**MA in Educational Leadership (Teach First)**

**Module: Improving Schools in Areas of Socio-economic Disadvantage**

**Session 2: The Education Policy Process**

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Activity 1: Contextual factors

“Educational leadership does not exist in a vacuum – it is exercised in a policy context, shaped decisively by its historical and cultural location.” (Bell and Stevenson 2006: 7).

Education philosophy activity - see additional sheets.

Activity 2: : Stevenson (2011)

Stevenson (2011) presents a polemical account of the historical and cultural elements perceived to underpin current Coalition policy. His main argument is that:

The consequence of Coalition policy represents nothing less than the eventual triumph of Thatcherism. Brian Simon’s prophecy of the destruction of a system, underpinned notionally by democratic control, to be replaced by an educational market driven by private providers, is on the brink of realization (Stevenson, 2011:189).

To what extent do you find this argument convincing?

Stevenson also claims that Coalition education policy is designed to achieve the following five objectives:

1. A hierarchy of schools;
2. A return to traditionalism (in terms of curriculum);
3. Structural privatization;
4. Educational Choice as a Consumer’s Transaction;
5. Reculturing the Teaching Profession.

If we have time, in your small group, choose one of the five objectives and consider a) how convincing his argument is (in terms of the evidence he cites) and b) whether his description accords with your own experience.

Extension Activities

Your school’s policy perspectives

1. Who has the most authority in your school? Where does their authority come from? How do you know they have the most authority?
2. Who has the most influence? Where does their influence come from? How do you know they have the most influence?
3. Is anyone in your school silenced? Who? And why?
4. Who is being silenced on a national scale and why?

Your own experience

Think of a policy recently developed and implemented in your work context.

* Where did the policy come from?
* Was it developed in response to a perceived problem? If so, how was this problem

defined and by whom? Was there a consensus about the nature of the problem?

* How was the policy developed?
* Who was involved/not involved in the process?
* Did the policy changes as it was being developed? If so, how, and in response to whose

intervention?

If you wanted to research policy, how might these questions shape your choice of topic?

And to what extent might the answers to threse questions warn you off? (Think about the extent to which people might feel willing and/or able to answer honestly.)

Using literature: Interrogating the Schools White Paper (2010) using Hodgson and Spours (2006)[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. According to Hodgson and Spours (2006), what five major inter-related changes in the policy landscape occurred between the mid-1970s and the mid-2000s?
2. What impact did these changes have on teachers and schools? What changes are the Coalition government reversing? What other changes are they making and why? To what extent do you agree with these decisions?
3. With regard to political eras, how the White Paper is similar to and/or different from the White Papers produced by the previous Labour government and the 1988 Education Reform Act of the previous Conservative government?
4. With regard to the education state, what national, regional and local structures and institutions have contributed to the policy?
5. With regard to the policy process, what role have practitioners and the public-at-large played in the development of the White Paper and what role is envisaged for them at the implementation stage? Can you find evidence of compromise?
6. With regard to political space, which stakeholders have been allowed to influence this policy, and how open has the Coalition government been to alternative perspectives?

References:

Ball, S. J. (1994) *Educational Reform: A critical and post-structural approach*, London, Routledge.

Bell, L. and Stevenson, H. (2006) *Educational Policy: Process, themes and impact,* London, Routledge.

Bottery, M. (1992) *The Ethics of Educational Management*, London: Cassell.

Blakemore, K. (2003) *Social Policy: An introduction*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Bowe, R. and Ball, S.J. with Gold, A. (1992) *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*, London, Routledge.

Harman, G. (1984) Conceptual and theoretical issues in J.R. Hough (ed.) *Educational Policy: An international survey,* London, Croom Helm.

Stevenson, H. (2011) “Coalition Education Policy: Thatcherism’s Long Shadow”, *FORUM, Volume 53, Number 2, p179-184.*

1. This offers an exemplar approach to constructing a literature review, though obviously for a full literature review you would need to include more sources to support the various arguments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)