been subjected to an avalanche of initiatives since 1997. As Ball (1999, p.195) put it

“Whatever else one would want to say about Labour’s education policies there is certainly no shortage of them!”

All of these factors create pressures on teachers and schools which, inevitably, interact with each other.

The climate engendered by these policies for teachers has been described as

“characterised by the removal of the locus of power from the knowledge of practising professionals to auditors, policy-makers and statisticians, none of whom need know anything about the profession in question” (Davies, 2003, p.91)

As a consequence the autonomy of schools and teachers has been diminished. This has undermined their ability to avoid being influenced by the pressures of targets, league tables, inspections and other outgrowths of audit culture. Thus even where individual teachers or schools sincerely wish to minimise and reduce the use of exclusion these pressures can make this extremely difficult. Schools which attempt to retain pupils whose behaviour is challenging risk:

- complaints from other parents (who have the power to choose a different school);
• losing teachers who may feel undermined, overwhelmed or suffer health problems due to stress;

• being labelled as having ‘serious weaknesses’ if inspectors consider they are not addressing pupil behaviour adequately;

• potential adverse effects on SATs results and league table positions;

• inability to access additional funding (e.g. specialisation money) much of which is barred to ‘inadequately performing’ schools.

In the face of these pressures, then, it is not surprising that many schools still find it necessary to exclude.

The managerialism and performativity (Ball, 1999) which permeates New Labour’s education policies thus fundamentally undermines attempts at social justice by creating incentives to exclude. It is a climate which invites teachers to feel ill equipped to cope with the most challenging and needy pupils and to fear being penalised rather than commended for attempting to do so. Some indicative empirical support for this argument can be drawn from Croll and Moses’ (2000) finding that a much higher proportion of mainstream primary teachers and headteachers feel that more children should attend special schools than feel that fewer children should do so, despite support in principle for inclusion. They also found that this was particularly the case for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (who are likely to have the most challenging behaviour) with some 69.4% of mainstream teachers stating that special schools are needed for such children (Croll and Moses, 2000).

Avoiding Conflict with Teachers
Initially at least the government seemed unaware and unaffected by concerns about tensions between its education policies and opposition from the teaching profession to the policy of reducing exclusions. Clearly the teaching unions have often felt powerless to exert any direct influence over New Labour’s education policy. The diminished influence of the trade union movement generally within the Labour Party since the debate over Clause 4 in 1995 inevitably limited the ability of the teaching unions to directly oppose policy as they once did. A resultant sense of impotence was evident by the end of Labour’s first term by which time Doug McAvoy (then NUT general secretary) was reported as saying

“there has been no attempt at partnership with the unions, and teachers feel they have been vilified.” (TES, 20/04/2001)

Similarly Steve Sinnott, the new general secretary of the NUT, has recognised that the direct influence of teaching unions on government policy has been limited and that this lack of influence has harmed their standing:

“If we are not in a position to be able to put before the Government our policies and our experience and indeed our guidance, if we are not able to do these things it places us in a position in which we are not being able to influence policy development and implementation in the way we want to do so it is damaging to us, of course it is.” (Quoted in TES, 30/06/2004)

It would, however, be an oversimplification to imply that the teaching unions no longer have any influence over the government. Diminished it may be but some degree of influence does still exist. The unions are still able to threaten to make the government look weak and ineffective by means of industrial action (a threat the New Labour government is vulnerable to because of historic sensitivities relating to the political consequences of the winter of
discontent) and, as I touched on earlier, they have become increasingly effective in their use of the media.

Through these means the perceived reaction of teachers to attempts to reduce exclusion may in fact have had some influence on the course and development of education policy. Certainly the government seems to have felt some need to keep teachers ‘on board’ with its standards agenda (Tomlinson, 2003). There were a number of key education policies which might have been under threat if teachers became dissatisfied enough to leave the profession. These were:

- workforce/workload reform (an important test case of a Labour government’s ability to ‘handle’ the unions);
- class size commitments (a manifesto pledge);
- SATs targets (always popular with headline writers and key to perceptions of the success of the government’s ‘drive to raise standards’).

Around 2001, these concerns came to a head when a perception arose (promoted by the unions) that teachers were leaving the profession because of increasing pupil misbehaviour.

An article in *The Daily Mail* of April 17th 2001 entitled ‘Teachers Losing Discipline Battle' exemplifies the creation of this perception. Appearing to be drawn from a NASUWT press release, the article claimed that teachers were leaving the profession because of increasingly poor pupil behaviour, with a heavy emphasis on violent behaviour. Considerable doubt must be raised about the accuracy of this perception since it is not well supported by the balance of research evidence. Evans (2003, p.8) did claim that there are an “ever-increasing
number of violent students appearing at younger and younger ages” which he describes as “a widespread international phenomenon.”. However, he provides no empirical basis for this claim. He also fails to acknowledge the existence of contradictory findings such as Croll and Moses (2003) who, in a study covering this period, found that

“Despite the considerable public debate about children’s emotional and behavioural development, the concern about increasing levels of exclusion from school and the increase in special school provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, there has only been a relatively small increase in teacher perceptions of these difficulties at the level of the classroom.” (p.736)

Nevertheless, even if groundless, for the government the very perception that pressure to reduce exclusions might be causing teachers to leave posed a dilemma - should the government risk the threat to its flagship policies that teacher shortages might pose or modify its policy on exclusion? This was not the first time New Labour had faced such a decision. ‘New Labour’ has consistently demonstrated a particular sensitivity to its electability. Indeed, the ‘rebranding’ of the party as ‘New’ Labour and the ‘Third Way’ philosophy which accompanied it were rooted in a “new social democracy [which] concentrates upon the conditions necessary to achieve electoral success” (Giddens, 2002, p.11). This rebirth has also spawned a tendency to expediency where electability is seen to be what is at stake. For example, in response to critics who complained about the lack of genuinely redistributive policies during New Labour’s first term, Giddens (2002, p.6) argued explicitly that Labour cannot “go back to the very policies that kept the party out of power for so long.”. Thus by 2001 when a situation was seen to have arisen such that the viability of more politically important policies might have been threatened by teacher’s concerns about behaviour expediency won out over social justice. The threat to policies seen as vital to Labour’s re-election chances seems to have been influential in shifting policy towards disaffected pupils towards a less inclusive path.
**Blame and Containment**

In July 2001 Estelle Morris, then Education and Skills Secretary announced changes to the law on exclusions to reduce the number of exclusions overturned on appeal and confirmed that no further targets to reduce exclusions would be set (DfES, 2001). These announcements came along with a package of measures designed to “tackle disruptive behaviour in schools” (DfES, 2001, p.1): extending the use of parenting orders, making admissions forums mandatory and increasing the numbers of learning mentors and learning support units.

Both the content and tone of these announcements were very different from 1998. In contrast to the inclusive language and structural focus of 1998, the 2001 press release quotes Estelle Morris as saying

“Disruptive behaviour wears down teachers, interferes with the education of other pupils, and condemns some children to failure at school and long term problems. I want to tackle the roots of poor behaviour in children, as well as strengthen the boundaries against violence and disruption.” (DfES, 2001, p.1)

The ‘problem’ here is clearly children themselves rather than schools, structures or policies. Not only are they responsible for teachers leaving and disrupting the education of other pupils, but they are even responsible for their own failure to learn and achieve within education. This seems a clear turn towards what Blyth and Milner (1994) termed ‘victim-blaming’.
Some aspects of the 2001 policies seemed to encourage rather than curtail exclusion. The limiting of opportunities for appeal combined with the lifting of the pressure created by the target to reduce exclusions seemed likely to lead to increased exclusions. The official data seems to indicate that to some extent this occurred. Since bottoming out at 8,323 permanent exclusions in England in 1999/00 the figures have crept back up slightly to 9,290 in 2002/3. They have not, though, approached their previous level (DfES, 2004a). Making admissions forums compulsory was apparently intended to facilitate the reintegration of excluded pupils (DfES, 2001), but may also have made it easier for schools to broker unofficial transfers of pupils as an alternative to officially excluding them (a practice documented by Stirling (1992)).

The emphasis on individual responsibility in the tone of the announcement was also evident in the policies themselves. The extension of parenting orders from the criminal justice system into the education system gave a clear signal that parents (individuals) were to be blamed and coerced into co-operating with the education system. Promoting the use of learning mentors and learning support units (LSU) also focused on individual children and their behaviour, whilst leaving the policies and practices of the school, LEA and education system virtually untouched.

While these developments were broadly supported by many in the educational community, learning support units and learning mentors were understood very negatively as ‘punishment’ by the media. I would argue that this perception, rather than that of teachers or educational researchers, is likely to have been of greatest importance to the government in this pre-election period. For example, even The Times referred to LSUs as “sin-bins” and perceived them as places “where violent pupils can be sent to cool off”
(The Times, April 27th 2000). The use of the word ‘sin’ focuses on the ‘badness’ of disaffected pupils rather than acknowledging that they may be having difficulties due to, for example, special educational needs or family problems. The further assumption that all disaffected pupils are violent, served to escalate the apparent seriousness of the behaviour and ensure that the pupils are viewed as ‘deserving’ of punishment. In similar vein, an early version of learning mentors which proposed to use them to provide an immediate crisis response service, found them dubbed a “SWAT team” (The Times, April 27th 2000). The use of this terminology, originally used to refer to US police firearms teams, immediately equated disaffected young people with adult criminals and risked creating the impression that young people at risk of exclusion pose a similar level of threat. Whilst the government is not responsible for the excesses of the media, a government with such apparent expertise in media relations cannot have been blind to the tone set by its new policies.

Ultimately I am arguing, therefore, that the government reworked both its policy on exclusion and the presentation of that policy in part to avoid conflict on multiple fronts with teachers and their unions. In theory many teachers were, and continue to be, supportive of the principle of inclusive education. In practice teachers, overwhelmed by initiatives, performance targets and the pressures of functioning in an educational ‘market’, have felt unable to cope. The setting of the target to reduce exclusions was not accompanied by the level of resources teachers and their unions felt were required to achieve the target in combination with these pressures. This, combined with remnants of an authoritarian discourse amongst some elements of the teaching profession, was enough to provoke vigorous opposition. When this opposition was seen to threaten flagship education policies that were perceived as vital to Labour’s continued electoral success, the government was unable to
ignore it any longer. This I have argued was a significant factor in the government’s gradual retreat from the policy of reducing exclusions. However, by itself, it does not provide a complete picture of the pressures and motivations influencing the evolution of exclusions policy up to 2001, let alone those that were still to come.

*The Objectors – Part 2: Middle Class Parents, Business and Political Reality*

As McCaig (2001) has documented the Labour Party made significant shifts towards a belief in open markets and the need for supply side reform during its time out of office between 1979 and 1997. There are two points about ‘Third Way’ philosophy and its implications for social justice in education which are crucial to my analysis. Firstly, as I have indicated above this fundamental philosophical shift was undertaken with the explicit aim of making the party electable (Giddens, 2002). Secondly, one of its most significant aspects as far as education is concerned is the consequent view of the primary purpose of education as providing skilled labour for industry (McCaig, 2001), broadly a form of human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958 both cited in Cowell, 2003).

This furthers our insight into the way in which the policy to reduce exclusions failed to subvert processes of marginalization in the following ways. Firstly, if education is seen as a ‘business’ with its ‘product’ employable school leavers, then disaffected young people are easily viewed as ‘defective products’. I do not, for one moment, suggest that most teachers or other educational professionals would accept such a view; merely that it subtly and probably unintentionally influences the priority given to the needs of disaffected young people in the development of overall education policy. As Cohen et al (1994, p.2 quoted in Wright et al, 2000) have suggested in a marketised education system
“the difficult pupil must either be seen as an object of punishment or a drain on resources.”.

Secondly, if parents (and especially middle class parents) are seen as education’s ‘consumers’ then it increases the pressure to exclude children whose behaviour is perceived as diminishing the quality of the ‘product’ their children receive. I therefore concur with both Tomlinson (2003) and Ball (2003) in accusing the current government of prioritising the concerns and interests of the middle class in order to protect its electoral chances.

In addition to the issue of class, however, I would suggest that there is another factor which has often been overlooked. It seems plausible that if political concerns dominate the government’s thinking on education policy then they cannot be blind to the simple fact that while parents vote, children do not. Consequently, adult voices are often prioritised over those of children in influencing policy on exclusion (Gordon, 2001). This means that issues which some excluded children consider to have been important in their experiences have easily been marginalised and ignored (Fielding, 2004).

These issues include: institutional racism (Wright et al, 2000), the sometimes devastating impact of exclusion on the children and their families (Gordon, 2001), perceptions of injustice and not being listened to (Gordon, 2001) and feelings that the curriculum has little relevance to them (Gordon, 2001). They join concerns about the influence of poverty and social class on exclusion from school in being mentioned with steadily diminishing frequency, if at all, by government ministers since Tony Blair’s initial speech about Social Exclusion. I suggested earlier that the ways in which disaffected young people are constructed through language in the media comprise a discourse which serves to demonise them. Avoidance of these issues by the government encourages and promotes this discourse. In so
doing, the government uses the discourse to circumscribe what is talked about, who is heard and how the ‘problem’ and its potential solutions are defined.

Promotion of this demonising authoritarian discourse both facilitates and is facilitated by what Ball (2003, p.25) has termed ‘non-decision-making’. Ball (2003) quotes Lukes’ (1974, p.20) definition of this as a process:

“in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests”

In the case of New Labour, I would argue, this ‘prevention’ extends not only to decisions but also to discussion and debate. In the next section I will set out this process in (in)action over school exclusions.

Closing the Door on Conflict – Claiming Victory

In 2001 the government claimed that the original target of cutting exclusions by one-third had been met a year early (DfES, 2002). There is considerable cause for doubt as to the reliability of this claim. Firstly, as I have described elsewhere (Dunn, 2004a), there are known problems with the reliability and validity of official data on exclusions. Research has frequently suggested that problems such as poor recording practices, confusion, failure to return forms, missing and wrongly categorised data are common at both school and LEA level (Blyth and Milner, 1994; Hayden, 1997; Vulliamy and Webb, 2001; Pavey and Visser, 2003). In addition, National Statistics acknowledge

“… the exclusions data reported by schools in 2002 and 2003 are known to be incomplete.” (DfES, 2003)
This data relates to the academic years 2000/01 and 2001/02, precisely when the target is claimed to have been met. Such potential discontinuities in time series data on exclusions caused by the introduction of the Annual Schools’ Census (ASC) in 1996 and the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) in 2002 make it extremely difficult to trace with any degree of conviction the extent of trends between 1990 and the present.

Secondly, the claim relates only to data on permanent exclusions despite the original target’s inclusion of fixed term exclusions. This is probably because, although there have been some recent improvements, what little official data on fixed term exclusions exists is known to be extremely unreliable (Osler et al., 2001; DfES, 2004b). This continues to be the case despite an undertaking from the government when the target was originally set to improve data collection on fixed-term exclusions (SEU, 1998). The omission of data on fixed term exclusions is important because it may disguise important inter-relationships between the two types of exclusion (Vulliamy and Webb, 2001). So it is impossible to tell, for example, whether heads under pressure to reduce their use of permanent exclusions are instead using more, or longer, fixed-term exclusions.

Thirdly, there is considerable evidence to suggest that ‘unofficial’ exclusions of various kinds are widespread (Stirling, 1992; Gordon, 2001; Pavey and Visser, 2003). Such exclusions are, by definition, unrecorded in official statistics and have proved to be elusive to research. Consequently there is no way to know whether the reported ‘fall’ in exclusions reflects an increase in the children actually being retained by schools or merely reflects a fall in the numbers officially recorded as permanent exclusions.
Fourthly, an attempt at independent verification of the data in one LEA carried out by Pavey and Visser (2003) found no significant changes in the proportion of children excluded (both permanent and fixed term) over time. Unfortunately there were considerable doubts as to the reliability of this data due to the types of recording problems detailed earlier (Pavey and Visser, 2003). In addition, findings from one LEA may not reflect the national picture. In general there is a dearth of independent statistical evidence on exclusion from school. This may be partly because there is little incentive for schools to ensure that they rigorously record exclusions since schools’ exclusion figures now form part of the information available to parents choosing a school for their child. In addition the local nature of educational administration and the fact that the administration relating to an exclusion primarily takes place after the immediate crisis has passed (i.e. the child has physically left the school) may further contribute to the chronic problem of poor recording of exclusion data. Consequently, it has become difficult to ensure sufficient independence and reliability in data collection in any but the smallest of studies.

A final reason for doubt as to the reliability of the government’s claim to have cut exclusions by one-third is created by the policy statements which have followed it. Once the target had been ‘met’, no further targets were set at that time because, according to the government:

“We have made so much progress in giving schools the resources they need to cut exclusions that we can move the agenda on to promoting the fundamentals of good behaviour.” (Estelle Morris, quoted in DfES, 2001)

Certainly it seems unlikely that the government expected exclusions to fall further or even to remain at the level recorded in 2001. As I described earlier, by this time there had been a steady increase in the negativity and individual focus of the government’s discourse on
disaffected young people. Consequently it must have seemed likely that sooner or later this would influence heads and cause exclusions to rise once again. I would contend, therefore, that in fact no further targets were set for two reasons. Firstly, because if the claim to have met the one-third reduction target was unreliable, then the government might have reasonably feared that further attention focused on the exclusion figures might reveal this. Secondly, because the government was finding the ‘problem’ it had in 1998 defined as too many exclusions contributing to social exclusion uncomfortable and needed to make it disappear.

Closing the Door on Conflict – Redefining the Problem

Levitas (1998) has set out three distinct discourses in which, she claims, the idea of social exclusion is embedded: a redistributionist discourse (RED), a moral underclass discourse (MUD) and a social integrationist discourse (SID). I am concerned here only with the first two, although the third (SID) will form part of my analysis in Chapter 3. Viewing the ‘problem’ as one of schools excluding too many of their pupils and thus contributing to social exclusion was creating a problem for the government because it was inherently part of the redistributionist discourse (Levitas, 1998). As part of this discourse it recognised that

“Permanent exclusion of a child from school may provide one of the entry points to this marginalised way of life.” (Hayden, 1997, p.27)

This proved problematic for the government because of the sharp contrast between this view and the moral underclass discourse. Levitas (1998, p.7) defines this as a discourse “which centres on the moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded themselves”. It is closely associated with the type of authoritarian discourses rooted in neo-conservative ideology which I discussed earlier. Fairclough (2000) has pointed out that this is a discourse
more traditionally associated with the political right. Consequently it is associated with notions of individualism and free market systems.

This moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 1998) formed a strong component of Labour’s strategy to make itself electable. Pitts (2000) colourfully describes how, from early in the 1997 election campaign, New Labour held out the

“implicit promise that, if elected, … [they] would instil a new sense of order and discipline into those dwellers in social housing, who were the instigators of urban decline and, of course, their perfidious offspring.” (p.5)

Initially these tendencies seemed largely confined to criminal justice policy. After all, Tony Blair had famously tried to steal traditional conservative political territory by promising to be “Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. However, it may have been inevitable that eventually this ideology would spill over into education policy since the moral underclass discourse sees poor parenting as at the root of criminal behaviour (Levitas, 1998; Pitts, 2000). Fairclough (2000, p.41) has described how in the course of one speech given by Tony Blair

“The moral discourse also slides into authoritarian discourse, and as so often the example given in the extract is about crime and especially youth crime.”

Examples of this discourse in policy on exclusion from school are more commonplace now than in 1997. New Labour rhetoric has progressed and developed. From early concerns about “forgotten people” (Blair, 1997), the emphasis has shifted to ‘rights and responsibilities’, a favoured phrase of the Blair government (Fairclough, 2000). For example, the increased focus on making “parents take responsibility for the behaviour of their children in school.” (DfES, 2001). This has allowed the government to be seen to “get tough on ill-
discipline in our schools” (The Express, July 31st 2004). The end result of this process has been to redefine the ‘problem’ as one of poor behaviour.

In so doing the government has deftly avoided exposing the clear tension which existed between the redistributionist ideology behind the original target to reduce exclusions and the moral underclass discourse of much of the rest of its policies towards young people (‘anti-social behaviour’ for example). This tension might have been addressed by open discussion and debate about how best to help the most needy children in society whilst assuring sufficient calm and order in classrooms to allow learning to take place. Instead, the government’s refusal to admit the tension exists at all has led to policies which blindly perpetuate marginalization and exclusion, rather than shed the light which might help to subvert them by acknowledging the difficulties of resolving competing claims to justice (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003).

Thus, by the time the recent 5-year strategy for education was released by the DfES, the ambitious target setting and social justice aspirations of the 1998 Social Exclusion Unit Report had been long forgotten. Trumpeting a clear triumph of MUD over RED (Levitas, 1998) and a vagueness which disguises the lack of real commitment to change, the only aspiration which remains for exclusions is that by 2008

“There will have been noticeable reductions in the levels of poor behaviour in schools, in teachers’ fear of attack and in the number of exclusions” (DfES, 2004c, p.56)

Chapter 2 - Conclusions
In this Chapter I have used the example of exclusion from school to illustrate the processes by which the current government has shied away from real, committed and meaningful attempts to tackle social injustice. I have argued that the need to placate and avoid conflict with the teaching unions, middle class parents and business interests has repeatedly taken priority over concerns about social justice. I have also suggested that the government has imported into education policy a moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 1998) which has closed the door on conflict about the social injustices of exclusion by defining it as a problem of individual poor behaviour and denying its deeper roots in the structures and practices of the education system. In so doing, I believe, I have demonstrated that the government’s policies have increasingly supported, rather than interrupted or subverted, processes of marginalization and exclusion both within and beyond the education system.

Chapter 3: Relationships Based on Respect and Mutuality
In the third of Gewirtz’s (2001) questions she asks: How, to what extent and why do education policies support, interrupt or subvert the promotion of relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality or produce powerlessness (for education workers and students)? In this Chapter I have chosen to focus on ‘inclusion’. This is an appropriate focus for two reasons. Firstly, because it is an area of policy whose focus is the power balance in relationships: between children and schools; between parents and schools; between children and wider society; between children and teachers; and between children themselves. Secondly, as I argued earlier, I see ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ in the context of a holistic inclusion/exclusion continuum and not as dichotomous concepts.

In the field of ‘inclusion’ policy, I will argue, the current government has built on a tradition stretching back to the late 1970s of accommodating (Humphries, 1994 cited in Fielding, 2004) and appropriating (Fielding, 2004) the language of their critics. This has allowed the government to claim the moral high ground for their policies towards children with SEN whilst in reality those policies have essentially changed very little from those of their predecessors. Changes in language, from ‘handicap’, through ‘integration’ and ‘Special Educational Needs’ to ‘inclusion’ and the ‘social model of disability’, have not been mirrored by meaningful and effective changes in policy. Instead, changes in language have been used to camouflage policies which pathologize individuals. The underlying picture is, I will suggest, one of policies which do not promote relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality. Rather, I will argue that a continuing tendency to co-opt the language of emancipation camouflages, rather than challenges, the structural factors which perpetuate oppression. This, in turn, produces powerlessness for students who do not experience meaningful inclusion by robbing them of a voice (Fielding, 2004).
As Booth (2000) has argued, the current government has exacerbated this problem by persistently restricting and confining the discourse of ‘inclusion’ within a discourse of Special Educational Needs or, at its broadest, disability. In so doing, they have avoided addressing other axes of difference, discrimination and injustice in the education system which subvert the development of relationships based on respect and mutuality. I will contend that this reformulation of ‘inclusion’ forms part of a repeating pattern whereby the current government controls the discourse of ‘inclusion’ in order to disguise, marginalise and silence potentially uncomfortable conflict. Thus, policy on ‘inclusion’ further illustrates my argument that New Labour’s tendency to mould, frame and present it policies in such a way as to avoid conflict, dissent and dispute ultimately undermines social justice.

**Defining ‘Inclusion’**

Before I begin to examine current ‘inclusion’ policy and the process by which once radical terminology has been repeatedly co-opted, I want to set out what I mean by ‘inclusion’. My conceptualisation of ‘inclusion’ is drawn from a transformative perspective which sees ‘inclusion’ as part of long-term global progress towards the emancipation of marginalised groups. Its origins lie within the disability rights movement (Armstrong *et al*, 2000) and, more broadly, within standpoint epistemologies generally. This view is closely associated with the social model of disability. This model, created by disabled people, essentially proposes that the source of ‘disability’ lies not with the impairment of the individual but with the disabling nature of some aspects of society (Oliver, 1996 cited in Dewsbury *et al*, 2004). My utilisation of this model is limited, however, and does not extend to a more extreme essentialist position such that

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3 I acknowledge that the generic term ‘social model of disability’ encompasses a range of theoretical positions. I use the term to refer broadly to the dominant paradigm in disability studies in recent years in line with its use by Dewsbury *et al* (2004).
“members of one social grouping are held to be incapable of experiencing the experiences of another social grouping” (Dewsbury et al, 2004, p.156-7)

I make use of the model purely to the extent of accepting that it is structures and prejudices, rather than deficits of the individual, which are at the root of disability.

Applied to education, then, I take the social model of disability to imply that the inclusion of all children in mainstream education is fundamentally a ‘social justice project’ (Parsons, 1999). I believe that it is a matter of moral principle and human rights that all children should be educated in mainstream schools because

“Students with severe learning difficulties are of no less value than students who gain Oxbridge entry and their achievements are no less worthy of respect. To select a student out of the mainstream because of disability or learning difficulty is a devaluation of their worth as a person and discriminating on the basis of circumstances for which they are not responsible.” (CSIE, 2002, section 3)

However I would also argue along with Levitas (1998, p.187) that

“beyond the question of who is included and on what terms lies the question of what they are included in.”

Thus, I would argue for a view of ‘inclusion’ which is not just about educating all children in mainstream schools, but also about ensuring that it is schools and the education system which adapt to the needs of all children, rather than children who are expected to conform to the needs of the system.

In addition, I would argue that the concept of ‘inclusion’ has the potential to go far beyond the issues of disability and special educational needs. Griffiths (2003) has suggested that social theory has evolved beyond a single axis of ‘difference’ and is moving towards a
general theory of difference, diversity and equality along multiple axes. These axes include, but are not limited to, gender, religion, class, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability and age. One approach which has the potential to develop into such a general theory is Booth’s (2000) notion of inclusion/exclusion. As I have argued elsewhere (Dunn, 2004a) this might be viewed as a continuum along which learners might locate their experiences. This view of ‘inclusion’ is not entirely unproblematic and is open to criticisms regarding conflicts between competing claims to social justice (Cribb and Gerwirtz, 2003). However, this model as it stands is, I believe, sufficiently robust to provide a benchmark against which to measure what ‘inclusion’ means, does not mean and is hiding in current education policy.

_A Brief History of ‘Special Education’_

Before moving to the recent history of ‘inclusion’ policy, a brief look further back demonstrates the importance of language and the ‘ownership’ of language in defining and addressing disadvantage. Croll and Moses (2000) describe how up until 1978 the notion of ‘handicap’ encompassing ten defined categories of ‘impairment’ and covering less than 2% of the school-aged population had dominated discourse on disability and schooling. Children defined as ‘handicapped’ had mostly been educated in segregated special schools (Croll and Moses, 2000). This was, according to most accounts, the dark ages of special education barely removed from notions of ‘ineducable’ children from pre-1970 days. Certainly, Fulcher (1989) has argued that the notions of ‘handicap’ and ‘impairment’ are imbued with the overtones of the medical discourse of disability. This is a discourse she sees as defining the social ‘problem’ of disability as consisting of a ‘deficit’ located within an individual requiring ‘expert diagnosis and treatment’ by a ‘professional’ (Fulcher, 1989).
In 1978, however, the notion of ‘handicap’ was replaced by the currently used concept of ‘Special Educational Needs’. The new term was created by the Warnock Committee whose ‘Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People’ reported that year (Department of Education and Science, 1978 cited in Croll and Moses, 2000). The Warnock Report, as it came to be known, led to the Education Act 1981 which implemented most of its recommendations. The new system was then further codified and modified by the Education Act 1993. These documents together created and defined the notion of ‘Special Educational Needs’, a concept which was intended to shift the focus from individual impairments to the educational provision required (Croll and Moses, 2000). I would concur with Fulcher (1989) in arguing that this did not happen in practice. The individual nature of the assessment and statementing process and its emphasis on ‘professionals’ as the experts and decision-makers in fact merely refocused attention on individual deficits (Fulcher, 1989).

At the same time the new concept dramatically increased the number of children who were to be considered as needing additional help, from less than 2% to around 20% (DES, 1981(B) cited in Croll and Moses, 2000). It has been suggested that one reason for this was an attempt to prompt the government into increasing the resources available (Fulcher, 1989). The more explicit rationale was to reduce the stigma associated with the use of the label ‘handicapped’ (Rogers, 1980). Despite these ideals, Tomlinson (1985 cited in Fulcher, 1989) argued at the time that the expansion of Special Education had instead merely led to the marginalization of a greater proportion of pupils and that the concept of ‘integration’ contained in the Warnock report was so weak it amounted to little more than a new name for special education.
Much of this criticism was due to the lack of specific recommendations about the principle of integration contained in the Warnock Report. The government of the day had preempted the Warnock committee, by enacting a statutory basis for ‘integration’ in section 10 of the Education Act 1976 just before the committee was set up (Rogers, 1980). The Warnock committee were, therefore, limited to considering “the practical requirements for the eventual success of integration” (Rogers, 1980, p.263)

Thus the Warnock committee did not critically consider the concept of ‘integration’ itself. Clearly the committee envisaged a continuing role for special schools (Rogers, 1980), however they made no specific recommendations regarding the numbers of children or types of disabilities which they felt could be provided for in mainstream schools. They also failed to lay out any timetable for progress or to specify the resources which might be required.

Consequently, when the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) carried out a survey in 1979 they found little change on the ground (Rogers, 1980). As Rogers (1980, p.273) records

“Some interested organisations claimed that the Warnock recommendations could be interpreted so as to leave the way open to a long draw-out period of inaction, where policy and practice remain far apart.”

Fulcher (1989) has argued that this lack of real engagement with the issue of integration in the Warnock report was due to an implicit acceptance of a medical discourse of disability. Thus, she argues, the Warnock Report fundamentally privileges ‘professional’ knowledge and accepts the root of disability as lying within the individual.
Challenged on this issue, Warnock argued “People say we fudged integration, but we fudged it as a matter of policy” (Warnock, 1978 quoted in Fulcher, 1989, p.165). Fulcher (1989) takes this to mean that the Warnock Report’s failure to include specific and detailed recommendations on integration was deliberate. She seems to suggest that it was due to pressure from politicians interested in the principle of integration but unwilling to provide the necessary resources to make it work (Fulcher, 1989). Whatever the truth of the limited view of integration taken by the Warnock Report it set the stage for a lengthy period of little real progress towards the ideal of inclusion as I defined it earlier.

This may have contributed to a view which developed later of ‘integration’ as inherently assimilationist rather than transformative (Booth, 2000). I would suggest that this view may have arisen, in part, because of the failure of the term ‘integration’ to maintain its juxtaposition with ‘segregation’. In retrospect the terminology of ‘integration’ was co-opted by the policy makers of the time to disguise inaction. Thus ‘integration’ proved to be considerably less revolutionary in practice than its original proponents had intended. In order to oppose what had become the dominant conceptualisation of ‘integration’, proponents of an end to segregated education found it necessary to change the terminology.

Thus, by the mid-1980s a new language of ‘inclusion’ was gradually replacing ‘integration’. This was particularly evident internationally where disability rights campaigners succeeded in getting a fairly transformative version of ‘inclusion’ incorporated into treaties. For example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), ratified by the UK in 1991, required countries to make progress towards equal opportunities in education and social integration for disabled children (articles 23 and 28) and sought to end discrimination against children on any grounds, including particularly age. Slightly less wide ranging, but
nevertheless quite ambitious, was the adoption of the ‘Salamanca Statement’ (UNESCO, 1994) by the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994. This demanded that all children with Special Educational Needs be educated in ‘regular schools’. These treaties, combined with a variety of domestic pressures (see Dunn, 2004b for a more detailed analysis), created a pressure on the UK government to be seen to be “doing inclusion”. In the following sections I will set out three ways in which New Labour has created the illusion of “doing inclusion” by appearing to support “the promotion of relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality” (Gewirtz, 2001, p.63) whilst actually pursuing policies which subvert these relationships in such a way as to “produce powerlessness” (Gewirtz, 2001, p.63).

*What New Labour Doesn’t Mean by ‘Inclusion’ 1: Educating All Children in Mainstream Schools*

For the past 7 years the ideas and language of ‘inclusion’ have dominated New Labour’s policies for children with Special Educational Needs. For example, the ‘Excellence for All Children’ green paper, issued not long after the election in 1997, set the goal that by 2002

“A growing number of mainstream schools will be willing and able to accept children with a range of special educational needs: as a consequence, an increasing proportion of those children with statements of SEN who would currently be placed in special schools will be educated in mainstream schools.” (DfEE, 1997, p.9)

At first sight this straightforward statement of policy seems to demonstrate a view of inclusion which appears substantially similar to the view I set out at the beginning of this chapter, at least in respect of a view of inclusion as a ‘social justice project’ (Parsons, 1999).
The statement certainly seems to emphasise the attitudes and resources of schools rather than pupils. There is also a clear commitment to the principle that there should be a process of moving children out of special schools and into the mainstream. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the green paper it is made clear that a long term continuing role is envisaged for special schools:

“we shall promote the inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schooling wherever possible. We shall remove barriers which get in the way of meeting the needs of all children and redefine the role of special schools to develop a network of specialist support.” (DfES, 1997, p.5, emphasis added)

As I have set out elsewhere (Dunn, 2004b), the government has repeatedly argued that these two positions are entirely compatible. It is, they insist, possible to include more children in mainstream schools whilst maintaining the special school network as a source of expertise. There is, however, a basic and unacknowledged flaw in that contention. If more children with SEN are to be integrated into mainstream schools it follows that this will reduce the numbers in special schools. At the same time, the government’s insistence that the special school system must provide expertise at local level to mainstream schools means that the majority of special schools must remain open if they are to achieve this goal. However, to stay open special schools need a certain minimum number of pupils in order to remain viable. This must inevitably create pressure on LEAs to place some children with statements in special schools with vacancies, rather than in oversubscribed or less threatened mainstream schools.

The government has not encouraged any measurement of the extent to which children are actually transferring from special schools to the mainstream. In fact, the measurement and evaluation of inclusion has been severely limited compared to the ‘audit culture’ to which most other education policies have been subject. It seems especially significant that, despite
New Labour’s near universal obsession with target-setting, no targets have in fact been set at any point in the last seven years to ‘measure’ progress towards ‘inclusion’. No proclamations have been made that the proportion of children with statements who are placed in mainstream schools must be increased by X%. No attempts appear to have been made to establish any other ‘measure’ of inclusion. The net effect, then, of imposing targets in other policy areas (such as SATs results for 11-year-olds intended to improve standards) whilst failing to do so for ‘inclusion’ has inevitably been to provide a much weaker incentive to schools to include more children with SEN than to achieve other policy goals.

If targets had been set and ‘inclusion’ measured what might have been revealed? Over a five year period from 1999 to 2003, there has been a decrease in the percentage of pupils with statements placed in special schools (maintained and nonmaintained) or PRUs, from 38 per cent in 1999 to 37 per cent in 2003 (DfES, 2003). This trend data must be treated with caution due to changes in data collection methods (DfES, 2003). However, it is supported by long term trend data showing a very slow, steady trend towards mainstream placements over nearly 20 years (Norwich, 2002 cited in CSIE, 2002). This data does not, therefore, suggest substantial progress towards increasing the placement of children with SEN in mainstream schools since Labour came to power. The decrease in special school placements is, in fact, so small that it could easily be the result of demographic changes or statistical error.

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4 The very concept of ‘measuring’ inclusion is, as I have discussed elsewhere, contested (Dunn, 2004a). It is important to recognise that pupils’ experiences of inclusion are likely to be “partial and fragmented” (Allan, 1999). The degree of inclusiveness experienced by pupils within a mainstream school is at least as important as whether they are able to attend that school in the first place. Nevertheless, there is a role for simple counting of the numbers of pupils in each type of school to augment these perspectives (Silverman, 1985).

5 It is arguable that this is a legitimate measure of special school vs. mainstream placement since virtually the entire special school population is statemented.
A possible alternative ‘measure of inclusion’ which would sit well with the government’s insistence that

“Helping children with SEN to achieve is fundamental to sustaining improvements in schools’ performance.” (DfES, 2004d, p.52)

would be levels of achievement amongst children with SEN. Unfortunately, changes in the way data is collected about SEN, changes to the SEN system itself, the disapplication of some pupils with SEN from national tests and the lack of a well established system for recognising achievement below that of the national curriculum levels, make it extremely difficult to produce a measure which is either reliable or meaningful. Data from a variety of studies suggests that disabled people, and particularly those educated in special schools, attain far fewer qualifications, and at lower grades, compared with all pupils (Department for Work and Pensions, 2002; Thomas, 1996 cited in Dockrell et al, 2002). However, comparisons over time are considerably less common. In a rare example, Croll and Moses (2000) repeated in 1998 their interviews with teachers from 1981, mostly in the same schools. Their data is therefore comparable. Unfortunately, their study relates only to primary schools, collected data only on attainment in reading and does not extend beyond 1998. Nevertheless, it is of interest that they found little difference in reading ages amongst primary school pupils with SEN over a period of 17 years (Croll and Moses, 2000). I do not believe that it is unreasonable to infer from this that substantial improvements since 1997, from a very low base (see Dunn, 2004b), would have been unlikely without very much more substantial and radical reforms than have actually been undertaken.

Indeed, the most definitive evaluation of the government’s ‘inclusion’ policy so far seems even more pessimistic. The 2002 Audit Commission Report ‘Special Educational
Needs: A Mainstream Issue’ (Audit Commission, 2002) was quite critical and concluded, somewhat embarrassingly for the government, that although

“Most children with SEN are now educated in mainstream schools, … progress towards ‘inclusion’ has slowed down over the last decade.” (Audit Commission, 2002, p.51)

The government’s reformulation of ‘inclusion’ to not mean education for all in mainstream schools, combined with the lack of measurable targets for ‘inclusion’, has made it considerably easier for the government to shrug off such criticisms.

**What New Labour Doesn’t Mean by ‘Inclusion’ 2: Equal Rights to Education**

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Katarina Tomasevski (2004) has recently argued

“The Salamanca Statement has more or less collapsed because it was strong on nouns like empowerment, inclusion and quality education but extremely weak on who has the obligation to do what.” (p.5)

Similar criticisms might be levelled against New Labour’s ‘inclusion’ policy. A good example of this is the most recent policy document in this area - ‘Removing Barriers to Achievement: the Government’s Strategy for SEN’ (DfES, 2004d). Despite its acceptance that reality has not always matched the idealistic ‘vision’ of inclusion put forward in earlier policy documents such as ‘Excellence for All Children’(DfES, 2004d, p.28), ‘Removing Barriers’ could still be described as more aspirational than concrete in its proposals. For example, it states prominently in the introduction that the government intends to focus on

“Removing barriers to learning – by embedding inclusive practice in every school and early years setting” (DfES, 2004d, p.9).
It is only when the reader turns to the detail on page 27 that they discover what the actions the government intends to take to achieve this goal actually consist of.

In fact, the proposals for ‘inclusion’ in “Removing Barriers” are vague and unspecific. I set out here the government’s proposals, listed under the heading “Action we will take” (DfES, 2004d, p.27), along with my comments on them (in italics).

(1) Help schools develop effective inclusive practice through an ‘Inclusion Development Programme’ to improve interagency co-ordination. (no indication is given of how this will be achieved or monitored)

(2) Provide “tools and materials” (but whether this includes actual resources rather than just documents is unclear) to improve access (presumably physical access but this is not specified)

(3) Ensure National College for School Leadership programmes promote inclusive practice (no indication of what ‘inclusive practice’ is intended to mean)

(4) Clarify the future role of special schools (but clearly not by specifying which children/categories of disability the government feels should and should not be attending them) and encourage partnership with mainstream schools (but the problem of the numbers of children attending individual special schools dropping below viability is not addressed)

(5) “take steps within the National Behaviour Strategy to improve the quality
of education for children with more severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties” (no indication of what ‘taking steps’ consists of, no definition of ‘improve’ or of ‘quality’)

(6) Improve regional planning of provision for those with less common disabilities. Apparently the government intends to “pump-prime regional centres of expertise” (it is impossible to infer what this might mean for the children concerned – would they be educated nearer or further away from their homes, with or apart from their peers?)

(7) Develop guidance to reduce the use of high cost placements in residential special schools (this seems likely to have more to do with conserving resources than inclusion)

(8) “Set minimum standards for SEN advisory and support services, for self-evaluation and for use by The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), to achieve greater consistency in quality, availability and cost effectiveness.” (The standards themselves are not, however, included and thus are less readily accessible to be debated or discussed.)

These proposals are only a small and unrepresentative sample of the measures contained in ‘Removing Barriers’. They also form only a relatively small part of all recent government policy relating to ‘inclusion’. They are, however, indicative of a pervasive vagueness which permeates such policies. The proposals discussed here suggest that, in practice, the role of the government is likely to be confined almost entirely to the production of policy documents. No concrete commitments to other actions, such as new legislation or the commitment of new resources, are given. The constant use of managerialist language such as “pump-prime”, “promote inclusive practice” and “partnership” erodes accountability and
specificity. This occurs because, as with the Salamanca statement, without clarity as to who is responsible for action, exactly what action will be taken and by when, it is impossible to hold those who author a document to their commitments. This undermines opposition to the government’s plans. It is extremely difficult to oppose what you cannot specify. As I have repeatedly argued, this avoidance of conflict appears to be the government’s intent. However its, perhaps unintended, consequence is to promote powerlessness and undermine mutuality.

Thus, I would argue that, despite claiming to do so, New Labour has failed to provide the concrete ‘rights and responsibilities’ (to use that favoured New Labour phrase) which would be needed to turn its rhetoric of ‘inclusion’ into significant reality. New Labour has made three legislative changes which could be considered as strengthening the rights of all pupils to education. Firstly, changes have been made to the statutory basis for inclusion. Section 1 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 has modified section 316 of the Education Act 1996. The original provision had stated that children with SEN should be educated in mainstream schools as long as this was compatible with (a) receiving the necessary special educational provision, (b) the provision of efficient education for other children, and, most controversially, (c) the efficient use of resources. The new provision requires that statemented children must be educated in mainstream schools unless that is incompatible with (a) the wishes of their parents, or (b) the provision of efficient education for other children. Of possibly greater significance are the amendments in sections 11 and 13 of SENDA 2001 to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ensuring from September 2002 that it applies to school admissions and disadvantaging disabled pupils within educational settings including schools. While these provisions may be an advance, they do not amount to a universal ‘right to education’. The exceptions of parental wishes and, particularly, the provision of efficient education for other children, fundamentally weaken the
right. It ensures that LEAs and schools continue to be able to refuse a child access to mainstream education merely because it would be too expensive or inconvenient. This, in practice, leaves some children powerless. Unfortunately, it is still the case that “there is no right of access to a school-based education for everybody.” (Hayden, 1997, p.28)

Secondly, since September 2002 a requirement has been placed on LEAs to provide full-time education for pupils excluded for more than 15 days. This provision was intended to create a financial incentive for LEAs to provide better support to schools attempting to include children at risk of exclusion (SEU, 1998). In recent research, approximately half of LEAs reported that they were unable to meet this requirement at all times and for all children and many remained unclear about the exact meaning of ‘full-time’ (Atkinson et al, 2004). In addition, concerns have frequently been raised about the quality and consistency of ‘Education Otherwise Than At School’ (EOTAS) and the limited range of qualifications likely to be on offer to the children affected (Parsons, 1999). This requirement might be expected, over time, to have some positive impact on educational provision for formally excluded pupils. Unfortunately, there are significant numbers of pupils out of school for other reasons such as truancy, unofficial exclusion, when a parent withdraws their child because they are being bullied, when a child’s chosen school refuses to admit them or when a child’s chosen school fails to provide for their SEN. This provision does not apply to children in any of those categories, consequently it cannot be described as providing a universal ‘right to education’.

Finally, the new requirement on the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) to use inspections to evaluate how well schools are implementing ‘inclusion’ might be considered a safeguard of sorts. This has been the sole exception to the omission of ‘inclusion’ from the
audit culture which dominates the rest of the education system. While at first sight this may appear to provide a substantial incentive to schools to make progress on including more young people with SEN and to a greater extent, in practice the effect is severely limited. Ofsted’s remit to inspect schools does not extend to their admissions procedures, the statementing process as applied to their pupils or decisions taken by an LEA with regard to their pupils. Although Ofsted also inspects LEAs, this is done separately and there is no integration of findings for a given LEA and the schools it serves and their respective inspections may occur years apart. This is crucial in undermining the usefulness of Ofsted inspection as any guarantee of a ‘right to inclusion’ since decisions taken by both LEA and school interact and must, therefore, impact jointly on the extent to which a pupil with SEN experiences ‘inclusion’. Evaluating them separately thus creates significant weaknesses in the practical impact of inspection.

New Labour’s reformulation of ‘inclusion’ has allowed them to avoid conflict by ignoring the issue of rights. Thus, although some small steps towards encouraging schools and LEAs to be more ‘inclusive’ have been taken, no enforceable right to be included has been created for all children. It is important to be clear what this means. As I have argued here and elsewhere (Dunn, 2004b) segregated education in special schools diminishes a child’s likelihood of acquiring qualifications and has been experienced by many as exclusion. Thus the lack of an enforceable right to inclusion means that, in England, not only do some children have greater access to education because of family background and socio-economic status, but some children are actually denied equal rights to education in law on the grounds that they have a disability or special educational need. It is my contention that this is institutionalised discrimination and its consequence is powerlessness for these children (and their parents).
Thus, their experiences of education policy are of disrespect, lack of recognition, lack of care and exclusion.

*What New Labour Doesn’t Mean by ‘Inclusion’ 3: Equal Slices of the Educational Cake*

I believe it is fair to say that New Labour’s overriding priority in education policy since 1997 has been ‘improving standards’. Indeed, recent policy documents have trumpeted what the government sees as its biggest success, claiming

“Standards everywhere are improving fast.” (DfES, 2004c, Chap. 1)

In terms of the impact of this aspect of education policy on ‘inclusion’ it is important to understand the key political philosophies behind the drive to raise standards and the means chosen by the government to attempt to achieve this end.

New Labour views the primary purpose of education as to maximise “human and intellectual capital” (Blair, 1998, p.10) and sees ‘raising standards’ as the means by which this can be achieved. This version of human capital theory, as I discussed earlier, understands education as an ‘investment’ with an end product of enhancing an individual’s employability. Under this conceptualisation then, the primary goal of the policy of ‘inclusion’ is to address the ‘problem’ of the lack of qualifications and perceived poor employability of disabled people. Levitas (1998) has described this view of ‘inclusion’ primarily in terms of labour market attachment as forming part of a ‘social integrationist discourse’ (SID) in New Labour policy. There is, however, a fundamental problem with this view of ‘inclusion’.

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6 There is in fact an additional problem with this view of ‘inclusion’ which is not directly relevant to my argument here but is nevertheless important. This conceptualisation assumes that the problems of the labour market are confined to the supply side and that increasing the supply of employable workers will lead to reduced unemployment. However, as Levitas (1998, p.161) has argued “There is no consensus about how far
Making some connections back to the processes of marginalization and exclusion I discussed in Chapter 2, I would argue that this discourse ignores the social ramifications of education policy and encourages the division of children within the education system into the desirable and the undesirable since

“a view that problems are to be attributed to the deficiencies of individual learners and require remediation targeted at individuals is the overwhelmingly predominant view.” (Booth, 2000, p.91)

The policies responsible for promoting and sustaining this view are, primarily, the very policies of ‘choice’ and ‘raising standards’ of which the government is so proud.

Recent analyses of these policies have concluded that they are: fundamentally divisive and effectively a continuation of conservative policies (Tomlinson, 2001), perpetuate class divisions (Ball, 2003) and are discouraging to inclusion (Tomasevski, 2004). Indeed, Booth (2000, p.97-98) suggests that

“The absence of a recognition of the social consequences of contemporary education policies has allowed the creation of a divisive approach to raising achievement in schools that may take some years to be played out.”

The government is insistent that this is not the case contending that

“Some have argued that there is a conflict between the Government’s school improvement and inclusion agendas. The reverse is true. Helping children with SEN to achieve is fundamental to sustaining improvements in schools’ performance.” (DfES, 2004d, p.52)
It is essential for the government to sustain this contention. This is because ‘social integrationist discourse’ (Levitas, 1998) has been essential as a means of achieving what is, arguably, the fundamental tenet of third way philosophy, that

“Social justice and economic competitiveness should not be treated as though they were distinct and separate from one another.” (Giddens, 2002, p.79)

Unfortunately for the government there is considerable evidence that, certainly in education policy, social justice and market driven policies are not compatible. In today’s education quasi-market (Hayden, 1997) schools survive or ‘fail’ on those criteria which are most prominent in league tables and inspections. The most crucial measures by which today’s schools live or die are: the number of pupils achieving 5A*-C GCSEs and the percentage of 11 year olds achieving national curriculum level 4. As Tomasevski (2004) has cogently argued, rewarding schools for having pupils who achieve particular grades discourages them from including those who are unlikely to attain that goal.

Additional evidence that the pressures on schools encourage division is available from a closer look at the study by Croll and Moses (2000). In interviews conducted in 1998 with mainstream teachers they ascertained their views on the appropriate placement of children with SEN. They found that 69.4% of teachers felt that special schools were needed for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD7) and 58.2% felt they we needed for children with severe learning difficulties (Croll and Moses, 2000). These are both categories of need from which children might be unlikely to contribute to those key statistics. On the other hand only 20.4% of teachers felt that special schools were needed for children with physical handicaps, whilst a paltry 2.4% felt they were necessary for children with sensory difficulties (Croll and Moses, 2000). These findings, I believe, lend weight to my

7 Now known as Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD)
argument that policies driven by economic objectives are undermining social justice by causing children to be divided into the desirable and the undesirable according to their perceived ability to achieve key qualifications. This, rather than need, is thus determining the division of unequal shares of the educational cake.

If this is accepted the only means by which the government can then sustain its position that these policies are not fundamentally incompatible with inclusion is by substantially reformulating the meaning of ‘inclusion’ so as to make the conflict disappear. Thus, I would argue the concept of ‘inclusion’ has been so distorted as to become “a euphemism for containment and assimilation” (Slee, 1996, p.111)

Chapter 3 - Conclusions

In this Chapter I have argued that New Labour’s version of ‘inclusion’ is virtually unrecognisable as a policy “passionate in its commitment to social justice …” (Blair, 1998, p.1).

I have set out a vision of the potential of inclusion/exclusion as a social theory embracing all difference and diversity. I have then contrasted this with the limited and politically expedient view of ‘inclusion’ taken by New Labour. I have sought to demonstrate that New Labour does not mean by ‘inclusion’ an end to segregation, nor an enforceable right to education for all, nor even educational equality. I have argued that by co-opting the term ‘inclusion’ whilst not meaning any of those things, New Labour policies have subverted the promotion of
relationships based on recognition, respect, care and mutuality and produced powerlessness for some of the most vulnerable children in society.

Chapter 4: Social Justice, Market Economics and Some Conclusions
Throughout this dissertation I have argued that, over the last 7 years, the New Labour government has progressively attempted to close the door on conflict surrounding its educational policies. In areas of policy which affect the education and lives of the most vulnerable children in our society I have described how fundamental policy tensions and competing claims to social justice have been hidden, glossed over and avoided. These processes, I have argued, have allowed the government to make inconvenient problems simply disappear.

In the previous two Chapters I have referred briefly to some of the reasons for this. Now I want to draw together these threads and attempt to provide a coherent explanation, as far as that is possible, for the current state of social justice in education policy. There are two threads, as I see them: social justice itself and free market economics. In order to gain power in 1997, New Labour had to resolve these potentially conflicting aims. The consequences of their means of doing so have now been played out in the battleground of education policy for seven years. It is time to re-examine that solution by unpicking these two threads.

‘Social Exclusion’ and Social Justice

The first strand of my explanation for the current state of social justice in education policy is that New Labour’s conceptualisation of social justice itself is weak. During Labour’s transformation into New Labour social justice was still a key concern of those in the Labour movement. At the same time, third way theorists accepted that “the market has … socially damaging traits” (Giddens, 2002, p.37). In order to resolve this potential conflict the ‘social exclusion’ model was adopted as a basis for New Labour’s social policy. As I argued earlier the notion of ‘social exclusion’ is heavily invested with what Levitas (1998) calls the ‘social
integrationist discourse’. That is a narrow view of the goal of social policy as state intervention to enable all social groups to become part of the workforce. The weakness of this view is that, as Levitas (1998) argues

“The solution implied by a discourse of social exclusion is a minimalist one: a transition across the boundary to become an insider rather than an outsider in a society whose structural inequalities remain largely uninterrogated.” (p.7)

Similarly Field (2000 quoted in Tett, 2003) has suggested that

“rather than struggling against the social causes of inequality, the new language of exclusion implies that government’s task is to promote ‘inclusion’ into the existing social order.” (p.108)

The ‘existing social order’ is, in this case, a free market economic system. The ‘social exclusion’ discourse has thus allowed New Labour to shift away from ideas of redistributive economics. This shift was, arguably, key to New Labour’s electoral success since avoiding discussion of poverty as a social issue made it considerably easier to avoid raising income tax.

This is, by now, an almost classic argument and one that Giddens (2002) has strenuously, and unsurprisingly, disagreed with. Rather than avoiding the issue of poverty, he argues, social exclusion builds on it. Thus, in today’s more affluent society

“Social exclusion is not just about poverty, but about living in neighbourhoods that are crime-ridden and lack access to shops, transport, decent schooling and job opportunities.” (Giddens, 2002, p.10)

The difficulty with his argument is, however, that all these problems are not in fact separate from poverty, but are, to a large extent, the result of it. Denying this forces Giddens (2002) to focus on the problems of “the excluded” (p.10) (individuals) rather than causes of the
exclusion (structures) as the source of the social ‘problem’. The discourse of ‘social
exclusion’, as New Labour’s version of social justice, thus becomes a perpetuation of, rather
than a challenge to, the neo-conservative authoritarian discourses of the 1980s and 1990s.

**Free Market Economics and the Role of Education**

The second strand of my explanation is at the heart of New Labour’s education policy,
namely the government’s view of the role of education. McCaig (2001) has argued that the
economic crises of the 1970s compounded by the end of communism in Eastern Europe led
ultimately to the current pre-eminence of market philosophies in political thinking. For a
Labour Party committed to state ownership of public services and state administered
economically redistributive policies (i.e. the welfare state) this created a dilemma. To put it
simply, they couldn’t get elected, and without being in government they could never put those
policies into practice. The ‘Third Way’, with its emphasis on supply-side economics, seemed
to provide an answer. It was seen as

“a modernised social democracy for a changing world which will build its prosperity
on human and social capital.” (Blair, 1998, p.20)

However, implicit in this solution was an acceptance of human capital theory, complete with
its view that

“the primary purpose of education was to ensure national economic improvement.”

(Tomlinson, 2003, p.197)

The problem with this is that the very notion of ‘capital’ means attaching a value to human
beings. The concept of value requires that there can be more valuable people and less valuable
people. This is fundamentally incompatible with any robust conceptualisation of social justice.

I have described some of the consequences of this conflict in the previous two chapters. Policies designed to ‘drive up standards’ and provide a more employable workforce have also created pressures on schools to exclude, or fail to include, young people who are not viewed as contributing to those goals. I am not suggesting that the government intended these consequences, rather that markets are driven towards efficiency and, therefore, tend to discard whatever is inefficient. When vulnerable children are being discarded in this manner, as I have argued is now the case, the time may have come to examine, debate and reconsider market economics themselves.

**Closing the Door**

It is precisely to avoid having to reach such a conclusion that New Labour has sought to make the conflict at the heart of its education policies disappear. The ‘third way’, as conceptualised by Giddens (2002 and in earlier work) and put into practice by Tony Blair, was meant to reconcile democratic socialism with liberalism (Blair, 1998). Defining ‘democratic socialism’ as social justice, with the state as its main agent, and ‘liberalism’ as individual liberty in the market economy, Blair (1998) has repeatedly argued that there is no necessary conflict between the two. I have argued throughout this dissertation that my examination of education policy under New Labour suggests that the government has tried hard to disguise, deny and avoid this fundamental conflict. But it does exist.

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