



When inclusion leads to exclusion: A consideration of the impact of inclusive policy on school leaders working within a pupil referral unit.

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Abstract

My research investigates the experiences of a range of professionals tasked with the role of enacting a policy aimed at achieving social justice. In a drive where one of the priorities was aimed at reducing exclusions from mainstream schools, some participants report feelings of being marginalised and excluded from the policy process. This paper offers a valuable insight into the permeations of the policy process, and the experiences of senior leaders working within education, health and social care, and who feel excluded from the decision-making process. This raises fundamental questions around the planning and implementation of policy aimed at inclusive practice, and a move towards achieving social justice. It raises the question of if it is ever justified to exclude the voices of professionals who are directly impacted by a policy? This is particularly pertinent given that the purpose of the policy itself is concerned with inclusion and social justice.

Keywords: Social justice; inclusion; exclusion; socio-economic disadvantage; Bourdieu

Introduction

England's Department for Education recognised the need for greater practical and financial support for disadvantaged areas. Consequently, in October 2016, 6 areas were originally designated as Opportunity Areas (OAs), which has subsequently been increased to 12. The policy means that extra investment has been made available, by the Government, to schools within the most deprived wards, to try to raise standards for disadvantaged students. My research focuses on one of these designated areas, and analyses how the policy has

been perceived by 14 policy enactors from education within one of the chosen locations: the local authority, the OA committee, and academia.

The causes of deprivation within the chosen OA, are multi-faceted and deep rooted. Poverty is compounded by cheap, poor-quality housing, a highly transient population, the importation of families with complex needs from neighbouring local authorities, and the lack of secure employment. Schools and the local authority provision have long suffered financially due to decades of savage cuts in funding, and punitive austerity reforms. Schools are forced to replace the

care and provision no longer provided by a social care system that has been decimated by years of austerity.

The aim of this paper is to utilise the theoretical tools of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly around capital and habitus, to understand the experiences of participants who were actively involved in the policy enactment process. It may not be self-evident why adapting an approach influenced by Bourdieu might be the best practice, particularly as Rawolle and Lingard (2008) acknowledge that he did not write anything directly about education policy. However, there are many factors that have influenced my decision. These include Bourdieu's own epistemological stance and the need for reflexivity within research; the importance Bourdieu placed upon empirical research and a rejection of the over reliance upon established theoretical ideas; the concepts or thinking tools created by Bourdieu that can be adapted and related to my own research, and finally, Bourdieu's interest in power imbalance and the subjugation of the poor. This paper will demonstrate how theoretical ideas of Bourdieu can be productively utilised in policy sociology within education (Lingard et al. 2005), and that his methodological approaches and theoretical concepts can also be helpful when researching and understanding education policy (van Zanten 2005), and particularly how the work of Bourdieu is complimentary to both my own methodological approach, and the nature of my study.

Drawing upon Bourdieu's taxonomies of power, this paper aims to gain a better understanding of how symbolic power is actualised within educational policy, and the impact this has upon key stakeholders within local education provision. Crucially, symbolic power is a central concern for socially just approaches to education policy, and this paper aims to problematise the impact that power dynamics have on the policy process and those associated with it. Power in relation to this paper relates to the ways in

which individuals are included, or excluded, from decision-making within the policy process, and that power is exerted to ostracise individuals whose opinions are to be discounted or marginalised. It can also relate to the distribution, or lack thereof, of economic capital, and the anxiety caused by the reliance and yet uncertainty in relation to funding. The aim of this paper is to argue that a more socially just approach to policy consultation and implementation is required, and that future decisions need to recognise that the relationship between injustice and education is unlikely to be disrupted unless fundamental issues of power and interest, advantage and disadvantage, are addressed within the policy process.

Methodology

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that the best way for a researcher to select who and what to study is based on gaining an understanding of the contexts of particular groups that lead to different forms of behaviour. Certainly, in respect to my research it was important for me to hear from participants located in differing fields (to use Bourdieu's term), all of whom have been impacted by the policy process. This enabled me to investigate the lived experience of policy interpretation and implementation of participants from differing contexts, with differing agendas. It also allowed me to examine how the specific field and the habitus of the participants influences their response to policy. In total fourteen participants took part in the research. Seven of the participants work directly in education within the focus town, although they are representative of different elements of the education system including mainstream, a special school, and a pupil referral unit (PRU)¹. One of the participants previously worked as a Central Executive Officer (CEO)² of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)³ within the town, and another participant worked for Her

¹ A Pupil Referral Unit is a type of school within the UK that caters for children who are not able to attend a mainstream school. Pupils are often referred there if they need greater care and support than their school can provide.

² Central Executive Officers within Multi-Academy Trusts are responsible for leading on strategic leadership, setting

and communicating a vision for the Trust, supporting headteachers of the school that fall within the trust.

³ Multi-Academy Trusts or academy chain is an academy trust that operates more than one academy school. Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of local authority control.

Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI)⁴ and still has direct ties to education within the area. I have also considered individuals working in fields that relate to the individual policy being researched. Three of the participants have roles within the local authority. One works within public health, another has a role linking directly with education, and the third is a director focusing on long term development. I also spoke to a key individual relating to the Opportunity Area Board. Finally, I spoke with an academic who has carried out substantive quantitative research in relation to contextual analysis of performance data with a focus on comparing performance in relation to context. This rich and varied data set has allowed me to investigate how the individual agents working within their specific fields view the focus policy and the overall policy process. I have also been able to consider relationships between fields, and how views are influenced by the fields of power.

The participants were interviewed and asked about their role and responses to the OA initiative and the impact of policy in general. Interview participants provided examples of how power dynamics have influenced the policy process. A common theme highlighted in this research was a feeling of injustice amongst the participants who worked in education and for the local authority. Many felt that they were not listened to by those in positions of power, and that often they were not consulted on policy decisions that affected their work and their town.

Each of the designated OAs have identified distinct priorities relating to the context of the area. Three priority areas were highlighted as areas for development for this OA. One was to improve pupil attendance outcomes and reduce exclusions. This paper focuses on some of the participant responses to the targeted aim of the OA initiative to reduce exclusions within mainstream schools.

Context: Educational disadvantage

Inclusive education is seen by politicians across the political spectrum as a priority. Arguably, this is

because education is viewed as a key driver of social justice. Education is a powerful predictor of life chances; inequality in outcomes means fewer opportunities (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). This can also be detrimental to society with higher welfare costs, lower levels of tax revenue and higher crime rates (Belfield and Levin, 2007). Investing in disadvantaged, young people is a policy initiative that promotes both social justice and fairness, and promotes productivity in the economy and the whole of society (Heckman, 2006). It is little wonder then that education, and particularly the education of the poorest young people in the country, remains a priority for governments, policy makers and educators.

However, despite significant financial investment from the government and successive government rhetoric highlighting socio-economic disadvantage within education as a priority, it remains the strongest predictor of educational attainment in the UK (Francis et al., 2017). In 2017, The Education Policy Institute estimated that at the current rate of progress, it would take fifty years to achieve an education system where disadvantaged pupils did not fall behind their peers during formal education to age 16 (Andrews, et al., 2017). Reay (2018) argues that the family that you are born into is a major factor that will determine educational outcomes, and that the education system continues to cement the social hierarchies that currently exist. In 2011, the UK government introduced new funds to tackle socio-economic disadvantage in schools in England: the pupil premium. However, since the introduction of Progress 8⁵ in 2016, the progress gap between students allocated pupil premium funds⁶ and their peers has increased each year (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Consequently, the government launched a place-based initiative pledging extra financial support to designated areas where there were the highest levels of deprivation. This study focuses on the impact of this initiative for policy enactors who work within the town and considers

⁴ Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) inspect education and care providers in England, challenge them to improve, and help them get the support they need.

⁵ Progress 8 is a school performance measurement in England and shows how well pupils of all abilities have

progressed, compared to pupils with similar academic starting points in other schools.

⁶ The pupil premium is a grant given by the government to schools in England to decrease the attainment gap for the most disadvantaged children.

how dynamics of power can disrupt the policy process.

Literature and concepts

Policy

Nudzor (2009, p. 85) argues that the term 'policy' is elusive and that it is used in numerous ways and refers to a 'highly diverse set of phenomena'. A lack of understanding in relation to the complex nature of the term has led to discussions around policy being taken for granted by academics, policy creators and enactors, making it very difficult to achieve a comprehensible understanding of the real meaning of the term (Ball, 1994). Nudzor (2009) outlines different dominant policy paradigms. Firstly, the 'problem solving' model which positions policy as some sort of document that is created by policy makers and put into practice by policy implementers. Within this paradigm, policy in its simplest form is viewed as a physical document that can be handled and read. Trowler describes policy viewed this way as:

A specification of principles and actions, related to educational issues, which are followed, or which should be followed, and which are designed to bring about desired goals (2003, p. 95).

This view of policy making can be seen as rational or incremental in nature, a system where policy makers become aware of a particular problem and look at the best available opportunity. However, this traditional, positivistic approach, of viewing educational policy as value-neutral is considered by many scholars to be too simplistic and lacks consideration of the complex nature of policy creation and enactment (Young, 1999). For example, policy is formulated from numerous different sources: from central governments, national bodies associated with governments, local authorities and educational institutions (Trowler, 2003). When researching policy, Regmi (2017) highlights the difference between the approach which he describes as 'analysis for policy' compared to 'analysis of policy'. The distinction is that the first contributes to policy production and is undertaken (usually) by government administrators and bureaucrats who already have the responsibility of formulating and

implementing policies, and as Ozga (2000) claims, have the intention to change and improve administrative practices by implementing the decisions made. However, analysis of policy relates to a more scrutinised approach where policies themselves may be part of the social problem and not necessarily the solution (Ball, 1997). This highlights a tension between those who are aiming to pursue a more efficient education system and those who want to highlight apparent injustices within the system itself (Ball, 2006). Young (1999, p. 685) observes the notable shift that has taken place within policy studies and outlines this transition towards a more critical approach which focuses on how 'knowledge, power and resources are distributed inequitably'. This shift in policy research focus recognises the complex nature of policy and allows a critical analysis of policy creation and implementation. Central to my research is a consideration of how policy is viewed from different perspectives, and how the distribution of power and influence can impact upon an individual's relationship to policy, and also to others within the policy process.

Bourdieu acknowledged the complexity of the policy process, but also that it is not a straightforward system of subjugation or domination. Policy making often involves, negotiation, contestation, or struggle between different groups who may lie outside of the official machinery of official policy making (Ozga, 2000). Nudzor (2009, p. 93) defines this view of policy as the 'process model' where policy becomes a site of 'struggle, negotiation and dialogue', and where the outcomes are co-created by makers and implementers. This method of analysing policy views it not only as a text, but also that it is highly influenced by the power dynamics at play. Consequently, any effective policy study must involve decisions made at all levels and not just to be seen as something done to schools by governments. Policy is permeated by relations of power but also a field of possibilities (Ball, 2006). Policy should be viewed as a dynamic process rather than something that is static (Trowler, 2003). Firstly, the policy process involves conflict, this could be from those who create the policies and those who are to put it into practice (Gale, 2003). Secondly, policies require interpretation, and they can be subjective. Sometimes policies are subject to multiple

interpretations. Finally, policy practice is extremely complex. Policy descriptions can describe a different situation than what is happening on the ground and often the outcome of policy enactment leads to something different than was originally intended. Trowler argues that policy texts are laden with multiple agendas, attitudes, values and sets of meaning and therefore the encoding of the policy involves: 'Complex practices of interpreting, negotiating and refining proposals' (2003, p. 98).

This incremental model of policy views the process as more of a 'muddling through' where policies can change, depending on the situation. They can appear uncoordinated and even contradictory (Lindblom, 1959). It is essential that policy research acknowledges this, and by interviewing a range of participants from different backgrounds, each with their own experience of policy, it can lead to a better understanding of how policy is viewed and implemented. Central to the participants' responses to the OA initiative were issues relating to power, or lack thereof. Participants were clear that for them, aspects of the policy process were unjust, and that they had experienced feelings of marginalisation or exclusion. Through participant examples, it has been possible to relate experiences to Bourdieu's conceptual tools, and particularly that of capital within its various forms.

Power

Navarro (2006) recognises that the process of democratisation has created new spheres of conflict where the previously subjugated are empowered to be a part of political discourse, and where it is encouraged for individuals to voice their opinions and express their grievances. However, it could be argued that much of this implied power is tokenistic, and that the reality of the power dynamics within education is quite different.

Bourdieu describes the field of power as, 'the relations of force that obtain between the social positions which guarantee their occupants a quantum of social force, or of capital, such that they are able to enter into the struggles over the monopoly of power' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 229-230). Bourdieu recognised that the social environment consisted of a multiplicity of fields, and within those

fields were individual agents, who competed against each other and developed social capacities. By investigating the practices relating to individual fields it is possible to consider who are the dominant and dominated agents involved when researching a policy field (Rawolle and Lingard 2008).

Swartz (2014) argues that of all the fields, the field of power is the most significant feature of Bourdieu's thinking in relation to the dispersal of power within society. It is within the field of power that people, and institutions compete with one another over the different forms of capital (Hearn, 2012). Fields only exist because 'capitals, individuals, groups and institutions are all interdependent in networks of relations that shape the social order' (Baroutsis 2015, p. 612).

For Bourdieu, power and capital were the same thing and he analyses power in three distinct ways. They are power in valued resources (capitals); power in particular arenas or spheres (fields); and power in legitimation (symbolic) (Baroutsis, 2015). Bourdieu made the distinction between three types of power in valued resources, that of economic, cultural and social. The focus for this paper is related to the exclusive nature of social capital and impact this has had on policy enactors.

Social Capital

Social capital is the aggregate of the resources that are tied to membership in a specific group. The group itself provides these resources, and they serve as credentials, sources of leverage, status, or worth (Bourdieu, 1986). As these resources are exchanged, they solidify the relationships that exist within the group. The exchange of social capital leads to a reinforcement of social relationships and social standing (Julien, 2014). There is an acknowledgement amongst scholars that education is one of the most important determinants of social capital. Huang et al. (2009, p. 455) argue that 'schooling spreads knowledge – the basic component of human capital and cultivates social norms – the core of social capital'. Indeed, many scholars have now established links between education and social capital. For example, Lingard et al. (2012) explored advantaged contexts hoping to gain insights into the nature of capitals within advantaged contexts and concluded that the

independent schools that they studied in Scotland inculcated a belief in their pupils that it was their right to succeed.

Social capital is not only something which can benefit pupils or the families of pupils within an educational context. Indeed, social capital and knowing the right people can also lead to advantages within work. However, it is important to point out that social capital does not just relate to who you know, or the connections that you have; there can also exist a lack of social capital, where individuals are excluded:

Thus, social capital theory constructs networks as forms of inclusion and fails, in the main, to recognise their potentially and, we would argue, usually, exclusionary, and hierarchically socially reproductive aspects in competitive and even more so in conflict situations (Gamarnikow and Green, 2007, p. 370).

Certainly, there was concern from participants about the exclusionary nature of social capital, and the fate of those who do not have the connections or a seat at the table of power. Some participants felt that many aspects of the policy process were unjust where policy responses were dictated both by social capital (or lack thereof) and the habitus of the policy enactors.

Habitus

Bourdieu describes habitus as 'a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past-experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 18). Consequently, an individual's dispositions (systems of propensity, tendency, and inclination) work as a mechanism for their behaviours (perception, appreciations, actions).

Bourdieu, and those who have since utilised his conceptual tools within their own research, argue that an individual's beliefs and actions are influenced by their past experiences. For those researchers who study policy enactment, it is the assumption that policy responses are inextricably bound to the background of the policy enactors. This could ultimately be related to personal interest or utility maximisation (Spillane, 2004), and may link to the

capacity, potential and limits of the individual and the institution in which they work (Ball et al. 2012).

When examining a policy, and perhaps in particular a place-based policy, it may also relate to the participant's own relationship with the place. Reay (2004) relates habitus to both a person's individual history and also the collective history of family and class that the individual belongs to, meaning that attitudes and actions are likely to be influenced by family upbringing and origins. However, Reay recognises the complexities of habitus and the fact that it can take many shapes and forms. This is particularly relevant following discussions with participants about where they are from, and whether the geographical origins of policy enactors are important in relation to policy decisions being made.

Structuralist Constructivism

Bourdieu argues that habitus becomes active in relation to a field (1990, p. 116). Within each field, individuals contest for a share of power. Bourdieu deploys the concept of habitus to articulate interested individual action on the one hand, and a constraining social structure, on the other (Friedland, 2009). For Bourdieu (1985), habitus is central to his methodology of structuralist constructivism which is his response to and reconciliation of the dualism of agency and structure. This view of power relates closely to Bourdieu's theory as 'equidistant from the opposing poles of either an over emphasis on agency or a one-sided focus on structures' (Navarro 2006, p. 13). A place where structures dictate practice to a varying extent but where individuals assert their own identity when and where it is deemed appropriate and perhaps more so when feelings of exclusion, isolation and marginalisation are present.

Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital, habitus and field are used to explain the structure / agency dilemmas, and how different situations result in different outcomes depending on the attitudes and experiences of the individuals, their surroundings and their relationships to others within and beyond the area that they operate or 'how particular agents may command differing stocks of capital, which will make up varying proportions and a resulting positional field' (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 128-9). Consequently, Bourdieu (1990) sees habitus as capable of influencing the

individual in both constraining and transformative action. Edgerton and Robert's (2014, p. 195) understanding of habitus is something that 'shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility'. These interests are born out in the practices of the individuals which reflect their circumstances, and where opportunities are created to exercise agency and control. Practice is, 'the product of a dialectical relationship between a situation and a habitus, understood as a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 261). Bourdieu argues that ultimately all actions are interest driven and are oriented towards the maximisation of material or symbolic results (Navarro, 2006). Stensli (2006) coined the term 'policy habitus' relating to the set of dispositions that are of interest when producing practices relating to policies.

The conceptual tools of capital and habitus developed by Bourdieu have been utilised when making sense of the participant experience. Throughout the interviews, the participants recognised a sense of injustice within the policy process. The next section will examine practical examples of these experiences which includes both the exclusionary nature of social capital and participant responses to marginalisation.

Research findings

The exclusory nature of social capital

There were some examples within the interviews of the inclusive nature of social capital in the form of cronyism. One headteacher spoke about how an Ofsted inspection had been helped when he had mentioned a mutual friend to the Chief Inspector. Another was deeply concerned about the closeness of some school leaders to government policy and government ministers which allowed them to have unfair advantages. However, it was clear that some participants had experienced situations that were often partly, or completely, out of their control. Perhaps the clearest example of this was Jenny. Jenny was a senior leader working within pupil referral unit within the town.

Jenny's attitude towards the OA initiative is likely to have been influenced by how she feels she has been omitted from discussions and decision making in relation to policy affecting the town. She feels that in the past she has not been listened to when she has suggested what the focus should be for disadvantaged students. These areas have since become priorities following the designation of the town as an opportunity area. Jenny explains:

I remember standing in meetings. I was heading up the inclusion group of people and they were all talking about, we need to focus on English, we need to focus on maths and I said no, no, no, no, we need to focus on literacy and SLCN (speech, language and communication needs) and inclusive practice. I kept getting battered down and so they didn't like what I was saying so they moved me out, but guess what? Now we are focusing across the town on literacy, inclusion and SLCN, and they are the 3 drivers and it's a shame because we are now 8 years down the line.

Jenny also feels that she has been removed from prominent positions and important meetings because those in power do not like what she is saying. She feels that in some circles, she no longer has a voice. Jenny describes the situation she experienced:

They have gagged me. They have taken me off these boards because they don't like what I'm saying, but actually it's right, and I'm not just saying me, our philosophy. Suddenly I have been asked to leave board meetings, you know these board groups that I was on because as well as head of the PRU, I also have a lay role, so I used to have a lot to do with behaviour, inclusion but they've redefined the group membership shall we say, and I'm not on the list anymore.

This could be understood as a situation where Jenny has lost the social capital of being able to influence groups that she used to belong from within them. This feeling of disconnection and isolation may explain her response to what has been perceived by many to be one of the success stories of the OA initiative, that of reducing exclusions within local schools.

Exclusion through inclusion

One of the priority areas for the chosen OA was to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. By reducing exclusions, it was hoped that mainstream schools would adopt a more inclusive practice and prevent the financial and social consequences of excluding young people.

Data from the local council suggests that school exclusions were certainly an issue that needed to be tackled within the town. In 2016/2017, 1.1% of pupils in the town attended a PRU (around 200 pupils), which is more than 6 times the national average and 3 times the regional average. Children attend PRUs for a variety of reasons, including temporary or permanent exclusion and mental or physical health issues. The proportion of children attending PRUs in the town has doubled since 2013. There has also been an increase in the number of children attending special schools in the town.

The OA initiative has supported schools in trying to reduce permanent exclusions. On the face of it, it seems like the drive to reduce exclusions has been a success. John was a member of the OA board. His independent role was to help decide what the priorities should be and to oversee the funding and impact of the individual strands of the project. For him, there was little doubt that the drive to reduce exclusions had been a success:

The reduction of exclusions for me, the biggest success in that little number, that big number frankly is the cultural change that we have seen in the schools, you know the desire to deal with those kids and to support those kids within mainstream education.

John argues that the positive changes have been brought about by the support that has been provided by the OA initiative which is delivering targeted appropriate interventions to groups of children and families, including those children at risk of not attending or being excluded from school. One aspect of this is to provide the 'team around the school' project since autumn 2018 which provides targeted support within schools:

I think those kind of cultural changes, you know, supported by our kind of team around

the school, where we put family support workers around schools, we've built a kind of support network around schools, to try to ease the pressure and to allow them the space to, you do this in school and our wish is that when we withdraw our funding, school funding will be there to replace it, or other set of funding because there's real value in it and they can see the real value in it. So, it's those things. Continuing with provision which is jointly funded with council to the tune of many hundreds of thousands of pounds, and you know, after a lifetime of trying and getting no results at all, we've actually halved the exclusions this year from schools. So again, you can see that there are really quantifiable things now that, you know projects have been running along enough, where we are getting quantifiable numbers, real things that are actually happening.

Tony, a former HMI with close ties to the area, agrees that the reduction in exclusions has been a positive consequence of the OA initiative:

I think one of the things, that (the town) has done that is really good is that they've, they have massively reduced the numbers of exclusions, fixed term exclusions, and they've done that because the council and the opportunity area have funded, have seed funded projects which have enabled the schools to develop their own internal, I don't want to use the word exclusion but internal support systems.

It is somewhat surprising that Jenny is critical of the OA initiative aimed at reducing exclusions by keeping challenging students within mainstream settings. Jenny states:

So, and what they can prove is well we've reduced this amount of young people in the PRU, we've given schools money and they're really supporting inclusive practice, they're not. It's just hiding figures. Inclusive practice across (the town) isn't improved. All they are doing, they aren't PXing (permanently excluding) them, they are hiding them in isolation rooms and elected home education and lengthy fixed

term exclusions. They are not fixing the problem, they are displacing it, and in doing so they have reduced the financial overheads of the PRU so we've won. Great. Big tick. But no because it's financially driven, not child led. They've been given £40,000 each for last year and for this year to develop inclusive practice. They're not developing inclusive practice, but they are hiding, it's a displacement of need.

Jenny also criticises the use of alternative provision by schools, some of whom she believes are not fit for purpose:

So, what the authority is doing is encouraging alternative provision in schools, occasional learning opportunities, that can do it cheaper and categorically not better than us. So TAS (alternative provision), they've bought places at the alternative school and the kids are accessing it. I know people say this about us (the pupil referral unit) but I know it's not true. They are accessing an hour a day. They are causing havoc in the town centre, but it's out of place so it's great. So, we've not permanently excluded, but we've bought places at TAS which is cheaper than us. So, it's a win win. Finance is down and reduce permanent exclusions. But those kids are ending up coming back to us or out in the ether somewhere.

It could be argued that her position has been influenced by the fact that she feels she has been ostracised from the decision-making processes around exclusions. Such decisions will undoubtedly have impacted her role as headteacher at the PRU whose numbers, and therefore funding, has been drastically reduced by the inclusive practice of mainstream schools. Clearly, this difference in opinion is related to the perception of the situation which will be highly influenced by the habitus of the individuals, whose attitudes will be formed by their experiences and frustrations. Jenny was also frustrated that key decisions about the town were being made by others who had no direct affiliation to the town. This is something that is addressed later in the paper. The feelings of powerlessness caused by an absence of social capital, and perceptions of being marginalised from the policy process, has resulted in

a situation where policy enactors recognise the process as being unjust. This is particularly meaningful when the policy is directed towards social justice.

Ball (2012, p. 8) argues that sometimes, 'policies are suffused with emotions and with psychosocial tensions. They can threaten or disrupt self-worth, purpose and identity. They can enthuse or depress or anger.' This certainly seemed to be the case with Jenny who was both visibly angry about the way she had been treated, but also seemed genuinely pleased to be able to give her account of the OA initiative and her perceptions of the mistakes that have been made. Her negativity towards the programme is likely to have been influenced by the loss of social capital she has experienced over decisions that have been made. She wasn't the only participant whose actions seemed to be directly related to the control, or lack thereof, that they were afforded within the policy implementation process. Jenny's feeling is that those in control did not want any dissenting voices to be heard, and that the consequences of any negative responses to the initiative was to be ostracised and excluded.

Jenny argued that she had recognised other situations where agency had been removed. She had witnessed situations where some of the school leaders were unable to make decisions without consulting the CEOs of MATs. Her understanding is that they do not have the freedom of choice and that the CEOs of the trusts manipulate those working within the schools:

We've got quite a young range of headteachers particularly at secondary. So, the old die hearts like me have disappeared, however, so they want they generally are interested in action research and inclusive practice, the problem is they're just Pinocchio. So above them is Gepetto, the CEOs and the head of the Academies talking inclusive practice but not allowing the puppets to be inclusive. So, at that level the heads are frightened of over-stepping the mark because someone else is pulling the strings, and you know in academies they can get rid of staff left, right and centre.

There is a suggestion then, that some school leaders have very little agency, and are instead pawns that are being used to legitimise and adhere to decisions made by those who have real power. Consequently, questions were raised about the OA initiative and how much control the policy enactors had in relation to what the focus should be and where the financial support should be directed. Participant responses to this situation varied, but what became clear is that the decisions made were often as a response to the power dynamics at the time and relative to the habitus of the individual.

My participants were asked where they were from, and how they ended up having a connection with the focus OA. I also asked if they thought that policy decisions relating to the area should ideally be made by those who are from the town. Some of them were born and raised in the town, whilst others were from other areas and came to work there. Some remain outside of the town, but have influence over policy decisions relating to the town. The responses from two individuals in particular who work locally highlight the dichotomy between those who argue that there are benefits in being from the area, and those who think the opposite.

Jenny believes wholeheartedly that being from the town is beneficial in comparison to those who work within the town but whose roots are elsewhere:

For me, it's made a massive difference because I genuinely believe I've got (the name of the town) blood, me being from (the town) has made a difference and I do understand these kids and I know the area, and it's alright bringing these leaders in who aren't (name of the town) born and bred, but for me it does make a difference.

For Jenny, having a historical relationship with the town is crucial when making decisions about the town. The response from those who do not have the same affiliation with the area were understandably different.

John, who has a prominent role on the OA (Opportunity Area) board, is not from the area but believes that it does not make a difference that there is someone from outside the area making decisions about the area:

I honestly don't believe I am any less passionate because I don't live there. I really, it's just not that at all, because actually I believe that you know, what we want to do in the opportunity areas is to forward best practice and to spread that into areas that I do actually live in as well. I have no personal agenda. So, I've no direct link to any of the organisations that are trying to provide these services, that benefit from funding, anything else. I have no, you know, significant personal relationships with any of the individuals there. So I am, I'm seen as truly independent and that has been really, really helpful in brokering collaboration.

The different responses to this question are likely to link to the individual habitus of the participants. The response from Jenny may be partly due to a genuine belief that those who are born and brought up in the town should have control over the direction it takes.

Certainly, the views of Jenny may also be driven by the fact that she has felt ostracised from recent policy discussions and is resentful that others from outside of the town have had greater influence over decisions that have been made which affect her role. This feeling of powerlessness, and of asserting opinions and influence wherever possible, was a common theme throughout the research.

Social capital, exclusion and habitual responses

There were other examples of policy enactors asserting their limited agency. The success of the different elements of the policy have been dependent upon the schools who implement the policies and their co-operation and contribution. Adam, the principal of a local mainstream school, argued that it is no coincidence that the success of the individual initiatives within the OA programme are dependent on the level of input from the policy enactors:

Some of the ideas have worked really well, other ones that we've been dictated to, and we haven't been asked about our own, you know kind of input, they're the ones that have struggled. For example, key stage 3 literacy, inclusion around the continuing provision, they

are projects that are now going into year three, year four. Now that's been, we've put a lot of work into that as head teachers. A lot of people have and tweaked it along the way, but if you think of something like key stage 4 English, where they just threw £20,000 without any thought into it.

In Adam's experience, when the initiatives have been properly planned, and have sourced the opinions of the schools directly before implementing them, they have more chance of being successful. This could be interpreted as an example of a field struggle over the distribution of capital. Adam suggested that there was a direct connection between the level of agency ascribed to the school when deciding the individual initiatives and the will of the school to make the initiatives a success. This demonstrates that when there are only a limited number of practices available, then stakeholders may use their habitus to manipulate outcomes to assert their agency.

Policy, power and change

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see within their roles, and particularly in relation to the policy process. Many of the responses made reference to greater autonomy and agency.

Anne, the principal of a newly opened special school in the area argued that disadvantaged areas need greater autonomy to decide their own priorities. Anne explained:

Each area needs the autonomy to sort of work with the policy or work with the funding or whatever, to decide how things are going to be done within the area.

Simon was the Director of Strategy for the local authority and firmly believed that a contextualised solution is the best idea, where local areas have greater freedom to plan their own future:

I am hopeful that they will start thinking long-term, dedicated resources. Letting the area decide what it needs, but that's it basically, it's giving up permission to do things differently, even if it goes against government policy in certain areas.

Peter, who was Head of School Standards at the local authority, recognised the need for a contextual approach towards towns with severe deprivation and understood that it is better for decisions to be made by those who have a working knowledge of the place and the opportunities available:

As I said before, they are not flat-pack systems are they? You know, there are no instructions for improving a school in (the focus town), and actually what we've found is the longer you're there for, the more likely you are to be successful at it, because you get immersed in the context and actually do understand what makes opportunities arise for children.

Many participants believed that a devolution of power to local authorities would give them the ability to prioritise the things that would lead to long-term change, but this is yet to happen. There was an understanding that policy is dictated and directed by central government, rather than the result of collaboration and compromise. Although there are elements of the OA programme which have been impactful and, overall, the extra funding and support brought about by the initiative is welcomed, the consensus is that the policy to improve standards does not go far enough. Participants recognised the need for greater contextualisation both in policy and practice, and the need for a greater awareness and consideration of areas of severe deprivation. Moreover, the participants argue that greater agency and autonomy, and an empowering policy process where the needs of the policy enactors were a consideration, would be advantageous.

Conclusion

A common theme highlighted in this research is that participants felt a perceived lack of agency when considering policy creation and implementation. This has a profound impact on their views regarding policy and their own responses to it. The feelings of not being listened to led to frustration and anger from some, whilst others took every opportunity within their roles to gain some sense of control. Participants from education and the local authority suggested that a contextualisation of policy and practice would support their roles and lead to positive change. They also believed that a recognition of local challenges

within education and social care with extra funding, and the ability of local authorities and schools to have greater control over key decisions would improve the situation moving forward.

Crucially, a greater consideration of the experience and views of policy enactors within policy creation and enactment is likely to greatly influence the trajectory and success of policy moving forward. Many local professionals in both education and the local authority feel that they are not listened to, and that often they are not consulted on policy decisions that are made which affect their work and their town. Many believe that a devolution of power to local authorities will give them the ability to prioritise the things that will lead to long-term change.

Throughout this study, it has been clear that power dynamics have influenced the policy trajectory and focus. There are some participants who have felt marginalised and ostracised in relation to social capital. The responses to the feelings of exclusion have been varied but it is clear that, wherever possible, individuals have utilised their positioning to gain whatever control back they can. Responses vary from being openly critical about some of the initiatives to implying more subtle responses in how the individual initiatives have played out within schools.

The policy process is extremely complex. By utilising Bourdieu's conceptual tools it has been possible to examine how social capital can act as an inclusive or exclusive element of the process, and that individuals will utilise their habitus within opportunities that arise. Consequently, the success of elements of an initiative may relate to the ways in which stakeholders have been consulted or marginalised from the process.

Final Thoughts

Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) argue that social justice within education will require more than just a fairer distribution of resources. Indeed, as far back as Young (1990, p. 16), academics have been arguing for an extension of the boundaries of what constitutes social justice within education to include 'all aspects of institutional rules and relations insofar as they are subject to potential collective action. Taylor *et al.*

(1997, p. 20) acknowledge that, 'policies are permeated by relations of power, and to ignore issues of power is to ensure our own powerlessness'. Power dynamics must have a greater consideration within the policy process. Failure to acknowledge issues around inclusion, agency and marginalisation of key policy stakeholders are likely to negatively impact the trajectory of the policy. The aim of policy aimed at improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils is clearly to try and achieve a more equitable system. This paper suggests that initiatives aimed at trying to achieve this must also better consider the position of the policy enactors within the process, particularly when the policy itself is directed at trying to achieve a more socially just education system.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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