Caring and educating: government discourse, care and learning

Dr Paul Adams
Senior Lecturer, Curriculum and Pedagogy Policy
Room LH208
Lord Hope Building
School of Education
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
141 St James Road
University of Strathclyde
Glasgow
G4 0LT

Tel: +44 (0) 141 444 8078
Email: paul.adams@strath.ac.uk

Within the primary school context, care is something that has great currency. Such positions are not only UK in orientation but are considered to be important across the globe. This said, the ways in which governments have organised and oriented education, particularly in the western world, present sharp challenges for care. The diet of efficiency and cost effectiveness, driven by a desire for justice, often orient education in ways inimical to caring for children. They present ways of construing the educational project which seemingly act in opposition to ideas about care that are anything more than care about exams or performance. Some countries, such as the England and Wales, have attempted to marry the care and education agenda together through government policy. However, such policies are often party political and thus do not survive changes in administration. Whatever the response it is important to ask questions about the place and form for care in contemporary education. This paper, attempts to do this.

The paper takes as its underpinning theory the idea of the position call. Originating in social constructionist positioning theory, the position call is a heuristic device which permits one to both examine the ways in which Discourse offers certain spaces and positions for individuals and groups to occupy, and examine discursive moments for the ways they give

form and structure to conversational moments. This paper will examine the first of these two aspects. Specifically, once positioning theory has been defined, the paper will identify the various position calls made by the current UK government concerning care in education. Whilst such calls are not necessarily explicit, the paper will examine how wider governmental Discourse drives certain conceptions of care in education. In particular, it will pay attention to calls to re-examine classroom processes and how these position both teacher and pupil.

The paper will then outline two challenges to be faced when trying to marry the requirements of the current educational system and the care agenda. The first challenge concerns the ways in which children and young people conceptualise themselves through the auspices of the educational venture and associated societal issues. In this regard the ways in which they might align themselves with current educational policy will be explored. Secondly, the paper will outline the nature of professional work and the challenges teachers now face in a globalised, digital world, in particular how they might be forced to work so that they might meet the challenges presented by care for the 21st century.

Positioning Theory and the process of realisation

For some time the literature has noted positioning theory as a means by which one might understand and consider the day-to-day perspectives of everyday discourse and language. From its origins in narrative psychology, it has broadened its scope and appeal (Burr, 2003). Importantly, writers such as Harré (2004), Harré and van Langenhove (1999) and Drewery (2005) have explored the ways and means by which we are created as subjects by interaction through language. Specifically, positioning theory seems to have found a welcome niche as a conceptual tool by which researchers might uncover and explore how '...we come to take up certain identities and not others' (Drewery, 2005: 306). It is a relatively new phenomena and as such has no, one, single definition. But this should not detract from its importance, especially if a particular way of conceiving of positioning theory can be garnered for the purposes of educational analysis.

Some, (e.g. Willig, 2000), start from the premise that positioning is

> 'the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectivity coherent participants in jointly produced storylines' (Davies and Harré, 1999: 37).

This posits that positioning theory is useful as a means by which snapshots of experience and perspectives might be understood. However, others, particularly Drewery (2005), argue for a more dynamic interpretation to explain how subjective experience is produced. She cites opportunities for critical reflection and analysis of preferred forms of subjectivity through the formation of differing types of 'positions calls', that is, implicit invitations to take up subject positions. Indeed, when writing about counsellors and counsellor educators, Drewery highlights the need for the development of '...sensitivity to the constitutive effects of conversations' (2005: 306) and in so doing helps us think about '...the productive impacts of colonizing language' (2005: 307). Her call concerns the interpersonal; the area of consideration is that of the conversation, the immediacy of the moment of discursive production.

To assist here the work of Gee (2012) can be deployed. For Gee (2012: 112) discourse consists of '…stretches of language which "hang together" so as to make sense to some community of people, such as a contribution to a conversation or a story'. So is defined the discursive act, the conversational moment. In this way sense-making can be uncovered through moment-by-moment discursive events through empirical matters.

Importantly, though, discourse does not happen in a social, cultural, historical or economic vacuum: language is embedded in society and social institutions (Gee, 2012: 112). There is, then, a need to uncover and examine the ways in which wider societal matters construct understanding, and so, in contrast Gee highlights Discourse.

> 'A Discourse with a capital "D" is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities.' (2012: 152)

Discourses, then, can be differentiated from discourses; the former are ways of recognising and getting recognised. They are about the various ways we use tools, technologies and props so that we might identify ourselves as a member of a socially meaningful group to signal that we are filling a social niche in a recognisable fashion (Gee, 2012: 158); they are about socially accepted associations in language and other expressions of thinking, feeling, etc.

Discourses are mastered by enculturation into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with others (Gee, 2012: 167-168): what someone says is a product of the Discourses they are in at the time and other Discourses of which they are a member. Thus, behaviour becomes meaningful only against the Discourse, or a set of complementary or competing Discourses that 'can "recognise" and give meaning and value to that behaviour.' (Gee, 2012: 190).

For positioning theory, this distinction is noteworthy. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999: 103) posit that,

> Positions usually involve not only speaking and writing rights, duties and obligations, but also expectations as to how someone in a certain position will exercise their rights...

It is the idea that through a variety of discursive acts (conversational moments), positions can be offered and amended, taken up or resisted that raises interest here. The assumption is that human behaviour is goal-directed, constrained by group norms and that human subjectivity is the product of a history of human interaction: during conversations, storylines are used to make words and actions meaningful (Barnes, 2004). Here, storyline is

> the narrative which is being acted out in the metaphorical drama. Within it, the positions are the parts being performed, possibly only fleetingly, by the participants. The actions (including utterances) of the participants are given meaning by the storyline and the positioning of those involved, and once given meaning become acts.' (Barnes, 2004: 1-2)

It is thus possible to see that positions are not fixed but fluid. They change from moment to moment depending on interpretation and sense making. This constant flux seems in contrast to the observation that people behave consistently. Notably, in this matter, positioning theory maintains that our 'selves' are made in discursive moments and not through our biological makeup. The conversational act sets out to solve social problems not merely describe them (Jones, 1999). As Harré (1997: 182) remarks,

> 'The meanings of a person's actions are the acts they are used to perform. But those acts come into being only in so far as they are taken as such by conversational partners … I don't and indeed can't decide what my actions mean. Only you and I can do that. The investigation of the devices by which some people can manage to get you to give my meaning to what both of us say and do is the study of power.

Now, this is not to deny that our 'selves' take meaning from actions; rather it notes that for such meaning to occur they have to make sense in terms of social referents. In this instance the person is not 'subjected' to pre-existing Discourses, but, rather, subjectively constructs such Discourses for themselves. In this way the person becomes someone who is accountable for his or her own actions (Bamberg, 2004); there is an agent-to-world fit (Korobov and Bamberg, 2004) brought into life through language existing only as concrete occasions of language in use (Linehan and McCarthy, 2000). This theory advances the idea that within the person/conversation reference, positioning is a process whereby speakers construct personal stories through discourse, and such stories are taken up or resisted. In this way actions are made intelligible and determinate as social acts (Tan and Moghaddam, 1995).

Such views predominate in micro social constructivist Discourse and accordingly positioning theory has often been criticised for ignoring the macro (Ofreneo and Montiel, 2010). However, one can argue, from the preceding, that local moral orders confer rights, duties and obligations on the participants in a discursive event and that such orders exist as a manifestation of the conversational act. But it is also the case that wider Discourses abound in such instances and, in turn, offer positions of their own (Bamberg, 2004). In this regard Discourses constitute the individual position from a number on offer. As Holloway notes 'Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people' (1984: 233). Here, speakers become 'the person' who is 'already positioned' in a top-down fashion (Bamberg, 2004) as Discourses provide the 'meaning' within which positions are taken. Furthermore, as Discourse is seen as inherently in conflict, individuals are said to have to choose and positions are, therefore, resources from which subjects can select; being positioned has a world-to-agent fit (Korobov and Bamberg, 2004).

Whilst I have outlined micro and macro positioning theory I here contend that there is a need to consider them together. As Bamberg (2004) states, it is possible to reconcile the two views of the subject; and Willig (2000) notes

> 'A move towards a 'phenomenology of everyday life and subjectivity' (Lupton, 1997: 104), therefore, allows us to study individuals' resistance to dominant [D]iscourses,

and the emergence of alternative subject positions as well as subversive practices.'
(Willig, 2000: 554)

We must, then, consider Discourse for through this is given the meanings and norms that guide human thought and action. On the other, though, we must understand how language is used to accomplish social tasks for the meanings of words are the social tasks they accomplish (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). In order to understand human behaviour and thus understand education, the analyst must understand how people use Discourse to construct meaning in specific contexts (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). This describes a social world ordered through construction; of note here is the socio-political: the micro-politics of discursive acts and formational activities.

The position call

Originating in the micro and macro social constructionist literature outlined above, the position call, as outlined by Drewery (2005), marries the two camps. She signals that the individual does not construct identity in ways that are either only conversational or only Discourse related. Rather identity is constructed within both the discursive *and* Discourse. What Drewery notes is how Discourse provides position calls that individuals are able to take up, modify or reject in relationship with others: for persons cannot be agentic on their own (page 315).

> Thus, to be positioned agentively is to be an actor in a web of relationship with others who are also engaged in co-producing the conditions of their lives. (Page 315)

This position specifically notes how conversations occur within Discourse and as a means to construct Discourse. The position call is, then, an offering to adopt; a mechanism by which one might understand the ways in which individuals and groups speak and act. They occur in the conversational and in the wider forces that seek to construct and order everyday life.

This said, this paper is not empirical and so does not attend to the ways and means of the discursive moment. It is theoretical and as such speaks to the ways in which policy Discourse offers position calls for the construction of care and its relationship with education. The

paper shows how the policy imperatives of New Labour and the Coalition give rise to various position calls for care through their policy imperatives, driven as they are within a wider neoliberal frame. The paper outlines the ways in which New Labour attempted to construct an education system replete with messages about the whole child but from an orientation that celebrated performance and efficiency. Similarly, the paper addresses how the position calls of the Coalition signal both a continuation of the New Labour line but also a turn towards more simplistic and traditional ideas about educational success. This is added to by a brief discussion as to the views of children and young people with regard to their position on education policy. Finally the paper discusses the ways in which present orientations for policy about care are manifest of a neoliberal line in education and social policy.

Performance matters

To start, performance can be thought of as a Discourse: it is

> ...about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relations, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations. (Ball, 1990: 2)

Performance, then, is a way of both describing that which workers and clients do and of measuring the worth of such activities. It is a Discourse that operates at the level of the individual and the organisational. Ball defines this as performativity:

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation … that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change. The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality' or 'moments' of promotion … or inspection. They stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement' (2000: 1)

What performativity aims at is to both build culture from within (the provision of a binding way of being and working) and audit from without (a systemic approach to 'assuring quality'). It marks a shift from discipline to control. Notably, truth identification is not the

goal; effectiveness is the point. As Marshall comments: the debate 'has shifted from aims or ideals to means or techniques for obtaining efficient outcomes - the most efficient way of using the (now limited) welfare dollar' (1999: 310).

Wilkins (2011) observes that, as a Discourse, performativity has three features:

- an audit/target culture:
- interventionist regulation
- a market environment:

Duly, when considering performance cultures, there is a need to take account of wider social, political and cultural forces for the ways in which they both position performativity and are positioned by it. Notably, position calls are implied through wider Discourses and these calls, implicit or explicit, are the substance of action; they provide touchstones towards which school activity might march or from which it might retreat. Importantly, such debates and conversations locate the practical; that is they mark the realm of institutional action.

New Labour and performance

What is clear is that performance has driven conceptions of English education for some years: the setting of targets and the expectation that these will be met as evidenced by certain measures, has been the major driving force. As Adams notes, the performance orientation of contemporary schooling '...operates via a conscious pursuit of preordained goals through coercive means' (2007: 226).

This ubiquity of performance matters in English education stems from the late 1970s/early 1980s. Education's role in developing and advancing the economy was held up for scrutiny. As Ball notes, the focus was on the '...value for money of educational spending and unsatisfactory standards of school performance.' (2008: 73). Certainly it was the election to power of Margaret Thatcher's government in 1979 which accelerated the rate of change and the drive to embed performance into the everyday existence of education. Indeed, following the Education Reform Act (DES 1988) there was a steady and sustained shift away from professional judgment, towards accountability to agencies external to the school.

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Increased surveillance occurred so as to monitor the success or otherwise of the system as a whole (Perryman, 2006).

Whilst many assumed that New Labour's ascendency to power in 1997 would have halted the Conservative Discourse, it soon became clear that this was not to be the case. Through their 'what works' approach and during the period from 1997 to 2010, performance came to be the defining rationale for school improvement. New Labour's concentration on efficiency and productivity soon became a defining feature of their term in office through their marshalling of a 'standards agenda'. There was to be intensified support for those schools seen to be improving at a fast enough rate, and intervention for those who were not. According to the Discourse, accountability was a 'good thing', and the mechanisms through which accountability was achieved were increasingly promoted as a desirable part of the education system. It is notable that critics of the regime were seen as being against progress (Perryman, 2006: 149) and were pilloried at every turn.

Blair's mantra of "Education, Education, Education" (Blair 1996) directed state provision of education via the rhetoric of 'high expectations'. Actioned through the procurement of mechanisms seen to be "obviously" successful, New Labour's vision for education, indeed for all public services, was one of improved and sustained efficiency. In educational terms, one way New Labour achieved this was through ratcheting up the use of the schools inspectorate, Ofsted, and in particular the devices of naming and shaming and special measures. It was through the measures of sanction and reward that the state defined its obligation to ensure that school performance was seen to be successful. And at the level of the classroom, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLS and NNS) drove pedagogic and curriculum change in an effort to increase the effectiveness of 'teaching the basics'. The identification of approved teaching methods and lesson content helped to define legitimate ways of working: in effect, performative accounts were to be given that demonstrated both teaching quality and pupil attainment.

What was most notable was the way in which quantitative measures held sway in the drive to both demonstrate and ensure performance and accountability. New Labour's focus on

the objectively empirical was a relentless focus on 'what works' and in turn, quantitative-driven accolades were deployed in a drive to secure performative success.

And questions can be asked about the place and form for one of the seeming underpinning concepts of education, at least in the primary sector: care. It is almost certain that most teachers have always cared for the pupils in their charge. Problematically, the standards agenda often precludes care as the defining feature for primary education; for the former is potentially an agenda indicative of a separation between teachers and children and which uses externality as the basis by which to judge the veracity of social interaction (Adams, 2007: 226). The performance agenda rests on the interaction between qualities that are external to both teacher and pupils: quality; curriculum; tests and so on. It is driven by accountability for things that are not internal to the teacher-pupil relationship but rather are indicative of distance between the two; the relationship is transactional not interactional driven by simplistic, reductionist measures of quality.

In contrast, it was clear that New Labour was desirous of mechanisms whereby the whole child might be prioritised. In 2003 the government published its Green Paper *Every Child Matters*. This was a far reaching agenda that sought to integrate the work of all services for children and young people and was based around holistic ideas of child welfare, education and safety. Born of the failure of the system to adequately safeguard children in a number of high profile cases of abuse and neglect, ECM was part of a wider international movement towards the integration of various parts of the policy community in responding to the wider needs and interests of young people (Davies et al, 2009). At its heart was the concept of care: care about pupils and their lives. The Green paper was made law through the passing of the Children Act (DfES, 2004). Related to ECM was the creation of integrated services (Children's Trusts) that would serve to ensure the safety and well-being of all. The policy sought to enact development opportunities in five areas: stay safe; enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well-being; make a positive contribution; and, be healthy. The focus for action was prevention rather than cure and in this regard all children, not just those deemed at risk, were covered by the new agenda (Davies et al, 2009).

At its heart, the new agenda sought to reduce the overlaps and gaps in provision that had plagued previous attempts to support and care for children and young people (Straker and Foster, 2009). ECM sought to identify and manage risks generally, through a commitment to integrated working (Straker and Foster, 2009), interagency, shared working and better collaboration with parents and carers to deliver on the five outcomes (Hopkins, 2008). Schools were seen to have a pivotal role in delivering against the ECM outcomes (Harris and Allen, 2009). In reality, how far schools went in implementation varied from institution to institution.

What ECM did do was increase teachers' confidence to act outside the immediate professional remit due to the increased familiarity of the role of others (Straker and Foster, 2009). It required changes in professional practice so that interagency working could occur (Harris and Allen, 2009). This interagency working went someway to reshaping professional identities (Straker and Foster, 2009); in turn this went a long way to improving welfare sector and professional support for children and young people (Straker and Foster, 2009).

At the time of ECM and up until 2010, Ofsted, the schools inspectorate, set out to ensure that in this regard, England had

> a school system in which Every Child Matters; in which attention is paid to their individual needs for education and well-being; and in which schools can develop the distinct ethos and approaches that maximise the potential of their pupils . . . . (Ofsted, 2005: 3).

This was explained through the publication *A new relationship with schools: next steps* (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted], 2005) which described how schools were to be inspected.

In many respects this document offered a long overdue and welcome change. For example, pupil voice played a central part in the inspection process. This was even more significant when seen alongside the requirement that all partners in the enhancement of pupils' education and well-being were to be consulted so that integrated services might be

delivered more appropriately. This and the requirement that schools, through self-evaluation, take account of the views of parents and pupils when deciding how to judge institutional development so that teaching can be tailored to the individual needs of each child, seemingly meshed with the holistic ECM vision.

ECM was not without its detractors however. Various comments were made that held up for scrutiny the lack of attention paid to aspects such as child trafficking (c.f Masson, 2005). Additionally, there were those who argued that interagency working is fraught with difficulties and costs and that such matters were glossed over in the rush to develop the framework for action. Some argued that ECM was inconsistent in its guiding rationale favouring both social justice and social investment (Davies et al, 2009) whilst others bemoaned the lack of consistency in its provision for and conceptualisation of care, particularly in the educational setting (Adams 2007). In this latter regard, whilst ECM sends signals that the holistic development of young people and children should be prioritised and that in this endeavour schools have an important role to play, ECM seemed to be a contradiction. ECM could be thought of as an explicit policy imperative that foregrounds care in the school context: on the one hand it prioritised the whole child through the way in which it sought to impact upon the whole of the life cycle. On the other, however, its use of reductionist targets, particularly to define success in educational terms, seemed to favour a distant relationship borne of rigour and quantity which reduced children and young people to the outputs of schooling, rather than the outcomes of education. This placed it squarely at the heart of the standards agenda outlined above. Evans and Rich (2011) note how ECM was pervasive in the lives of children; for them it was an example of a total pedagogical solution. The language, aims and intent of ECM start from a position of certainty and truth centred on accepted ideals concerning the provision of a heathy and caring resolution.

> Readers of ECM and associated health measures are thus positioned to accept a form of state governance in which they are either on the side of virtue and righteousness, or held responsible and culpable for the life-threatening conditions we find ourselves in…, and from which we can escape only through concerted, immediate, state intervention on our behalf. As Jacobson noted, 'demurral looks like meanness of spirit' (2007: 43). Thus the 'natural attitude' is moralised, nurtured and

established not just through interactions within formal education but in family life and communities outside school. (Evans and Rich, 2011: 372)

And although inspection changes offered a new point of entry for the examination of the school system, close scrutiny of Ofsted documentation of the time reveals an overwhelming emphasis on school performance and levels of attainment, for example, the need for schools to set targets for, and gather data about, the progress and performance of individual pupils (Ofsted 2005: 19–20).

Some (c.f Adams, 2007; Evans and Rich, 2011) argue that ECM entered the performative discourse both in that it became part of the discourse of the performance culture of school and in that it pandered to this culture through its mechanism of marking out for consumption targets and outcomes. It seemed, then, that there was a contradiction; a contrast between the provision of services that sought to be wide-reaching in their aim to improve the lives of all children, whilst at the same time reducing success measures to what often amounted to simplistic quantification such as, in the educational sense, numbers of GCSE passes at grades A to C. What was clear was that the standards agenda had dominated the debate, leading all else to follow in its wake.

A continuation of the performance era in education: the coalition

ECM was still policy, however, when the Coalition assumed power in May 2010. On the one hand the Coalition does not differ from New Labour in matters of performance and accountability; it does, in fact, recognise the positive features of such a system. Certainly, the measures used to call schools and teachers to account seem to be an area of continuation. As they stated immediately after coming to power, 'clear performance information and good comparative data are positive features of our system' (DfE 2010a: 12), and, 'rigorous assessment is important. It provides sound information for parents on their child's progress and the effectiveness of schools' (DfE 2010a: 48).

From the outset, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition set out its stall in terms of the part to be played by performance indicators. Their first White Paper delivered shortly after forming the government states quite clearly '...but what really matters is how we're doing

compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future' (DfE, 2010a: 3). Indeed, the sister publication to *The Importance of Teaching*, *The Case for Change* (DfE 2010b) echoes this. Citing international comparisons, this document notes that accountability of performance measures is a feature of all high-performing systems. In particular, external measures are believed, to be 'more reliable indicators of future progress and success than teacher assessment' (DfE 2010b, 22).

On the other hand, the Coalition's position does differ from that of New Labour. Importantly, the coalition proposed to end the use of contextual value added (CVA) measures and concentrate instead on raw scores alone, the argument being that it is difficult for the public to judge a school's worth based on how far it improves pupil's attainment relative to other schools in similar circumstances. Although CVA measures are certainly more complicated than simple raw data the fact that the Coalition does not wish to distinguish between groups on the basis of contextual factors demonstrates a misunderstanding of the relationship between life-chances, pedagogy and educational success and failure. The government seemed to deny such matters, preferring instead to simply state that 'raw attainment is a much better predictor than a Contextualised Value Added score' (DfE 2010b, 22). Pointedly, quantitative measures are extolled so that performance might be compared not only between schools, but also between countries.

Additionally, changes to language occurred following the May 2010 general election. The changes wrought by the Labour government post-2003 were quickly undone by the coalition. The coalition's direction was set by the renaming of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to the Department for Education (DfE) and the renaming of the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families to the Secretary of State for Education. Whilst the coalition had some sympathy for ECM, there was a general belief that attention had been diverted from the core business of schools: standards. Indeed, Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education, had described the ECM agenda as 'meddlesome' (Stewart, 2012).

Although some teachers felt that ECM diluted their role as educators (Evans, 2012), there was, in the main, support for the direction and intent of the legislation. However, Coalition

changes, it was feared, would signal an end to this agenda. Commentators worried: the change in language meant that it might become harder for schools to persuade people that the whole child should be at the forefront of their work (Stewart, 2012). Some were unconcerned by the changes, though, provided that the general holistic tenor of ECM remained in practice (Literacy News, 2010). This said it was clear that the major change to ECM language, swapping 'Every Child Matters' with 'help children achieve more', suggests that achievement is top of the policy agenda (Literacy News, 2010). Changes in language seem to indicate a shift in emphasis from targets and outcomes to results and impact (Puffet, 2010). This despite the fact that post the 2010 election, the DfE maintained that although there had been a change in terminology, the focus on ECM would remain.

The new policy countermanded the changes wrought through the latter years of New Labour's administration which were centred on a belief in the role of schools as engineers of social inclusion. The Coalition undermined this position however, seeking instead to 're-focus Ofsted inspections on their original purpose – teaching and learning' (DfE 2010a, 4) so that inspectors might 'spend more time in the classroom and focus on key issues of educational effectiveness, rather than the long list of issues they are currently required to consider' (13). In January 2012 a new Ofsted inspection framework prioritised just five areas for school inspections: pupil achievement; quality of learning; pupil behaviour and safety; leadership and management; and, overall effectiveness. All of these new areas are where simplistic statistical evidence can be garnered and used to draw judgements about the veracity or otherwise of the school in question. Additionally, grades on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development have been dropped along with grades for adopting healthy lifestyles and contributions to the wider school and society (Stewart, 2012). In sum: the use of performance measures to hold schools to account has been strengthened.

It is clear that performance and accountability measures form the cornerstone of the coalition's approach to educational development. They have signalled their intent to ensure that standards rise and to do so testing data would be rigorously used. Indeed, Michael Gove was quick to set a school floor-standard of 60% of pupils reaching level four in each of Literacy and Numeracy in the end of Key Stage Two SATs. This floor standard rose as of

September 2014 to 65%. Performance and accountability are part of the solution, then, to engendering a world class education system.

But critics have questioned the concentration on test scores and in particular international test scores. The UK Statistics Authority has challenged the line taken by Michael Gove and Sir Michael Wilshaw, the Chief Inspector of Schools, that England has plunged down the international league table (Stewart, 2012). Their argument is that from 2000 the number of UK schools taking the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is too small to use as a reliable indicator of international standing. This notwithstanding, the DfE and Ofsted continue to bemoan the 'parlous' state of English education. Indeed, in a statement to parliament, Michael Gove was clear that reform of the school system is needed due to the UK's poor showing in such tests. For him, the 2013 PISA results show a need to 'press ahead with further reform to the system' (Gove, 2013) so that the UK might move further up the tables.

Position calls and governmental Discourse

What comes into view are particular position calls born of Discourse from both governments. For New Labour, whilst the whole child was considered, the focus remained on gathering statistical evidence that education, and, indeed, related social services, meet a set of defined and narrow performance measures. With respect to care, it is the case that the ECM agenda was at the forefront in defining an education system that sought to take into consideration care but it was a particular orientation that was adopted. Internally, the dichotomous nature of ECM reflected the ambiguity that existed between the position calls of care and performance. On the one hand it might be argued that a desire to both publicly extol 'care about' (Noddings, 1984) and promote an ethic of 'caring for' (Noddings, 1984) in the day-to-day relationships of the school lay central to ECM. However, its use of specific, reductionist targets and indicators sat it squarely within a performativity Discourse. It could be argued that children were defined solely in terms of that which school can affect and address, albeit in relation to a broader set of parameters and service provision than hitherto considered. For Forrester, this concentration on outputs,

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and the growing importance of a performance-oriented culture in schools is in danger of neglecting the development of the child as a whole human being. Arguably teachers' attention is being distracted from what they consider to be the caring aspects of their work, but which they regard as essential if pupils are to be encouraged, motivated, supported and appropriately challenged in school. Clearly there were tensions between what was expected of teachers in terms of their own and their pupils' performance, and between what teachers considered are the daily needs of their pupils. (Forrester, 2005, p. 284).

The Discourse was, then, one of performance: a series of mechanisms whereby that on offer related directly to the provision of a system geared up for the realisation of manifestations of educational success. The position call was the *performance of care*, at the heart of which was a desire to see matters of care elevated to the quantifiable and observable.

In England the direction of travel for education policy since 2010 has been to further develop the performance agenda. There is a marked difference in orientation from New Labour though, for now can be seen the removal of matters pertaining to the direct provision of 'caring' through policy manifestations. The removal of ECM directives, flawed though they were, and the redefining of Ofsted inspections towards 'standards' and away from holistic matters orients policy towards a new position call: the *excising of care in the face of performance*. Whilst it is true that child safety and welfare still form part of the makeup of school's work, through the operationalisation of child protection matters for example, such endeavours operate within the confines of legally defined perspectives rather than the humanising project that could be said to have been part of the contradictory ECM policy.

The views of children and young people
Clearly the position calls offered by both governments would have an effect on those within the education system; individuals do not operate within a vacuum. Also, such position calls are important to consider for they allow observation of the policy landscape. But they also require consideration of how such matters orient the life-world of the child. School has an effect on the beliefs and attitudes of children and young people and goes some way to

contributing to their development and in this policy Discourses present a tapestry into which such matters need to be woven.

Research conducted for the European Commission (EC) (2011) found that children across Europe were vociferous in their support for children's right to an education. Having access to a quality education was seen as very important by all children and was viewed as one of the positive features of being a child in Europe. What is notable, though, is the view expressed that there are too many pressures to succeed educationally and that this pressure to succeed at school was one of the negative aspects of being a child in 2010. Indeed, in England, this sense of pressure was significant. Whilst the majority of children saw the importance of education and felt that their school is sensible in its rules and supports learning well (Chamberlain et al, 2011) the same research found that educational urgency translated into about a third of those surveyed feeling that school puts too much pressure on them to succeed with about half worrying about results and exams. This sense of pressure seemed to increase as pupils get older but for all ages a significant proportion reported a feeling of being rushed at school which limited children's ability and time to play (Kapasi and Gleave, 2009). This is significant: given that children reported the positive effect school matters such as play have on classroom performance in a variety of areas including concentration and behaviour, the loss of time to play should be seen as a matter of concern. Kapasi and Gleave (2009) also observe that children described how popular is play at school and how creative their in-school play was due to access to friends and resources.

It could be argued that the position calls described above, namely the elevation of performance over other holistic matters, lead to concern amongst children and young people. Whilst laudable in their intent, high expectations do, in some instances, fuel negative perceptions of children's own achievements, behaviour and self-esteem. What was signalled by Chamberlain et al (2009) was the fact that children and young people often saw pressure to succeed as a manifestation of teachers 'caring' about their welfare and futures. This is noteworthy and signals that care is not entirely lost in the drive for output success. But, it is also the case that such caring is exactly that which could separate child from teacher. Indeed, children and young people, although recognising a positive role for teachers, held ambiguous relationships with them: on the one hand there was a recognition

that their role is important in securing rights and care, but they are not always held in high esteem (EC, 2011). In fact, some cited unfair treatment at the hands of school staff, possibly in the name of increased educational standing. Chamberlain et al (2009) observe that around two-thirds of pupils felt that teachers showed them respect at least sometimes; this is below what is arguably acceptable though, i.e. teachers always showing children and young people respect.

It can be seen, then, that manifestations of the education system have an effect on pupils. The ways in which staff interact with young people and children has a marked impact on the way in which these groups feel about their teachers and themselves. The pressures to succeed in the current performance related climate do have an effect and such effect is not always positive. Whilst reflecting on their time in school and their relationship with education policy, many young people feel that the system as it stands is skewed in favour of success rather than, perhaps, the celebration of all that goes into being a child. But it is also the case that young people are themselves tilted in favour of some of the policies inherent within the current system. For example, meritocratic measures are seen as the best and fairest way to allocate school places by many young people. Whilst such methods would find favour with many in English education policy-making, it is surprising that most pupils feel that school places should be allocated according to how well pupils do at school (Chamberlain et al, 2009). Significantly pupils within this English cohort displayed less appetite for selection based on more 'socially just' methods such as distance from home or whether in care (Chamberlain et al, 2011).

Conclusion

It could be argued, then, that the policies of successive governments have led to the individualisation and de-holistification of the educational project. Policy imperatives have engendered a line that school should adopt a rationale akin to the marketplace: the rational consumption of educational fare towards the 'betterment' of individuals in the drive for economic successes. Teachers should concentrate on standards and pupils should too. But this is unsurprising. Apple (2000) writes powerfully of the neoliberal turn in education. For him, this is part of a desire to reintegrate education into economics alongside class and social struggles, a consequence of which is the viewing of schools as black holes: inefficient

and wasteful partly as a result of provider capture. What occurs, he writes, is the aligning of views about the necessity of the economic rationality of education with consumer choice as king. Educational freedom is thus seen through an economic rather than democratic lens. As he states (2000: 67), in the case of neoliberal policies, 'democracy is now redefined as guaranteeing choice in an unfettered market' albeit from within a system that mistrusts the professional and avoids 'the other'. And so children and young people desire to see meritocracy as the means by which school advantage is ordered, rather than through democratic means. Teachers concentrate on that which is to be profitable in the vocational marketplace: results.

Neoliberalism is about finding one's own solutions to health, societal or educational problems. It tries to ensure that individuals participate in their own discipline: they should display the correct character traits or risk being defined as failures with no right to services (McGregor, 2001). Through its hegemonic position, it has become a 'common-sense' way of organising political and social life with pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices (Harvey, 2007). What is elided is a role for the welfare of people, communities, societies or the state, except where government is required to enforce the rules and logic of the free market in order to provide for economic profit, technological progress and growth and development (McGregor, 2001). The basis is the individual: she acts for herself, free from any hindrance brought on by a concern for others or the environment; she acts independently of others. It is more about restoring power than it is a project to revitalise capital accumulation and is mainly redistributive towards the ruling classes (Harvey, 2007).

> With its debased belief that profit-making is the essence of democracy, and its definition of citizenship as an energized plunge into consumerism, neoliberalism eliminates government regulation of market forces, celebrates a ruthless competitive individualism, and places the commanding political, cultural, and economic institutions of society in the hands of powerful corporate interests, the privileged, and unrepentant religious bigots (Peters and Fitzsimons, 2001). (Giroux, 2005: 8)

As Harvey (2007) notes, neoliberalism has gained the upper hand in persuading governments across the world that state led systems are inefficient and less cost-effective. In eschewing democratic accountability neoliberalism has permitted a small cadre of powerful elites to control as much of social life as possible in order to maximise their own personal profit (Chomsky, 1999).

Into this is thrown the age-old concern of care in education. What is foregrounded here is the way in which the position calls offered to education, through the lens of the neoliberal totalising project are manifest in the removal of inter-personal concerns. The educational interaction becomes defined by its distance and rigour, not its personality and warmth. But there will be many in schools who do not subscribe to such a thesis, and they are to be lauded and applauded. For them, education continues to have a humanising element that drives the very application of educational work. Theirs is the caring, nurturing way, the continuation of education as a force for human development and growth. The issue is, though, that such a rationale sits in opposition to the position calls offered by educational policy. The *excising of care in the face of performance* is one which, whilst not overt in the sense of direct, word for word mandate, is something which is implied and which locates care as being of less worth. The fact that the current UK government do not see, for English education at least, the need for policies to celebrate and nurture care as a defining feature drives a powerful coach and horses through the work of those who do seek to care. It presents a powerful challenge to the caring project.

It remains to be seen how far such matters will take care in education. One possibility is that those who work in our schools continue to find ways to express the caring nature of their work. Another, and one which has happened in a number of secondary schools already, is that pastoral work is given to non-teaching staff, including the teaching of Personal, Social and Health Education. A further possibility, of course, is that policy will change, although this is the least likely of the scenarios due to the durability of neoliberalism. Whatever the situation it is clear that whilst teachers may wish to continue to care, it is within a system that purports to do so, but is really about the educational standards achieved in schools and the economic viability of such an orientation.