



A case study in leading schools for social justice: when morals and markets collide

Leading schools for social justice

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper explores how school leaders seek to promote social justice agendas within the context of multi-ethnic schools in England.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on data from five case-study secondary schools in England. Qualitative data was derived from interviewing principals in each institution together with interviews with staff, students and members of the wider community.

Findings – Effective principals in multi-ethnic schools had strong values commitments to social justice and were able to articulate these values across and through the policies and practices in their schools. However, in some cases value commitments to equity and inclusivity could be challenged by the consequences of policies promoting school choice and the development of a quasi-market for school education. This could present school leaders with complex moral dilemmas that counter posed inclusion aspirations against performance in the local market.

Originality/value – School leadership committed to promoting social justice can be both supported and undermined by the context created by national policy initiatives. This paper highlights the need to ensure education policy is fully aligned with social justice objectives if it is facilitate, not hinder, efforts in school to challenge inequalities.

Keywords Leadership, Social justice, Ethnic groups, Schools, England

Paper type Research paper

In the preface to Michael Fullan's *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership* (Fullan, 2003, p. xiii) the author argues that "The 1990s was a dismal decade for the principalship". Reflecting a situation to be found in very many countries, Fullan argues that principals were the victims of unrealistic expectations and a policy environment that simultaneously increased prescription and diminished coherence. Relentless and rapid system change, often driven by motives that appeared to conflict with professional educational values, and a lack of support at institutional level contributed to significant levels of alienation amongst principals. Within England, as elsewhere (Quong, 2006; Walker and Qian, 2006), the consequence was a looming crisis in principal supply. Many principals sought early departures from their careers, whilst the numbers of those willing to step into their shoes reduced substantially. Principals' experiences were mirrored across the wider teaching profession, with a growing recognition that the system lacked sustainability. Professional disaffection, contributing to rapid teacher turnover, threatened to jeopardise the government's reform agenda.

Growing recognition of widespread alienation at all levels of the school system has since provoked a governmental response that purports to re-assert the importance of teacher professionalism and professional values. In classroom teaching this is reflected



in the publication of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003), which claims to prioritise teachers' professional judgement and the centrality of creativity in teaching. For school principals it is possible to discern an increasing emphasis being placed on the importance of values in educational leadership – and the reassertion of “moral purpose” in educational leadership. The recognition of leadership as “driven by beliefs” (National College for School Leadership, 2006a, p. 7) has become a key focus in the work of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) as the College's own research reports continually highlight the importance of moral purpose not simply as a key feature of effective leadership, but as one of the key factors that *sustain* effective leadership (National College for School Leadership, 2006b).

The increasing emphasis on values-driven leadership raises important questions about the extent to which school leaders have genuine scope to develop policies and practice within their institutions that promote social justice, and that challenge social injustice. This paper seeks to address two issues. First, how do school leaders “make sense” of social justice and seek to operationalise it within their schools? Second, how much opportunity do leaders have to promote social justice agendas within their institutions, and to what extent do national policy agendas help or hinder school leaders in their work? Put simply, where school leaders have social justice “attitude” – do they also have latitude?

This paper addresses these issues with a specific focus on “race” and ethnicity in the English school system. These issues have long been recognised as both difficult and problematic within English schools (Swann, 1985), often associated with systemic racism and significant differentials in engagement and achievement across ethnic groups (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996). Whilst there is an established record of educators seeking to challenge racism in schools (May, 1999), impact so far has been uneven and the problems are both complex and enduring. It is important therefore to develop a better understanding of how school leaders seek to develop their schools as inclusive multi-ethnic institutions, and to what extent their efforts to articulate values based on social justice at the school level are helped or hindered by national policy agendas.

Leaders with (l)attitude: can school leaders make a difference?

There is of course nothing intrinsically new about the importance of moral purpose in educational leadership and there is an established tradition within the academic field that has recognised this (see, for example, Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993; Hodgkinson, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992). What is novel is the apparent re-assertion of the moral purpose of leadership after a period when neo-liberal inspired policies appeared to have stripped the school leader's role of its educational value, and reduced school leadership to a crude “managerialism” (Thrupp and Willmott, 2003). The managerialist critique of educational reform has argued that following the collapse of the Keynesian welfare settlement (Robertson, 2000) a major restructuring of school sector education presaged a transition from welfarist to post-welfarist (Tomlinson, 2001) forms of organisation and delivery. Gewirtz and Ball (2000) have argued that central to the shift from welfarism to post-welfarism was a shift in the underlying values that inform public schooling, with increasing emphasis on performance, market success and efficiency. Within such a model there is pressure on school leaders to focus on those aspects of schooling, and those students, who add most value. This emphasis on value and the maximisation of efficiency can stand at odds with the public service ethos of making

professional judgements based on principles of equal treatment and assessments of need. The emerging primacy of post-welfarism therefore offered a direct challenge to the commitment to social justice within welfarism and the social democratic consensus that underpinned it (Gewirtz, 2002; Tomlinson, 2001). Professional values associated with social justice (however ill-defined) and the egalitarian principles that informed these values, came under increasing threat from an education system that prioritised market value over human need.

Critics vary in the extent to which they accept that school leaders necessarily got drawn into assuming a managerialist role. For example, Day *et al.* (2000), in their study of school principals, argued that effective leaders when faced with a hostile policy environment were able to assert their agency and retain a strong commitment to educational and professional values. Day *et al.* (2000) identified three types of leader response to hostile policy contexts. First was the *subcontractor*, who uncritically implements the policy agenda, without discernible resistance or modification. Second was the *subversive*, who sought to challenge policy by undermining it. Each of these typologies were perceived as problematic by Day *et al.* (2000), who argued that in both instances trust and integrity in the leader was undermined (the former viewed as supine and the latter as disingenuous). In contrast the third type of leader response, *values-driven leadership*, was characterised by an ability to “mediate” the external policy environment and to align it with the values and vision of the school. In these cases leaders were able to retain personal and professional values. Indeed they were explicit about their commitments to equity and openness. However, they were adept at exploiting opportunities within the wider policy environment and aligning these with their own priorities in pursuit organisational objectives. Day *et al.* (2000) present a largely optimistic assessment of leaders’ abilities to work for progressive change, even when this goes against the grain of government policy. This assessment has been supported by others (Gold *et al.*, 2003; Moore *et al.*, 2002) who have argued that effective leaders can create a “space” in which personal and professional values can be retained.

The school leaders in our case studies remained committed to a set of strongly held values and a simple shift from “welfarism” to the “new managerialism” (Gewirtz and Ball, 2000) was not apparent. This was not to say that school leaders were unaware of the need to manage resources effectively, including human resources, and of the significance of parental choice and market forces, but that they were not fundamental. They were driven by a different set of values and these [...] were based on intrinsic values and not those imposed by others, including governments. Of importance was the wider educational, social and personal development of all pupils and staff. Effective or “outstanding” school leaders are those who are able to articulate their strongly held personal, moral and educational values which may, at times, not be synonymous or in sympathy with government initiatives or policies (Gold *et al.*, 2003, p. 136).

Such an optimistic view is not shared by others (Thrupp, 2004; Hatcher, 2005) who have asserted that State power has now become so centralised that school leaders have no meaningful space within which to exercise autonomy. Wright (2003) has argued that school leaders may have some scope to exercise “second order” values such as collaborative working or open communication, but that “first order” values are set elsewhere and are not capable of being contested. Wright (2004, pp. 1-2) has further argued:

Principals are [not] necessarily unprincipled people, far from it, but [. . .] the system in which they have to operate stipulates the overall framework, values direction and often the detail of what they have to do.

Central to Wright's argument is the belief that there is a "values clash" between the professional decisions of school leaders, and the values embodied in state policies which shape the environment within which school leaders function. It is Wright's argument that the power of the State and its agencies affords little opportunity for school leaders to fundamentally challenge the system and the values that underpin it. This argument highlights the need to better understand the interface between State policy and institutional practice and the extent to which both are expressions of the values that underpin them. Policy itself can be analysed as a formal expression of State values – what Kogan (1975, p. 55) described as "the authoritative allocation of values". However, I have argued elsewhere (Bell and Stevenson, 2006) that policy must be viewed as more than the operational statement of values, but as the *capacity* to operationalise values. Policy is both product and process (Taylor *et al.*, 1997). By seeing policy in these terms, attention is drawn to the key themes within this paper. First, how do school leaders "make sense" of social justice and articulate it within the context of wider policy agendas? Second, to what extent are school leaders attempts to promote socially just institutions and forms of education supported, or hindered by state policy?

Within England this latter question has become increasingly significant following the election of the Labour government in 1997. Prior to this period the Conservative administration had pursued a vigorous pro-market policy in education, seeking to weaken professional power bases (teachers and their collective organisations, local education authorities) and effectively abandoning the welfarist commitment to equality of opportunity. The election of New Labour in 1997 represented both continuity and change with this agenda. In fundamental respects the Thatcherite state restructuring of education has remained intact with continued dependence on quasi-market structures to power "improvement" and penalise "failing schools". However, the government's "Third Way" approach has sought to combine a faith in competition with a commitment to social justice and a focus, at a rhetorical level at least, on equity issues (Department for Education and Employment, 1997; Department for Education and Skills, 2004a).

New Labour's commitment to a social justice agenda is complex and often contradictory. There is no doubt that there is an impulse within New Labour policy that is committed to some form of social justice, and this does distinguish New Labour policy from the Thatcherite neo-liberalism that preceded it. However, terms such as social justice (or its more anodyne and therefore more widely used synonym, "social inclusion") are rarely articulated with any clarity or intellectual rigour (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). Rather they remain vague and ill-defined, providing only a limited framework to guide policy. Policy itself becomes suitably confused and contradictory – sometimes radical, but often experienced as controlling and coercive. For example, policies seeking to address issues of distributive justice (such as the national minimum wage) often conflict with wider policy agendas that continue to extend inequalities (such as tax "incentives" to promote enterprise). These tensions and contradictions are clearly evident in relation to social and education policy relating to "race" and ethnicity.

Space does not allow a detailed analysis of New Labour education policy with regard to “race” and ethnicity but it is important to briefly sketch out the policy context within which schools have functioned in the years since Labour came to power. Early race relations policy was dominated by the State’s response to the MacPherson Report (MacPherson, 1999) – a public inquiry into the racist murder of a young black student in South London in 1997. The report highlighted problems of institutional racism, not only within the police force (nobody has been successfully prosecuted for the murder), but as a pervasive feature across the public sector. The government’s response to MacPherson was largely framed within the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, a key element of which was the statutory duty placed on public sector institutions to positively promote race equality. Although not specifically “education policy”, the new legislation had significant implications for schools. At the same time notions of inclusion within education were increasingly extending beyond a narrow interpretation focused on children with special learning needs to raise wider questions of equality and access within the school system. However, schools have had to reconcile their commitment to inclusion within the wider context of the government’s “standards agenda” and its drive to achieve national targets of student performance in standardised tests.

Government is adamant that “inclusion” is not an “either/or” in relation to its standards objectives and there is no contradiction between demonstrating achievement through performance in standardised tests and being inclusive for all students. However, there are undoubtedly tensions between the drive for academic achievement and the commitment to social inclusion (Lunt and Norwich, 1999) with conflicts between competing objectives posing difficult dilemmas for school leaders. Furthermore the ill-defined nature of social inclusion compounds the complexity for school leaders as they seek to “make sense” of policy texts and translate these into the lived experience of their students. These issues highlight the first concern of this paper which is the way in which school leaders seek to “operationalise” social justice within their multi-ethnic schools and it highlights the possibility of “space” within which school leaders can take external policy agendas and interpret and adapt them in ways that exploit more radical possibilities. More recently this “space” has increasingly been framed by the development of the *Every Child Matters* agenda (Department for Education and Skills, 2004b) which sets out 25 specific aims for children and young learners under five broad outcomes – for children to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive and contribution and achieve economic well-being. As a consequence London Principal Kenny Frederick (2007, p. 51) has argued:

The Every Child Matters: Change for Children (ECM) agenda does mark a shift from a narrow focus on attainment to “enjoying and achieving” which should mean genuine opportunities for schools to take on a wider brief for developing the whole child.

ECM is not a legislative approach to policy in the way that No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) is in the USA. However, it does share many of the tensions and contradictions that underpin NCLB (Meier and Wood, 2004). It is located within a discourse that emphasises issues of equal access and social inclusion, but it does so in the context of a target-driven management culture, an often controlling approach to social policy and a continued commitment to marketisation and choice policies across the public sector. These contradictions highlight the second focus of this paper, which

is the extent to which national policy agendas help or hinder school leaders seeking to promote their schools as inclusive multi-ethnic communities.

The case-study schools and research approach

This study draws on research undertaken for the National College for School Leadership in England exploring effective leadership within the specific context of multi-ethnic schools (Dimmock *et al.*, 2005). Five local authorities (broadly equivalent to school districts in the USA) were identified across England to reflect a range of ethnic population profiles. Given the demographic nature of ethnic populations all the case study schools could be described as urban, with above average levels of social deprivation and illustrating the complex weave between issues of ethnicity and class. Within each of these local authorities district administrators were approached to identify schools with diverse ethnic populations and where the principal's leadership was considered particularly effective in promoting inclusive learning cultures. Alongside these recommendations a number of other factors were taken into consideration including published inspection reports and academic achievement within the school. The intention was to provide a broad canvas for exploring "effective leadership" and to avoid an overly deterministic approach that equated effective leadership with a single factor such as academic achievement.

Given the relatively small sample size the research focuses exclusively on secondary schools with each school reflecting a distinctive ethnic profile. The proportion of students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds ranged within the schools from 24 per cent to 93 per cent, with significant variation of profiles within the BME population. For example, some schools had a broad and evenly balanced range of ethnic groups, whilst others were much more homogenous (the school with 93 per cent BME students, for example, had 89 per cent of students from a single ethnic group). Principals were well established with at least two years' service at the school, and in most cases considerably longer. In each school extended interviews were conducted with the Principals and further interviews were conducted with a cross-section of the school community – these included several staff (senior and junior, teaching and support), students (conducted as focus group interviews) and members of the community including parents and school governors. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes (with students) through to two hours (with principals) and data was analysed using a process of coding and memoing (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to identify and generate the themes and issues presented in this paper.

Values-driven leadership in practice – research findings

The study did much to support the conclusions of Day *et al.* (2000) that a key feature of leadership was the possession of explicit values based on commitments to equity and inclusion, and an ability to articulate these values in ways that allowed them to become part of the lived experience of the school community. This is not to deny the importance of others in the school community who share similar values and who work tirelessly to promote these in their work. But the school principal, with the authority and influence that their position confers, is clearly a pivotal individual in shaping the organisational culture. A key feature of principals' leadership in the schools in this research was their ability to develop an institutional policy framework that reflected policy as "operational statements of values". School leaders in the case schools were

not passive implementers of policy from above, but were able to shape institutional policies in ways that reflected personal and institutional values. This was in part evidenced by the ways in which school leaders seized opportunities (such as introduction of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and more latterly *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2004b)) to question existing practices and to raise the profile of social justice issues. In these cases national policy was not something to be implemented unimaginatively, but an opportunity to support and extend multicultural and anti-racist initiatives that were already happening in the school.

In the study it was possible to identify four key domains of school life where “values-driven leadership” was given expression – first was the curriculum, teaching and learning; second, the creation of inclusive organisational cultures; third, the nurturing and developing of staff; and fourth, the mobilisation of the community in support of educational goals. In each of these four domains school leaders had the capacity to articulate their values in ways that promoted a distinctive social justice agenda within a multi-ethnic school. For example, in regard to teaching and learning teachers were encouraged to develop curricular that reflected ethnic diversity and drew on the cultural background of students (although made more difficult by what was perceived as an inflexible national(ist?) curriculum and the strait-jacket imposed by standardised testing). In support of the creation of inclusive cultures principals worked hard to ensure that all ethnic groups were represented across the full range of the school’s life (extra-curricular activities, student councils, governing bodies). However, an absolutely key feature of these institutional cultures was the need to challenge racism and racist behaviour and to communicate a zero-tolerance attitude to all forms of racism. Here principals were highly effective in developing policy as “operational statements of values” with regard to racism and the handling of racist incidents. Student interviewees, for example, reported “very little” racism (“we only have racism when the cricket is on!”) and identified robust and well-understood policies within their schools for dealing with racist incidents. Crucially, students displayed a high degree of confidence in these procedures. They did not believe that racism would be tolerated, and when it manifested itself they had confidence the school would deal with it. This is not to assert that the schools were racism-free zones, but that the school community had confidence in the school to deal with racism and racist incidents.

With regard to the development and nurturing of staff, principals often went to extra lengths (sometimes courting controversy) to mentor and support BME staff in order to not only advocate for individuals, but also to ensure that the ethnic profile of the school staff better reflected that of its local community. Links with the wider community were a high priority and in the fourth domain it was evident that principals placed considerable emphasis on developing partnerships with local community organisations and taking the school to the community, rather than expecting the community to come to the school. This was seen as particularly important in areas where language issues, for example, appeared to militate against parental engagement with the school.

The case-study schools therefore did appear to support approaches to leadership that were explicit in their commitment to promoting inclusive, multi-ethnic schools and that were effective in mobilising the whole school community in pursuit of this objective. However, it is important to identify a number of issues that emerged from

this closer analysis of values-driven leadership in practice. First, was the very different ways in which school leaders with ostensibly similar values, and confronting similar issues, sought to operationalise their values through policy. In some cases school leaders may pursue almost polar opposite policy positions to pursue essentially the same objectives. For example, a common concern of school principals was the differential achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds, and in at least two schools there was a particular concern with the perceived under-achievement of African Caribbean boys. In one school the response was to identify a group of students from this group and provided additional and specific learning support within the timetabled curriculum. In another school the principal expressed complete opposition to any explicit “singling out” of specific ethnic groups on the grounds that this would promote labelling and inter-ethnic tensions. These differences in part derived from school circumstances (the latter school had a less stable local community and arguably more fragile race relations), but they also reflected the values base of the different principals. Both principals were passionate about equality issues – but each operationalised the concept of social justice in very different ways.

The different ways in which school principals approached essentially the same issues appeared to arise from the confluence of two factors. First was the personal values base that individual principals had and the beliefs and ideological positions they had developed within their personal and professional lives. These are the strongly held convictions of principals that shape the way in which they seek to express their values and which principals had developed over time and through their life experience. Second was the individual contexts they faced within their own institution that further shaped what was possible and expedient in any given set of circumstances. Decisions therefore about how best to operationalise values through institutional policy frameworks reflect a coming together of personal value sets with institutional contexts in which principals seek to apply personal positions to individual circumstances. Such circumstances highlight to importance of *choice* in principals’ decision-making and the space they have, at one level at least, to make personal decisions about how to implement policy. However, what the research revealed was the complex nature of the choices that principals faced and moral dilemmas they often confronted as they sought to operationalise their values in pursuit of social justice. Within their individual school contexts the moral dilemmas they faced were rarely issues of “right versus wrong” (and which were relatively easy to deal with), but much more complex issues of “right versus right” (Kidder, 1995). “Right versus right” dilemmas can be characterised as “either/or” situations where there exists a clear opportunity cost resulting from whatever action is not pursued. For principals a daily manifestation of this issue was in the decisions they made about the allocation of their time. How we allocate our time, what we choose to do, and not do, are tangible signals of the values that we hold – what is important to us. For principals in these schools time was spread very thinly. Leadership was not confined to the hours of the school day, or the boundaries of the school gates. Schools in challenging urban areas require principals who are high profile and who can show they care in the actions they take (for example the principal who patrolled local streets at the end of the school day to protect students from racist attacks taking place in the local area). Principals also invested considerable time in working with local community organisations to both develop their own understanding of students’ contexts, and also to build community trust in the school. Sitting in the

office, even with a claim that “my door is always open”, is not an option for principals in these schools. However, the high level of need in schools such as these means there are always difficult choices about how best to use time.

However, “right versus right” dilemmas in which school leaders sought to reconcile the most effective way to articulate their values and their commitment to social justice were not the only moral dilemmas school leaders faced. It was also possible to discern another set of tensions that prevailed when the moral positions of school leaders came into conflict with the values underpinning national policy. This issue was exposed most clearly in the tensions that existed between commitments to inclusion and “standards”. All school leaders are faced with the difficulty of creating caring and inclusive learning environments (if these is what they choose to do) in a context of high stakes testing and the publication of “league tables” of school performance data. This issue is common to most schools but there are particular issues within multi-ethnic schools where there is growing evidence that the approaches underpinning standardised testing penalise black and minority ethnic students and reinforce systemic institutionalised racism (Gillborn, 2006). However, the issues raised by these tensions appeared to become most acute in schools where local market conditions, underpinned by “school choice” policies, conspired to present school leaders with very specific sets of difficulties. These issues were not experienced uniformly and the extent to which this was likely to be an issue depended on several local factors including the profile of the local community (both the balance of different ethnic groups within the community and the extent to which the community was subject to demographic “turbulence” or movement); the school’s “market position” in terms of “league tables” of published results, and the extent to which the local school market might be considered “open” or “closed” (Dimmock *et al.*, 2005). A closed market describes a situation where there is little spare capacity in local schools and therefore opportunities for students and their parents to choose schools outside of the catchment area school are limited. In these contexts “school choice” is largely a misnomer. However, where spare capacity did exist much more movement was possible. Parents were able to exercise their right to secure places in schools other than their catchment area school and therefore these schools were much more susceptible to the preferences, and the prejudices, that drive parental choice.

The dilemmas that this presented for school leaders were most graphically illustrated in one of the case-study schools where the future of the school was at that time threatened by an inspection report that had labelled the school as “failing” and a continuous decline in student numbers. The research revealed a principal passionate about her students, strongly committed to promoting an inclusive culture for all and highly regarded both within the school and many sections of the wider community. However, it was the principal’s conviction that the school’s commitment to social inclusion, illustrated for example by its willingness to receive and support a significant proportion of refugee and asylum-seeker youngsters, made it unattractive to sections of the local middle-class and white population. In such circumstances the school suffered a loss of students likely to perform more highly in standardised tests, a situation which exacerbated the school’s lowly position in the local league tables.

At this point the market begins to reinforce the school’s problems and imposes significant constraints on the principal’s ability to pursue policies that promote social inclusion. The commitment of the school to being inclusive directly drives some parental preferences and ensures that racially motivated parental choices skew the

school intake. Students who are likely to perform less well in standardised tests because of their class, ethnic background or social environment are disproportionately represented within the school. The consequence of this profile is that overall student test scores remain depressed and difficult to improve. Falling student numbers deplete resources further, whilst the challenging environment and uncertain future make staff recruitment and retention more difficult. The pressures placed on the school leader are revealed by these comments from the principal:

People despair – that is not too hard a word for it. You get someone in your lesson who hardly speaks any English, and you have to meet those needs. You get support, but it is yet another need in an already needy situation. A lot of staff will run with it, but convincing them is a permanent sales job – “this is good for the children . . . this is what we are here to do”.

In these circumstances the school leader’s personal commitment to social inclusion is challenged as the pressures exerted by external forces, principally the operation of a local market, undermine not only their own aspirations, but also the claimed aims of national policy. The tension is highlighted by the principal:

Social inclusion is a misnomer – what you get is parental preference driving social division. It is not academic division – it is social division. You’ve got “I don’t want my child going with *that type of child*”. Parental preferences increase division – that gap is getting wider.

Conclusion

The experience of the principals in the case-study schools highlights the contribution of the principal to the creation of successful and inclusive schools that are capable of responding to the needs of ethnically diverse communities. A key feature of the principals in this study was their strong sense of moral purpose, and an explicit commitment to social justice. Principals were able to articulate their commitment to social justice through their professional practices and were able to operationalise their values through the institutional frameworks they established. At their most effective the principals in this study were able to take progressive national policies and use these creatively to support their own social justice objectives. However, despite having shared views in relation to social justice issues the principals in this small study often articulated their values through policy in markedly different ways. The ability to work in different ways and to pursue different strategies highlights some space at least within which principals could function and the degree of autonomy they were able to exercise. This study highlighted four key areas, or domains, in which school leaders were able to develop policies to promote social justice in their multi-ethnic schools:

- (1) through culturally sensitive teaching and learning;
- (2) the promotion of inclusive organisational cultures;
- (3) the nurturing and development of staff (especially minority ethnic staff); and
- (4) the mobilisation of the wider community in support of school objectives.

In each of these domains school leaders were faced with difficult decisions about how best to achieve their objectives and these decisions were perceived as most problematic when they presented “right versus right” dilemmas. These ethical and moral dilemmas posed sensitive problems for school leaders and highlight the complex nature of school leadership in a diverse and plural context.

More difficult dilemmas arose where the commitment of the school leader to social justice objectives appeared to come into direct conflict with the values underpinning wider policy initiatives, such as those relating to the role and influence of market and choice policies in shaping local school contexts. This was not an issue in several of the case-study schools, but where local markets were “open”, and there was significant scope for parents to exercise choice of school selection, the issue was significant. What is clear is that “choice” policies, driven by the creation of quasi-markets between schools, had the capacity to reflect on to the school the racist attitudes and beliefs prevalent in the local community. Where this was the case the principal’s commitment to social inclusion, if not supported by sections of the community, could be penalised by the operation of the local market – at this point markets and morals collided. In such cases principals’ own objectives, and indeed the claimed aims of national policy, are made more difficult to achieve as policy tensions create conflicting and contradictory pressures. Given the continued emphasis on policies that promote choice in education it seems likely that principals will continue to have to find creative ways to reconcile social justice aspirations with market imperatives. The reality is that in some of the most challenging schools, facing the most difficult circumstances, these issues for school leaders are likely to be posed most sharply.

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