**An analysis on the impact of the neo-liberal agenda on leaders’ intellectual and moral knowledge in English schools.**

“The complexity of our present trouble suggests as never before that we need to change our present concept of education. Education is not properly an industry, and its proper use is not to serve industries, either by job-training or by industry-subsidized research” (Berry, 2001: 5)

Introduction

In this assignment I will examine how the neo-liberal agenda has affected leaders’ professional intellectual and moral knowledge in English schools. As a middle leader in secondary education, I can relate to the issue quite closely as at the present time. It appears that the main focus of education is on targets and standards instead of being learning centred.

There is some controversy about how the standards and targets -that once were set to help students progress further and raise the education profile of schools, by Cameron’s government and with Gove as education minister in 2012 - seem to be hindering the learning of many students and as a result is having the opposite effect on students’ results. Harris (2012) is a fierce opponent to this business like education system and proposes a more child centre approach (albeit without much academic backing). Ball (2012) also remarks how the public sector is assimilating more the practices of the private sector to the point that “The private sector is the model to be emulated, and the public sector is to be ‘enterprised’ in its image” (Ball, 2012: 30) thus schools are becoming companies.

I have organised this essay into four areas: firstly, I will discuss what this neo-liberal agenda is and how it has affected the education reforms. Secondly, I will delve into the available research about the notion of professional knowledge and values. Thirdly, I will look into how this neo-liberal agenda has affected the knowledge of leaders and values. Lastly, I will examine if a leader is able to maintain child-centre values while conforming to the neo-liberal agenda.

**1) The impact of the neo-liberal agenda in the education reforms in England.**

In a world that moves at a fast pace and where education moves alongside economy, the fact that the economy influences education (and perhaps vice versa) in such a great manner; this has contributed to the creation of a business-like type of education through targets and standards.

For instance, in the latest education policy, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (2016) Morgan outlines that: “education should prepare children for adult life, giving them the skills and character traits needed to succeed academically, have a fulfilling career, and make a positive contribution to British society” (DfE, 2016:20) Education is centred on the academic success – target related and performance, thus Morgan mentions that the reason for a new education policy is that “Recent international assessments, comparing the performance of our young people in 2011/2012 with their international peers, have shown that our education standards have remained static, at best, whilst other countries have moved ahead” (DfE, 2016: 3). This policy thus related to performativity and the new neo-liberal system.

Moreover, the new type of education should accordingly “Provide opportunities to bring together educational expertise with business and financial skills in innovative and efficient organisations that can deliver better outcomes from the resources available” (DfE, 2016: 59) – which is in line with this neo-liberal idea of linking education and preparing students for the world of work. Furthermore, the Education Policy from the Department for International Development (DFID) also encapsulates the meaning of education that England is trying to develop for its own country and for others globally: “Education has the power to change lives. It opens doors to better employment, …which benefit future generations” (DFID, 2018: 1).

Also the creation of Academies, in 2010, shows the neo-liberal idea of the privatisation of the national sector. Whilst academies still having to follow the guidelines from the government, they believed that a more autonomic approach will benefit the performance of students (DfE, 2012)

There is clear evidence to show greater school autonomy leads to improved outcomes for pupils, and that quality sponsorship is tackling entrenched underperformance. It is for that reason that this Government took urgent and decisive action to expand the Academies programme to tackle underperformance and to free schools from bureaucratic constraints to do what is best for their pupils. (DfE, 2012: 6)

Notwithstanding, there is some disagreement with this style of education in Harris (2012), Ball (2003, 2008, 2012), Hargreaves (2007) Hargreaves and Fink (2007) as they considered that school are places of learning and not a constant focus for targets and standards. Hargreaves (2007: 225) also states that sustainable knowledge societies and sustainable knowledge society schools seem like oxymorons, where knowledge societies promote innovation, rapid learning and change and by contrast sustainable schooling:

…values slow and in-depth learning rather than a hurried curriculum, it asks for patience and endurance in the implementation of change, it calls for prudence and resourcefulness rather than energetic and profligate investment, and it promotes the virtues of conserving the past in a world awash with innovation and change. (Hargreaves, 2007: 225)

With this apparent contradiction, learning needing time and endurance and a fast market approach to education, and there is no surprise to the fact that standards do not rise as the business-like neo-liberal model may not be the adequate model to raise standards.

However, there are historical reasons as to why this neo-liberal style of education is been implanted, according to Peal (2014: 72-73), in 1977, Williams, the Education Secretary, “introduced a Green Paper called *Education in Schools*”. In this paper schools were warned “against the uncritical application of child-centred teaching methods which had descended ‘into lack of order and application’ in the classroom”. Moreover, this Paper “also suggested the establishment of a national curriculum”. Williams did not get the support of the teachers or unions as they “resented the potential loss of professional autonomy and interpreted this desire to raise standards as ‘teacher bashing”.

This centralisation of power continued in 1988 with The Education Reform Act, as schools were getting their self-direction removed and substituted for a more central approach and for the first time the policies start to be “marketised”. Furthermore, it was the beginning for teachers and leaders of a new professionalism where teachers are more accountable but less autonomous -a Neo-liberal agenda which will prescribe what teaching is and who is competent, a model coming from the biggest private companies.

However, there is not a lot of research literature supporting the neo-liberal model of education albeit the PISA report (Programme for International Student Assessment’s) run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), every 3 years, which uses the business like model to measure the students’ performance around the world- with 15-year-old students- in their core subjects.

The fact that the running agency is the OECD already sets the tone and shows their support with the neo-liberal model of education. Besides, whilst the idea of assessing students being able to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom and in a collaborative manner is positive “PISA assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students, near the end of their compulsory education, have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies” (OECD, 2016: 25); the fact that they refer to modern societies implies the close relationship between education and economy. However, PISA, despite being so “economy” orientated, has its best intentions for children: “Equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their full potential, contribute to an increasingly interconnected world, and ultimately convert better skills into better lives is a central preoccupation of policy makers around the world”. (2016: 3)

Taking a closer look at the current reforms in education, schools are being submitted to more and more pressure regarding standards and league tables- thus promoting competition, like in the private sector. In fact, league tables, since their introduction in 1992, marked the beginning of a different type of education- based on attainment and progress. However, the headline measure of school progress has changed overtime until nowadays, being “progress 8”- where the government’s attitude to education is to foster competition among different schools whilst having an equilibrated curriculum:

The new performance measures are designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on an academic core at key stage 4, and reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils, measuring performance across 8 qualifications. Every increase in every grade a pupil achieves will attract additional points in the performance tables. (DfE, 2018)

In fact, there have been several reforms in education that have affected the way leaders have to approach these leagues tables, all related to results in different ways- taking into account attainment and progress and measuring the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs to nowadays taking into account 8 passes “progress 8”:

Since 1992, the UK Government has published so-called ‘school league tables’ summarizing the average General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) ‘attainment’ and ‘progress’ made by pupils in each state-funded secondary school in England. While the headline measure of school attainment has remained the percentage of pupils achieving five or more good GCSEs, the headline measure of school progress has changed from ‘value-added’ (2002-2005) to ‘contextual value-added’ (2006-2010) to ‘expected progress’ (2011-2015) to ‘progress 8’ (2016-) (Leckie and Goldstein (2016: 3)

What this shows is that, in terms of priorities for the government, results are first and the child-centre education comes second. Ball (2012: 30) brings up the key concept performativity, as it is “a vital component of both management and enterprise” and it is the new concept in education as “performativity facilitates and requires the reflexive redesign of organisations, organisational relationships… In effect organisations are ‘enabled’ to think about themselves differently in terms of, or in relation to their performance”. This links really well with the new education policy document *Secondary Accountability Measures* (DfE, 2018)-more of a company document than a school document. In fact, the idea of “performance” appears 51 times in the first 20 pages of the document, whilst the concept of “learning” only appears twice- that says a lot about the current education climate.

In this same line of work, Green (2011: 1) questions how this managerial model is adequate for “achieving any *public accountability*” or even less for education. According to Green (2011: 1), she argues that there has not been a proper scrutiny of the underlying rationale of this model, otherwise it would have shown that in fact this model could make professional practices “*less accountable* and, when applied to education, *less educative*”. Indeed, Green, (2011: 1) neo-liberal managerial models of accountability are criticised in the literature as these models have venomous effects on professional conduct and practice.

1. **Unpicking professional knowledge and values.**

The definition of professionalism is far more complex than perhaps anticipated. To start with, I will use the definition provided by the Cambridge Dictionary: “the combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people: He praised her professionalism and dynamism.” (Cambridge dictionary online, 2018). According to this definition, professionalism entails qualities but, there is not a lot of explanation of what qualities and the example does not clarify the situation either.

Nonetheless, professionalism is required of teachers and school leaders as part of their daily life duties- as the Teacher Standards’ (DfE, 2011) call it “Personal and professional conduct (2011: 14)- which take the style of a code of conduct.

Overall, in education, the definition of professionalism is still ambiguous; is professionalism a code of conduct that one follows? Or perhaps is a set of skills acquired at a school/ university? Is professionalism a set of values (and what are those)? Can it be learnt in some training (as suggested by the Cambridge dictionary)? In the current modern education model, maybe those values are principles for professionalism come from the economic world.

Hoyle (1974 in Clow: 2006, 411) calls this professionalism ‘professionality’ and it defines it as “-‘the knowledge, skills and procedures employed by teachers in the process of teaching” He then divides this professionality in 2 categories -‘restricted’ (referring to a high level of skill in classroom practice) and ‘extended’ ( which refers to ‘a broader range of knowledge and skill which contextualised – and hopefully improved classroom practice’ (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 123 in Clow, 2006: 411). This could be closer to a more traditional way of thinking about what professionalism is, however, it may not be a definition that has moved on with the times.

Eraut offers another definition about what professional can symbolise these days, according to Eraut:

… ‘professionalism’ … (is) an **ideology…** the ideology of professionalism embodies appealing values, in this case those of service, trustworthiness, integrity, autonomy and reliable standards; it works in the interests of certain groups—those occupations recognized as professions—while winning the consent, most of the time, of others whose interests are less certainly served by it; and it is effective in so far as its representation of reality is accepted as obviously correct. It is the increasing lack of acceptance of the obvious correctness of the ideology of professionalism, partly but not entirely because of attacks from other ideologies such as that of ‘the market’, that presents us with a need, and an opportunity, to reappraise the idea of professionalism. (Eraut, cited by McIntyre, 1994: viii)

Hence, here there is a definition that can be applied to teachers and especially to school leaders who need to be the representatives of this professionalism for the rest of their school staff. As it can be seen in this definition, a point is being made about this professionalism being on the side of those organisations with certain interests. What this means is that professionalism can change its colours, much like a chameleon, by adapting depending on who holds those values and standards. In the case of the current education situation, the government, and more importantly an economic state ‘the market’ as it has been aforementioned.

This can cause controversy since professionalism can be a non trustworthy term in itself due to the fact that professions are just following the changing agenda. As Hanlon (1988 cited in Whitty, 2000: 285) states “virtually all professions are becoming fragmented, with some members enthusiastically adopting the changing agenda of the state and corporate employers, while others are resisting it”.

Hanlon (1988 cited in Whitty, 2000: 285) also mentions that until 1980, most professions which served the welfare state in the post war period “developed a ‘social service’ form of professionalism in which professional experts were trusted to work in the best interests of everyone and the resources were made available by the state to help them do so”. Nowadays, notwithstanding there is what Hanlon calls ‘commercialised professionalism’ “in the public and in the private sector: “which responds more to the needs of profitability and international competitiveness and therefore privileges the needs of some clients over others. Similar developments have been evident within education as a result of policies of ‘marketisation’ (Whitty et al, 1998). (Hanlon, 1988, cited in Whitty, 2000: 285-286)

And this is what it is happening with professionalism in education- in England- as the professional knowledge needed by those school leaders changes and adapts depending on what the organisations controlling this “professionalism” (in the school case- the government) need at a particular time- in our times related to performativity and autonomy.

This is the case to the extent that ‘de-professionalisation’ is occurring as the neo-liberal agenda in England is very prescriptive, leaving teachers and leaders without much autonomy based on a competency model perhaps inappropriate for the education task:

In fact, as Carr (2000) suggests:

…the recent rationalisation of professional preparation according to competence models of training, and standardisation of educational provision through training, and standardisation of educational provision through centrally imposed curricula, have been widely regarded as conducing to the ‘de-professionalisation’ of teachers, whose opportunities for individual and creative initiative and endeavour seem increasingly curtailed. (Carr, 2000: 15)

As it has been examined, there has been a shift in the definition and meaning of what professionalism could mean, however, since education seems to have been ‘marketised’, the value of professionalism and its values is on the air to this day. In fact, these so-called professional values are very malleable as they seem to represent the ideology of the organisation that requests for this professionalism.

1. **How this neo-liberal agenda has affected the professional knowledge of leaders and values.**

Neo-liberalism is a form of autocratic management as it is stipulated by the authorities- and prescribes a series of rules and conducts expected by teachers and leaders- such as National Teachers’ (2011) and Headteachers standards (2015). In contrast, Helsby (1995: 320 in Evans 2008: 3-4) states that: ‘If the notion of “professionalism” is socially constructed, then teachers are potentially key players in that construction, accepting or resisting external control and asserting or denying their autonomy- however, is this the reality?

In terms of the professional knowledge that leaders would have to learn for this particular type of professionalism, the concept of accountability and the type of autonomy that the government suggest they have. Moreover, the new business-like language and understanding behind it would be paramount. This new knowledge will include the learning and understanding of the new business-like language and leaders will have to learn how to analyse of the new data and statistics, almost becoming technocrats. Boyle, 2001 (in Ball, 2003: 215) remarked this situation:

We take our collective pulse 24 hours a day with the use of statistics. We understand life that way, though somehow the more figures we use, the more the great truths seem to slip through our fingers. Despite all that numerical control, we feel as ignorant of the answers to the big questions as ever. (Boyle (2001, in Ball (2003: 215)

Nonetheless, as Boyle outlines, all that data analysis does not always make sense regarding education and learning as there has been a sudden need for teachers and school leaders to rapidly understand a great amount of data for which they have to learn on the job and as it happens as education policies change fast.

In fact, looking back at the education policies, school leaders would have to learn all the new jargon and acronyms and the new ways to measure headline progress: “value added”- 2002, “contextual value added”-2006, “expected progress”- 2011, and lastly about Progress 8- 2016- all the language is target orientated, not valued orientated as if schools were enterprises. .

According to Harris (2012), school (and school leaders in particular) should promote to develop the whole child, not just aim to get good results. By a whole child he means caring about his wellbeing and about the community he is part of. And as he points out it is everyone’s obligation to do so. Harris (2012) also mentions that events and clubs area motivational tool for students as well as having a canteen with healthy as good food is a means to take care of the whole child. If education is to be doing its job- not only being data driven- Harris sustains that a child-centred focus should be prioritised.

Notwithstanding, Harris (2012) while talking about communities, he mentions that – as a key of change- bravery is having a moral purpose- but he does not specify according to what moral: “An emotionally self-aware leader can work to ensure that the organisation seeks to identify and work towards its own moral purpose, one around which all levels of staff and the wider community can gather” (Harris, 2012: 125).

Coates (2015:175) in the same line as Harris (2012) agrees with him on the whole child approach- a citizen with broader education responsible, etc

..our pursuit of academic excellence can never be extricated from the challenge of developing responsible, mature, compassionate citizens who are able to channel their talents towards healthy, productive ends. Pupils should emerge from school with a broad, expansive education, sensitive to themselves and others. (Coates, 2015: 175)

Moreover, she remarks that “Character development is not at the expense of an academic education: it enhances it” (Coates, 2015: 175)

In addition, Groves, Hobbs and West-Burnham (2017: 15) mention 4 different propositions for future school and leaders; the first one called “ethical foundations” (unlike the government policies which talk about performativity). Inside these essential ethical foundations for the future the community and community-based strategies and renewal schemes are part of the core of these principles which is in line with what Harris (2012) initially suggested. Nonetheless, Groves Hobbs and West-Burnham (2017) mention the use of targeted interventions to students, thus showing a balanced between results and the well-being of a child- unlike Harris (2012) who is too child centred and leaves the results out of the equation.

Montessori (1988: 3-4), positions herself in the same way and states that if knowledge is to be part of an individual, there should also be a focus on the development of the child aside results from tests:

If education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man's future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind? Montessori (1988: 3-4)

Giroux (2014:2) states that this neo-liberalism instead of promoting social responsibility, public values or community, it creates a kind of social amnesia “that erases critical thought, historical analysis, and any understanding of broader systemic relations” in many Western societies. This creates individuals unable to think critically about the relation between “public agendas and private worries” or other words; they cannot see the relation between individual interests (neo-liberal) and the correspondent public agenda at the core of democracy.

**4) Can a leader maintain child-centre values while conforming to the neo-liberal agenda?**

The neo-liberal agenda has been shown in a negative light as it is quite restrictive and too target based. What the leaders of the future need is to conciliate both, the child-centred education with results.

As it has been shown, it is a difficult task to match the neo-liberal agenda with the child-centre values as they seem to be in opposition. It seems that the way forward for the government is standards, results, performance- with those premises it is a very challenging task to keep the focus on the child as the pressure build up for schools.

Especially school leaders will find this task daunting as they are constricted by all the education policies’ (DfE 2015- *National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers*) and by another government agency: Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), thus the accountability and standards are always very present.

In addition, headteachers are not always rewarded for being the best headteacher, as the government’ objectives seem to only focus on short term goals. Harris (2012) makes an analogy between objectives and a race, long term goals are called “marathons” and quick wins “sprints”.

Harris states (2012), that these government agencies are looking for quick wins not for the fulfilment of long term targets or the “greater good of the community as a whole…” (Harris, 2012: 49) Normally those quick wins would have been triggered by the “external agencies who have the power to sack you if you don’t join in that particular race” (Harris, ibid)

Another factor to take into consideration is if it is possible to find an education model that is moving on with the times at the same time that appropriate learning takes pace (more traditional) as it was aforementioned takes place. Hargreaves (2007: 225) questions this same idea: “How can we reconcile innovation and sustainability? How do we build a future on the foundations of the past? How can the energetic innovator and the prudent Puritan live and work together, side by side?” (Hargreaves, 2007: 225)

Shields (2010) suggests that to move on from this managerial- imposed by the government- style from school leaders to a more transformative leadership, in order to help children become as Coates (2015: 175) refers to as “responsible, mature, compassionate citizens” the communities need to be supported to change in order for the child to thrive, thus the emphasis is on changing communities beyond as well as within a school building.

The solution could have possibly been found by Stanley Park High, a school that marries both a focus on students achieving good results -which have dramatically improved, see report from Ofsted 2015 and also TES Award 2016 as the best school in England- and a focus on the whole child and relationships. The positive comments from the reports highlight the improving results from the previous Ofsted report where the school required improvement to currently- having changed its status to an academy- to them having embraced a future where community principles and the whole child are at the core of their values. As Harris (2012) mentions, community values and relationships, being the most important thing for a child and his learning (2012: 72, 108)

In contrast, for Harris, examining the Ofsted report (May 2012) from his academy, Nottingham University Samworth Academy (NUSA), it was a shock when the school was rated as “inadequate” in 2013 just a year after being rated as “good” in May 2012. Especially as the school had been in the news and profusely congratulated by Ofsted (2012) about how much improvement there was in an area where it was initially considered a bad school and students had a negative view on themselves.

Harris resigned from his headmasters post in September 2013 (NUSA report, 2013: 1), along with all of his senior leader team, possibly due to the poor results (Ofsted, 2013 and NUSA directors report and financial statements, 2013). Hence, his child, community centred education failed to address standards- perhaps the focus was too much in the other aspects of the child development and not enough with achieving good results and hard learning.

Where can we find a more balanced view that conciliates results and relationships? Perhaps Stanley Park High could be an example of a good school where community values and relationships are at the core of the curriculum (http://www.stanleyparkhigh.org.). This is a school which has been able to maintain the results and the relationships over time, unlike Harris’s school which was too focused on community change without hard learning. Examining the Stanley Park High website it is very clear what their values are- relationships and a good curriculum support- in order for children to succeed:

We believe we have a unique and exciting offer. We believe our success is due to the relentless focus we place on ensuring that your child will form excellent relationships with all those they interact with at the school, from the start of the transition process, to when they leave us at the end of year 13..We are highly ambitious for the success of your child and driven by our determination to ‘ignite a passion for learning’ in every one of our students, who reap the benefits of a broad, rich and forward-thinking curriculum, within a nurturing environment. (Stanley Park High School Prospectus, 2018:2)

In this way, community value is important but it needs to be done properly as too much emphasis on relationships and not enough in hard learning-as it was the case in Harris’s school- leads to students not being successful academically as well as well nurtured but in the case of Stanley Park High, “We, of course, value the importance of our students being literate, numerate and achieving examination success; however, we also place a great deal of emphasis on developing other capabilities that we believe are vital in today’s and tomorrow’s world.” (Stanley Park High School Prospectus, 2018:3) - it seems that they have the balance right.

Moreover, Ofsted also praises Stanley Park High School on their values and how they allow students to succeed academically:

“Stanley Park High is innovative and imaginative, where students are very successfully prepared for their future lives. Practically all students respond to the school’s motto of ‘Igniting a Passion for Learning’. This is done by blending positive relationships, in small class sizes, with an exciting curriculum.” (Ofsted, 2015: 3)

Thus examining Stanley High Park closer, it is a school that blends creativity and results- from the neo-liberal agenda at the same time focuses on good relationships and community, could this be then that the neo- liberal agenda is after all positive for students’ learning? Could this model be scaled up?

Maybe the success also lays in the fact that this school is part of Human scale education - hence classes are smaller. Could this also be part of the success? Moreover, would it be possible to think about schools that have smaller classes, is that feasible nationally to run a school with small numbers? This statement from Staley Park High sounds ideal:

Our ‘Small Schools’ create the structure and environment for us to know and value the individuality of each child, while our tutoring arrangements are designed to facilitate the advice and guidance required to find, support and nurture each student’s passion; and ensure that every child builds the best possible relationships with members of staff. (Stanley Park High School, prospectus, 2018: 2)

Not long ago, the government and its academy system were talking about bigger classes in an academy world of no doors and big theatres (DfE, 2010), it is the completely opposite of what this school is doing- smaller classes and more child centred which leads to good performance- according to their Ofsted report (2015).

Could we use the neo-liberal agenda and create an education that caters for the whole child? Perhaps, if this school has managed it, maybe others will. However, the issue of profitability arises, as schools are businesses to a certain extent nowadays- factories where students are learning skills to put into use into businesses in the society- so it is a chain. Could other schools follow the model of Stanley Park High School and break the chain? Would they be allowed by the government?

**Conclusions:**

It is clear that nowadays the nurturing type of education that encourages critical thinking and the values of community (Harris, 2012 and Giroux, 2014) it is utopic as it has been substituted for the hard core values of individualism and competition promoted by a neo-liberal agenda which has filtered his way down into the education realm.

As it has been discussed, education laws have been changing according to what the government deemed necessary to raise standards- a marketization approach where there is commodification of education and leaders and students are complicit as, education is located in a neo-liberal agenda which is very target and results orientated.

At the point I am writing this essay, 2018, the standards continue to need improvement- the KPIs (Key Performance indicators) keep changing- now with the Progress 8 agenda and with documents such as the *Secondary Accountability Measures* (DFE, 2018)and in the case of headteachers, with the *National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers* (DfE, 2015). It seems that there is a never ending target based agenda.

Furthermore, the constant scrutiny and the accountability tune make leaders reticent to continue being one because of documents such as the DfE (2018) *Secondary Accountability Measures* as it is asking leaders to only care about the one thing that matters to business: performance, and it seems that nowadays, education is a business.

In this respect, there is a myriad of antagonism towards the government (Ball (2008), Ball (2013), Harris (2012), Giroux (2014) because there is a feeling that schools and higher education providers should not be managed like a result factory where students are only numbers.) Shahsavari-Googhari (2017) mentions Foucault and the idea that neo-liberal practices and performativity are really engrained into not only the English but also global system to the point it has shaped our values: “Foucault’s (1991) idea of neoliberal governmentality and performativity as technologies of neoliberalism was adopted as another framework to show how neoliberalism is turned into a global phenomenon and that it has shaped common-sense notions” (Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017: 90)

Consequentially, the professionalism – the knowledge and values needed as a school leaders in this day and age, have changed and are accommodating an enterprise model, satisfying the “the powers that be” (Harris, 2012: 163). Professionalism has been defined in different ways overtime but as Eraut (1994) stated professionalism is an ideology which encompasses “values of service, trustworthiness, integrity, autonomy and reliable standards”, notwithstanding, there is a blur about professional knowledge and vales as definitions change over time. Moreover, in reality, the only professionalism that people have to be taking into account is the one dictated by their company or in this case the government who manages schools. As a school leader and classroom teacher your autonomy to decide has been taken away a long time ago (Williams’ reform of the curriculum in 1977, and the Education Reform Act in 1988).

Maybe Harris (2012: 35) was right when he said we should not dance to “the political tune” as he mentions “political timescales are almost out of sync with those required for effecting lasting change” and follow our own instincts. As Precey (2016) and Harris (2012) both agree, it is about leaders being brave and “ who are hard headed with a focus on making a positive difference regardless of unreasonable opposition and challenging circumstances” (Precey, 2016: 7). In this case, true school leaders should move from the Standards agenda that prioritises results first then relationships to do the opposite and put relationships first then results (unlike Harris, 2012 who lost sight of them)

Maybe the most successful case showing a commitment to relationships and community and results is Stanley Park High School where students are at the core of the school values and results are rapidly improving as a consequence of the child being nurtured and also hard learning taking place. However, there is the issue of the ‘small scale education’ in this school which is an advantage to these students as they get closer attention; nonetheless the majority of schools have to deal with oversized classes.

Perhaps it is time for change coming from within schools, in the words of Taleb (2008):

“It has been more profitable for us to bind together in the wrong direction than to be alone in the right one. Those who have followed the assertive idiot rather than the introspective wise person have passed us some of their genes. This is apparent from a social pathology: psychopaths rally followers.” (Taleb: 2008: 192)

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