Inclusive school leadership in challenging urban communities: a comparative study

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Introduction

This paper outlines the emerging findings from a three-year joint project (2008-2011) carried out in challenging urban communities in England and Poland. Firstly, an overview is provided of the nature of these types of communities, together with an assessment of the impact that this has for schools and their leaders and there is also a description of the current policy context in both countries, particularly as this impacts on challenging schools and their highly disadvantaged communities. Secondly, there is a description of the research questions, methodological approach and methods for this joint project. Thirdly, the schools' experiences of successful school leadership in bringing about positive achievement for pupils who grow up in challenging urban communities are presented.

The motivation in pursuing the issue of school leadership in challenging urban communities is principally because such challenging communities require urgent and sustained attention by policy-makers, local agencies and schools if a major difference is to be made to the life-chances of children and their families. Also, a comparative study of this kind is perceived by the author of this article to be fairly rare and has significant potential for advancing knowledge and school leadership practice in this field of work. Making comparisons internationally in the field of education is capable of unlocking new perspectives and understandings that could be applied more widely. Nevertheless, it can be recognised that each national and local situation is situated within its own cultural environment. The purpose of comparative study is predominantly "to point up similarities and differences" (Alexander, 2000: 6) and, through comparison, to "illuminate constants and contexts", enable contexts being compared to be "theorised

as part of wider social science debates" and to facilitate the development of theory (Broadfoot, 1999: 24).

Challenging Urban Communities

The term "challenging urban communities" had been adopted in the presented study to describe some of the most disadvantaged areas in Poland and England. In England, these have also been called "Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances" (SFCCs) having a high percentage of pupils receiving "free school meals", and missing their examinations or test targets. Broadly speaking, these communities are amongst the poorest five percent of communities nationally, according to official data. In Poland, the official measures for inner city schools and specific funding to support them are yet to be developed to the same extent. Nevertheless, these communities are even poorer in absolute terms than their English counterparts, with incomes lower than 60% of the average national income level in a country with low levels of income overall. Poland also has higher levels of child poverty and a greater disparity in standards of living between richest and poorest than any other EU country.

The impact of poverty and social exclusion are similar in both countries, namely: poor health, housing, local facilities, environment, access to public transport and educational underperformance. These communities are, by nature, *different* where "poverty and deprivation tend to set a context of hopelessness and anger that are difficult for schools to grapple with and turn around" (Michalak and Jones, 2009: 2). Poverty and social exclusion in these communities are further defined by the EU as comprising: exclusion from the economic benefits enjoyed by wider society, falling below a minimum acceptable way of life, poor future prospects, and lack of access to welfare benefits (Marlier et al., 2007). The impact of poverty on educational achievement in these contexts can be catastrophic. Mortimore and Whitty (2000) has cast doubt on schools' ability to do more than make incremental changes to pupil attainment in these challenging communities, given the current policy environment. We share the concerns of critical writers and others that present educational and social inclusion policies in England, Poland and in the EU as whole remain insufficiently focused on disadvantage to transform the life chances of these children and young people. In these circumstances, professionals working with children and young people devise local strategies and alliances to make whatever positive impact they can.

School leaders, in the case study communities, have to contend with the "neo-liberal" school agenda in both countries (Michalak and Jones, 2009). In England, formula-funding, parental choice, national curriculum, testing, inspection and league tables have been modified over the past thir-

teen years by an intensified and "top-down" standards agenda, personalisation of learning, diversity within the schools system and curriculum reform (Hopkins, 2004; Kendall et al., 2007; UK Government/DCSF 2007; Lewis and Murphy, 2008; Michalak and Jones, 2009). In Poland, the educational system has been changed greatly since the Soviet era from being centrally planned, hierarchical and closed, to a more open and highly decentralised system. However, this developing market system along the English model is beginning to create small schools in inner city areas, as parental choice and formula funding bite, raising the danger of closure (Michalak and Jones, 2010). In these circumstances, government and EU expectations that schools can lead the struggle against social inclusion in challenging urban contexts with some additional EU financial support is in our view unlikely to be realistic, given the current lack of professional infrastructure in these areas and the current scale of social needs.

School Leadership in Challenging Urban Communities

In framing school leadership, there is a need to recognise that there are many definitions and deep disagreements about the identification of leaders and leadership processes. Leaders contribute to goal attainment but also to shaping the goals themselves. In challenging contexts, school leaders have to chart a course between competing goals and successfully dealing with the informal structures in their organisations, whilst managing an uncertain environment, insistent external demands and the fostering of their school's organisational integrity. School leaders in these circumstances require strong educational values that recognise the need for social inclusion and democracy at the local level.

One of the ways that educationists can approach this set of issues in challenging urban contexts is through trying to develop *social capital* locally. According to Halpern (2005), education can assist the creation of social capital to tackle disadvantage, with schools potentially having a major impact on young people's social networks and skills (McNeal, 1999; Langbein and Bess, 2002; Halpern, 2005). These networks and activities can help a school both internally and in its relationships beyond the school (Michalak and Jones, 2009). Nevertheless, development of social capital and networks to the advantage of local people and their education is likely to be extremely difficult, given the tough environment.

The school leadership task is further complicated by what Habermas (1975) has labelled "the legitimation crisis", where "governments and other institutions cannot deliver on promises" and where people are robbed of their "life-worlds". In this potentially strained relationship between educators and the communities they serve, a collaborative and inclusive approach that aims

to build a sense of community inside the school and beyond stands the best chance of success. Educational leaders can be catalysts in community building and in using education to aid community development locally. Such an enterprise needs to be one where leadership is shared as widely as possible.

Sustainability in challenging urban contexts is extremely difficult to achieve. Successful schools search for their own solutions for managing sustainable change, re-energising themselves through reflective practice and a culture of enquiry. At the same time, the development of curriculum creativity to promote young people's self-confidence "can have a profound effect on young people who have become marginalized from the school system" (Cochrane and Cockett, 2007: 41). So we regard a willingness to change the character of the mainstream school as an additional potential way to achieve sustainable success.

Finally, a further area worth exploring is what Harris and Muijs (2005) term "teacher leadership". This involves teachers "serving as research colleagues, working as adviser-mentors to new teachers and facilitating professional development activities" (Harris and Muijs, 2005: 13) and where colleagues regard themselves as part of "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998). Also through wider collaborative networks beyond the school, teacher leaders are able to draw upon innovation and change processes in other contexts, applying them to the needs of their own situation. This potentially powerful pedagogical approach to school leadership is one where the sharing of leadership is linked to creativity in the classroom and reflective practice in communities of practice.

"Success" in Challenging Urban Contexts

"Standards agenda" with its winners and losers, and with most of those losers being located in inner city areas, potentially creates an "apartheid of school improvement". This is more so in England at present, although further marketization in Poland appears to be a "one way street" to a similar set of consequences. Whilst in England the "standards agenda" has run counter to a simultaneous encouragement to co-operate, in Poland a strong competitive culture is crowding-out possibilities of co-operation between schools. We regard disincentives to co-operate in both countries as totally being counterproductive to shared leadership at a local level. As Ainsworth (2009) emphasises, a desirable state of affairs is for school leaders to move beyond competition and develop lasting collaborations. We agree that leaders need to value collective endeavour at the local level to tackle the major challenges of inner city communities. In this sense, we view shared endeavour and co-operation between schools locally as a means to raise educational achievement and create success.

Teaching and learning innovation is a potentially powerful means of engaging and inspiring children and young people in challenging urban contexts. This process is closely linked to the need for "teacher leadership" described above. Encouragement of free expression, self-expression, improvisation, exploring unknown outcomes, associative thinking, flexibility, problem solving, critical thinking and eclecticism can "have a profound impact on young people who have become marginalized from the school system" (Cochrane and Cockett, 2007: 41). This impact is potentially all the greater through the development of deep levels of skill, both from the point of view of the learner and the teacher. Collaborative networks and sources of external support are most likely to underpin innovative and inspiring learning cultures (Hargreaves, 2004). Whilst imperatives for creating exciting learning environments are great in challenging urban contexts due to the pressing need for pupil progress, nevertheless these practices are hard to engender where schools are under increasing pressure to fulfil the fairly narrowly-focused requirements of the "standards agenda".

Details of methodology and methods

The study is situated within the non-positivist/qualitative paradigm, whilst aiming to make use of as many "concrete" reference points as possible (e.g. official reports and data). The methodological approach in the study employs "interpretivist" methods of data collection and analysis, without relying on the data alone for the generation of concepts and theoretical issues.

In the study, qualitative data has been collected from groups of schools in challenging urban contexts in two major cities in England and Poland. These cities (Sheffield and Lodz) are long established manufacturing centres that have suffered a decline and undergone more recent attempts to reconfigure their local economies, with mixed success. The Yewlands community in Sheffield is in the poorest five percent nationally, according to official data. Inner city Lodz is even poorer in absolute terms than its English counterpart, with incomes 60% below the national average, in a country with low levels of income overall. Both countries have relatively high levels of child poverty and disparity in living standards between rich and poor, with Poland having the highest levels of these in the EU (Marlier et al., 2007).

The aim of the study was to "get below the surface" of individual leaders' values, challenges and to capture the complex school leadership tasks in these communities, with trustworthiness being achieved through comparing and contrasting evidence from a range of people and methods. The primary purpose of the research effort was to generate a deeper understanding of how the examined leaders perceive their successful leadership practices.

A *purposeful sampling* approach has been adopted, aiming for "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990: 52). The same broad criteria of school/leadership "success" discussed with Local Authority/Municipality professionals were used in the study to establish the case/area in both countries.

In Poland, schools were identified in different challenging urban communities in the city of Lodz – four primary schools and two lower secondary schools. These schools had the majority of their students drawn from economically and socially deprived backgrounds, where the communities in different parts of the city are characterised by mainly decaying and grey blocks of flats situated in a fairly bleak environment lacking significant major facilities or green space. The profile of these areas is one of high unemployment, drug issues, crime and deprivation.

The English sample is a "family of schools" (a secondary school, its feeder primaries and one special school) on a large council housing estate built in the 1930s in the city of Sheffield. Behind the recently modernised dwellings is a highly deprived community with major social problems of a similar nature to the Polish context – poor facilities, unemployment and high crime levels. Both communities can be described as predominantly "white working class" rather than "multi-cultural", although there are a small number of minority ethnic pupils attending the schools in both contexts.

A combination of semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and a small number of observation studies (e.g. governance meeting) were used. Respondents were associated with four broad *Issues of Focus*, which arose from the pilot study carried out in the same areas of England and Poland (Michalak and Jones, 2009):

 – Transforming teaching and learning,
 – Work with the Surrounding Community,
 – Sources of External Support,
 – Finding Creative Solutions.

The research was deliberately not overly structured, to allow for flexibility and depth in each country. Informal interviews were used with key leadership figures at regular intervals in each case, to explore issues informally and to check out emerging matters as the studies proceed. Interviews (semi-structured and informal) were held with different levels of leaders, including: head teachers, senior management team members, middle leaders, community representative(s), and teacher leaders. Semi-structured interviews followed a checklist of issues/questioning in both cases that also allowed for the flexible exploration of issues raised by respondents.

Three different methods were used to triangulate data, to build rather than test the theory. One of the aims of the study was to establish "fuzzy

generalisations" through plausible accounts of events and phenomena (Bassey, 1999). Similarities between Poland and England demonstrate the complexity of the pedagogical and leadership task for professionals seeking to adopt an inclusive approach. Differences partly reflect the national context, history and culture. However, these also reflect the genuine differences of approaches towards similar educational issues that we regard as also potentially instructive more widely. An *inclusive school leadership* approach to work in challenging urban contexts has been outlined. A mainstream interpretivist approach to data analysis has established primary patterns in the data and identified meaningful and significant issues (Patton, 1990; Dey, 1993; Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Findings
Significant differences between the two cases

There are some significant differences between the Polish and English contexts. The English "standards *vs.* inclusion" agenda creates particular tensions and dilemmas for staff. These threaten to undermine professional values that aim for the development of meeting the wider needs of the students. The sharing of leadership in a "family of schools" context in England seems to be almost impossible in Poland at the moment due to the widespread perception that schools should compete rather than co-operate. However, Polish *s*chool principals are particularly keen to assert co-operative school cultures internally to signal a break with the Soviet past. Making links with the surrounding community in the English context appears to be relatively more problematic. In Poland, the surrounding community is more likely to view the school as a vital local resource in a situation where support from the local state is at a developmental stage.

In the Polish context, alliances with external agencies and organisations are more difficult to come by. Schools are far more isolated than in England, with even greater expectations placed on them both by their challenging communities. Co-operative working with neighbouring schools as a source of support, is much more possible in England. The Yewlands schools regard co-operative working as a source of strength, helping to develop leadership and to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The English family of schools are keen to advance their work through experimenting with new governance and partnership arrangements, currently not available to schools in Poland. Generally, Polish schools have far less resources and tend to have more basic facilities. This relatively poorer resource base in Poland, however, arguably encourages school leaders' creativity in developing new ideas and practices, although in some contexts it could have the opposite effect.

Similarities - Adopting an Inclusive School Leadership Approach

As well as differences between the two contexts there are some major similarities too. These similarities represent potentially fruitful school leadership approaches that can possibly be applied more widely. The author of the paper characterises these ways forward as essentially *inclusive*, firstly reflecting the professional aspirations in both contexts to promote the full educational potential of their students, regardless of society's expectations of them. Secondly, these ways of working also reflect a desire to work in an inclusive manner internally to harness and develop the professional expertise of staff, particularly in teaching and learning. Thirdly, the imperative to include parents and the local community as well as other stakeholders is viewed as an urgent one if school students from challenging backgrounds are to make vital progress educationally. In the study, it was found that an *Inclusive School Leadership* approach requires a focus on three main areas: *teacher leadership, building "social capital",* and in the adoption of *subversive approaches* locally (Michalak and Jones, 2010).

Teacher leadership

Leadership of pedagogy. The areas of teacher leadership of pedagogy, inspiration of students, curriculum innovation and creativity are closely related (Day et al., 2010). A useful definition of teacher leadership envisages teachers as "research colleagues, working as adviser-mentors to new teachers and facilitating professional development activities" (Harris and Muijs, 2005: 13). Wenger (1998) stresses the importance of colleagues forming "communities of practice". Through collaborative networks within and beyond the school, teacher leaders are able to apply innovation and change to the needs of their pupils. Encouragement of free expression, self-expression, improvisation, exploration of unknown outcomes, associative thinking, flexibility, problem solving, critical thinking and eclecticism can "have a profound impact on young people who have become marginalized from the school system" (Cochrane and Cockett, 2007: 41). So the sharing of leadership can be powerfully linked to creativity in the classroom and reflective in the ways of working in communities of practice.

In the Lodz schools, a wide range of approaches has been adopted to encourage goal setting and teamwork. Continuing Professional Development CPD programmes at these schools have proved very helpful in moving away from a culture of individualism towards one of cooperation. As a result, teachers interact more openly and frequently on matters of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Some of these teachers are reluctant to appear to "judge" the work of a peer. So engendering teacher leadership is still a diffi-

cult endeavour for these schools, but where these connections are made, experiences appear to be professionally rewarding and potentially beneficial to the academic growth of their students.

In the Yewlands family of schools, curriculum innovation is encouraged through teachers linking up to enable students to make links for themselves. Colleagues at the secondary school are encouraged to link subjects together around topic work so that pedagogy "is not content driven but process driven" (Teacher leader). Working across the curriculum is connected to individualised learning, a more student-centred learning environment and to staff development. The secondary school particularly uses its technology specialism to enhance the learning experience for students. Staff development also receives high priority across the family of schools, with curriculum specialists coming together for INSET (e.g. Science), as well as curriculum leaders regularly reviewing provision collectively.

Partnership working. Development of external partnerships and access to wider knowledge networks are potentially crucial in these urban contexts. These can lead to the development of deep levels of skill both from the point of view of the learner and the teacher. Collaborative networks and sources of external support are most likely to underpin innovative and inspiring learning cultures (Hargreaves, 2004). Nevertheless, these practices are hard to engender where schools are under increasing pressure in both countries. In England, "the standards agenda" tends to encourage schools to focus their attention on narrowly focused requirements. In Poland, increasing school competition and falling numbers have also put school leaders under local pressure and scrutiny.

The Lodz school principals have found that partnerships and agencies to help them with issues such as behaviour and attendance are limited. There is also a huge pressure and expectation placed on them personally by municipal and national authorities, as well as by the local community. Yet the Polish school leaders face severely limited resources and only embryonic infrastructural support locally in carrying out their task.

In the Yewlands family of schools, a focused partnership vision has been developing for around ten years, led principally by the secondary head and by the executive head of Fox Hill and Monteney primaries. They are keen to provide "0-19" joined-up provision in the area. They work as a family of schools on joint initiatives, and are setting up closer working structures with neighbouring secondary schools. The family of schools is forming itself into a Trust to cement relationships further. There is also a partnership between Yewlands and a secondary school in West Yorkshire, successfully developing approaches on accreditation, teaching and learning, raising of standards, and pupil inclusion. There is a keenness to engage with national

partners wherever possible, with national government in the area of pedagogy and with the local authority where it is felt to be beneficial to local school development. The Directorate of Teaching and Learning (DTL) helps to develop pedagogical and curricular efforts and leadership of this is shared amongst the family of schools. The Yewlands schools also aim to use whatever finance and new structural arrangements (trusts, federations, and partnerships of various kinds) are currently on offer to enhance local initiatives, with teaching and learning being at the forefront of school leaders' thinking.

Distributing leadership. Sustainable success relies upon creating entire cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community. Successful schools also search for their own solutions for making sustainable change, re-energising themselves through reflective practice and a culture of enquiry. Distributing leadership and involving pupils as partners are potentially crucial features of a sustainable way of working, particularly in challenging inner city locations.

The Lodz principals have adopted a conciliatory attitude in their everyday work. They aim to join their staff together, emphasising similarities rather than differences, and through CPD activities and more informal professional staff discussion. However this is a major undertaking, as one school leader points out:

"I came to this school seven years ago ... what I found was teaching staff working in isolation. Teachers were not willing to innovate and to invest in training and professional development. So, one of the challenges was to work collaboratively ... [creating a] wider repertoire of learning and teaching strategies than in the past. [Now we aim for] an intense focus on the demands of teaching, rather than a focus on external events".

This co-operation encompasses teaching staff, parents and students. They aim to support and coach teacher colleagues to accomplish school goals and to make pedagogical improvement. The principals stress the importance of teacher interdependency rather than dependency. A primary school principal tries to "work with the teachers so that everyone has the possibility to feel like a leader", believing that "the child's good is most important". To this end, the principal of the lower secondary school asserts, "a school, and the community that surrounds it, can't have too many leaders".

In the Polish context, supporting the development of people's potential is perceived as helping to build a *democratic school*, in contrast to the past Soviet, centralised ways of working. They wish to show students that "school is for them" and that they deserve high educational achievement. They foster supportive learning environments where every student feels valued and respected and inclusive curricular choices support a wide range of learning needs. These schools are open substantially beyond their official teaching

hours. During the week there is a variety of extra-curricular support and a lot of culturally appropriate activities catering for many different interests.

The Yewlands family of schools, in a similar vein, have set themselves the task not only of co-operating as a group but in developing leadership for learning. One head teacher sees "development of other leaders – initially in the federation … giving opportunities" as crucial. Also working across schools in developmental work is regarded as important to develop leadership at all levels, with more than just a few people making decisions or coming up with ideas. Skills of leadership in this situation are viewed as vital to the transformation of teaching and learning.

Building social capital

In the study, *social capital* has been defined fairly broadly to encompass: "bridging", through the engagement of community bodies, and "bonding", through networks and relationships locally. According to Halpern (2005), education can assist in the creation of *social capital* to tackle disadvantage, with schools potentially having a major impact on young people's social networks and skills (McNeal, 1999; Langbein and Bess, 2002; Halpern, 2005). These networks and activities can help a school both internally and in its relationships beyond the school (Michalak and Jones, 2009). Nevertheless, the development of *social capital* and networks is likely to be extremely difficult in tough environments.

Muijs et al. (2007: 3) define social inclusion as "the promotion of equality of opportunity for all children within society, regardless of background or personal circumstances". The task for schools involves "improving achievement … overcoming barriers to learning, [and the enhancement of] other capabilities and skills" (Muijs et al., 2007: 7). Some schools develop a strong role in the community, bonds with parents and a welcoming culture. These ("Type III") schools place a strong emphasis on the socialising role of the school, with inclusion being central to the school's vision, with impact being measured. Similarly, our *Building social capital* strand asserts the importance of schools developing their *social capital* internally and within the local community. The Lodz and Yewlands schools in the study share this approach, believing that there is a developmental role for themselves in the local community wider than education. They see the local community as important allies in encouraging students to achieve educationally, although both contexts struggle in this task, particularly Yewlands.

In the Yewlands family of schools, staff are encouraged to value links with parents, but success is patchy and variable. One senior leader at Fox Hill and Monteney primary schools believes that parents "do care and we do have a lot of parents who come into school and do support school in a lot of

ways". However, this work with parents as partners is an acknowledged area of difficulty. Also, their small number of ethnic minority children have difficulty in accessing the curriculum and community cohesion is a major concern. At the secondary school, a designated "extended schools co-ordinator" has been employed to help build better links with parents and the community. A particular focus is what is termed "hard to reach families", with efforts being made to engage them through family day trips to the seaside, parents evenings where children's achievements are showcased, food tasting sessions and the celebration of children's work in local horticultural allotments.

However, all these ventures are extremely hard to do successfully. For instance, a middle leader explained how a major three-day community event put on by local secondary schools and agencies only attracted a handful of parents. The reasons for this resistance revolve around local history and culture, characterised by a massive lack of trust and aspiration. A middle leader from the secondary school recounts a conversation he recently had with a teenage girl pupil:

"What do you want to do when you leave school?" And she said "Nowt" [local dialect for "nothing"]. "What do you mean nowt?" ... She said "well my dad does nowt, my brother does nowt, my grandad's done nowt so I'm doing nowt".

Given this lack of belief amongst some of the local population, "open door policies" and attempts to involve parents are difficult to make successful, yet vital in order to encourage young people to reach their educational potential. As the secondary school middle leader says "if you don't have the parents on your side you're fighting a losing battle". At Fox Hill and Monteney primary schools, they have been working on a "leading parent partnership". This has involved a parents working party, newsletters, parent-friendly practice, discussion of key school policies with parents, and holding of "bring your parents to school" days. This engagement of parents has been regarded as fairly successful. This aim pervades the family of schools as a whole but with mixed success in practice.

Similarly, in the Lodz schools, there is agreement that they should include the local community and that a better quality school environment can aid the development of pride and positive local activities. However, a primary school principal believes that the biggest problem is "getting the community to see us as a resource rather than the enemy". These schools could not imagine working without involving parents in the school's daily life and parental involvement is seen to be crucial to children's learning. They recognise that schools are only one factor influencing a child's education, so the building of *social capital* has become part of the school improvement agenda. However, involving parents and the local community in school work is

acknowledged to be a difficult task, with teachers having to work very hard to bridge the gap between school and community. The schools focus on increasing parents' pedagogical awareness and offering them educational programmes as needed (e.g. drug issues, coping with aggression and educational assistance for pupils).

The lack of resources and poor facilities from the Soviet era have forced these school leaders to think creatively to generate extra resources and get the help of local people. Out-dated ICT equipment, inadequate teaching facilities and scarce materials effectively force school principals to develop new ideas and practices, involving the opening-up of their schools to the community. They also engage with the small number of local agencies and individuals working with the same families and students as positively as they can.

"Subversive" approaches
Subverting policy and the market. School leaders in challenging urban contexts are increasingly on the receiving end of marketised policies that tend to create "winners and losers" amongst local schools, with their schools often perceived as the "losers" (Harris and Muijs 2005). Competition rather than co-operation also tends to create a negative perception of these schools locally that can easily result in low pupil numbers and a concentration of high disadvantage and educational needs amongst their student populations (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). Hargreaves points to the "apartheid of school improvement" (Harris and Muijs, 2005: 3) where English inner-city schools receive a great deal of negative attention, which can easily cause a further decline and possible closure. In Poland, further marketization appears to be a "one-way street" to a similar set of circumstances. Funding mechanisms and national programmes may also tend to disadvantage these schools unless ways can be found locally to turn these policies to their own advantage. Also, current national policies may tend to stress the importance of "standards" at the expense of "inclusion" and this may run counter to the child-centred and collectivist values of local staff (Jones, 2007). So we regard the leadership task in these circumstances as a *subversive* one in the sense that the way to counter these major forces impacting on urban schools is often by bending policy and funding mechanisms to local circumstances, raising school reputation in the face of the market forces and asserting solidarity rather than individuality.

Applying inclusive and democratic values. As with all schools in the English context, the Yewlands family of schools has to meet tough external performance benchmarks. These benchmarks are based on previous outcomes in key stage national tests, with an assumption that these will be exceeded year-on-year. Failure to meet these requirements carries the threats of

local public censure, major intervention and turmoil for these schools. One of the local Yewlands primary schools has been in this position over the past year, with more than one temporary head teacher being brought in by the local authority to make major changes, with mixed success. Another primary school (Parson Cross) has been linked in a federation with Monteney School, which has a better standards record. This has produced positive results so far. At the same time however, the inclusion agenda from the previous Labour government has also required schools and other local agencies to address the needs of the whole child and this can sit uneasily alongside the standards requirements. The temptation for staff in these tough contexts can be to "teach to the tests" to meet standards required of them and to downgrade the wider needs of children. In response, Yewlands school leaders have set out to *subvert* this set of circumstances by refusing to let the standards agenda dominate everything else. Rather they aim to address the wider needs of students and provide a high quality learning experience. By doing so, they have begun to transform standards across the family of schools. Furthermore, they also apply their strong values of shared leadership and pupil inclusion. So, the Yewlands schools work jointly on teaching and learning transformation and thereby aim to meet the standards targets set for them externally. They collectively regard enabling young people to maximise their educational opportunities as a major inclusion issue. A teacher leader is determined that they meet the wider needs of children so that they can "be positive contributors to society, that are well rounded and ... have wider things to offer". So staff are keen that pupils enjoy their learning experience to enable them to reach their full potential educationally. There is frustration at schools being regarded as "exam factories" and being set attainment targets without proper consideration being given to the tough context. One head teacher refers to the constant "tension between the quick results [required] and the long-term sustainability". Reflecting this constant external pressure on standards, a community representative believes that "we've had our hands tied" because of the relentless need to get pupils through their examinations. In the face of this situation, the family of schools is keen to build sustainable educational success through sharing leadership and ensuring a high quality learning experience. However, sustainable progress as a group of schools is hard-won and requiring targeted effort throughout the family of schools.

Strong values of equal opportunity and collective effort underpin the Yewlands project to transform the life-chances of local children and young people. A senior management team member relishes the challenge represented by her educational work, because "you feel you are making a really big difference to some children's lives ... and the challenges which they bring ... are good to face." These values of equal opportunity require positive relation-

ships inside the school, sometimes based on what appear to be fairly insignificant interactions between staff and young people but are actually highly important for the student. The school culture is regarded as critical to positive achievement. If colleagues are open and approachable, working well in teams, sharing ideas and turning these into actions in a purposeful manner, major progress is deemed to be possible. However, the values and vision of the head teacher is crucial to make things happen. For instance, the head of the secondary school is credited by senior colleagues and stakeholders with having made substantial positive changes for the betterment of her school. This has been achieved through her vision of setting up roles to re-engineer teaching and learning, in her relentless pursuit of higher educational standards and in transforming the learning culture of children and young people.

High aspiration for students is seen as an urgent issue in Yewlands, given the culture of disbelief that tends to pervade some thinking in the local area. In this sense, educational professionals are aiming to *subvert* the local pervasive culture of the lack of aspiration and persuade parents and their children that educational success is possible. Staff constantly foster belief in what students can achieve: "We need to move the school up to the next level ... aspiration, attitudes, relationships", according to one head teacher. It is recognised that disaffected children need to have time spent with them and their parents to re-engage them in school. This re-engagement is done through having high expectations, utilising a positive home influence and through some community learning opportunities. A student-centred approach is regarded by leaders as key to providing inspiration in these tough circumstances. This is done through enlivening the curriculum at the secondary level, for instance, in creative work with local elderly people and in development of craft skills and vocational work. At the primary level, the Science specialism has had a very positive effect on children. According to a senior management team member, the children "had really high perceptions of themselves as scientists and being good at Science ... especially when it was very practical ... but also when it involved ICT." Students are viewed as likely to reach their full potential in school if they can communicate, enjoy learning and feel good about themselves. Leaders regard development of self-belief, opportunity, aspiration and goal setting as important ways to develop self-worth amongst these young people.

The Lodz school principals also adopt a *subversive* approach to their task in the sense that they face a complex and newly marketised environment but nevertheless adopt child-centred, aspirational and democratic values in meeting local educational needs. They are increasingly under pressure due to the developing school market adopted by the Polish government, where they are encouraged to compete with other local schools to attract pupils, build

their school's reputation and avoid closure due to small pupil numbers. They also have to cope with an extremely wide range of management demands (and other tasks) with limited time and resources. Nevertheless, they assert what they perceive to be more "authentic" outcomes to promote students' comprehensive and harmonious development. As in Yewlands, they place teaching and learning at the heart of school life. This approach is embodied in the three "main subjects": *learning to learn, learning to think,* and *learning to be an independent manager of one's own future.*

Again, as in the Yewlands family of schools, these principals put a major emphasis on *cooperation*, in complete contrast to the 'authoritative' style of leadership predominant in the Soviet era. In so doing, they are keen to *subvert* the previous ways of working, asserting democratic and co-operative values to build sustainable schools. They see themselves as part of the 'team', work with others as professional colleagues and lead from within the group, rather than directing from the outside:

No one can work alone. This is a school and we create a group. We are the kind of organisation where everyone learns from each other...my staff has to feel that they are working with me and not for me (Principal of primary school).

My approach to leadership is discussing everything with the staff. (Principal of primary school).

I see myself as 'team leader'. Everybody has something to discuss, to add and that includes not only the teachers here but also parents and students. (Principal of lower secondary school)

Building school reputation in a tough urban context and in the face of a strong market ethos is a very important task, as in England. To 're-brand' their schools, they promote an atmosphere of caring and respect. For the primary school principal, a caring approach to the people she is working with is fundamental to achieving lasting change, as "the most important things are people, their relationships, and this is the base on which everything is built". They recognise that raising student outcomes, often from a low base, is a key focus of their work. However, in addressing student achievement they view their work as being guided by "the good of people" whom they serve, both inside and beyond their schools. We would argue that these principals practice that could be described as *servant leadership* (Greenleaf, 1977), reversing former traditional roles in their organisations. Servant leaders are responsible for treating their subordinates as rightful shareholders in the lives of their organisations, therefore they are obliged to eliminate all social inequality and injustice. Servant leaders try to minimise the instruments of formal power, replacing them with the ability to listen to others, empathy and acceptance for those having views differing from theirs (Greenleaf, 1977).

In their everyday work, these principals aim to develop the potential of the teachers, pupils, parents and the local community. Supporting the development of this potential is conducive to creating autonomy and self-government of all those involved in the school affairs and life, which in turn creates conditions for building a *democratic school*.

Final thoughts

In the paper, *Inclusive School Leadership* has been outlined as a way of working for schools in challenging urban contexts. This approach firstly envisages an emphasis on *teacher leadership* to put innovative pedagogy at the heart of a school's work. Secondly, schools need to recognise the importance of developing *social capital* both inside the school and beyond it to the local community. Thirdly, school leaders need to focus on local circumstances and needs, bending the policy environment to their own values and educational imperatives. Whilst these Polish and English schools demonstrate committed examples of professionals achieving "against the odds" in the interests of the students and communities where they work, the task is a daunting and complex one.

Polish school leaders make progress with inadequate resourcing and at a cost to themselves in work-life balance. The English leaders have relatively more support in their work but find the community-building aspects of their task a constant struggle, more so than in Poland. There are some significant differences between the Polish and English contexts. The English "standards *vs.* inclusion" agenda creates particular tensions and dilemmas for staff. These threaten to undermine professional values that aim for the development of meeting the wider needs of students. The sharing of leadership in a "family of schools" context in England seems to be almost impossible in Poland at the moment due to the widespread perception that schools should compete rather than co-operate. However, Polish school principals are particularly keen to assert co-operative school cultures internally to signal a break with the Soviet past. Making links with the surrounding community in the English context appears to be relatively more problematic. In Poland, the surrounding community is more likely to view the school as a vital local resource in a situation where support from the local state is in a developmental stage.

Marketization of schooling is set for further development in both countries and resourcing of education is likely to reduce rather than increase. So school leaders in challenging urban contexts are likely to have a further intensification of difficulty in their work. In these circumstances, educational values of equal opportunity for all students and a renewed determination to adopt inclusive approaches within and beyond the school to promote edu-

cational achievement will become all the more important. However, policy-makers and governments also need to recognise the importance of making renewed efforts to support all our young people in their schools and communities so that they can reach their full potential.

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centrične pedagogike in epistemologije. V novejši pedagogiki so pomembne lastnosti razumevanje, dialog, multikulturnost, individualnost učenca in njegova usmerjenost k učenju vis-à-vis prejšnji šoli prenosa znanja, racionalnih argumentacij in primarnosti poučevanja. V članku pokažemo, kateri epistemološki problemi nastajajo pri soočanju transmisijske in transformacijske pedagogike.

Ključne besede: učenje, konstruktivizem, transformativna šola, epistemologija, paradigma.

Joanna Michalak

Inclusive school Leadership in challenging urban communities: comparative study

The aim of the paper is to explore what is perceived to be successful school leadership in the challenging urban communities in Poland and England. This paper reports on outcomes from two case studies. These studies were conducted in two groups of schools in challenging urban communities in Lodz, Poland and in the Yewlands area of Sheffield, England. This paper builds upon outcomes so far from a three-year joint project (2008 - 2011) and firstly presents some differences of context and approach towards school leadership in the Polish and English studies. However, significant similarities in terms of pedagogy and leadership between the two contexts constitute what can be characterised as inclusive school leadership in three main areas: teacher leadership, building "social capital" and in the adoption of subversive approaches.

Key words: leadership, disadvantaged areas, education, case studies, comparative research, Poland, England

Joanna Michalak

Vključujoče šolsko vodstvo v težavnih urbanih skupnostih: primerjalna študija

Namen prispevka je raziskati, kaj je dojeto kot uspešno šolsko vodstvo v zahtevnih urbanih skupnostih na Poljskem in v Angliji. Članek poroča o rezultatih dveh študij primerov. Ti študiji sta bili izvedeni v dveh skupinah šol v zahtevnih urbanih skupnostih v Lodzu na Poljskem in na področju Yewlands v Sheffieldu v Angliji. Članek temelji na dosedanjih rezultatih triletnega skupnega projekta (2008 - 2011) in prvič predstavlja nekatere razlike v okviru in pristopu k vodenju šol v poljskih in angleških študijah. Vendar pa velike podobnosti z vidika pedagogike in vodenja šol med dvema okoljema pomenijo to, kar lahko označimo kot vključujoče vodstvo šole na treh glav-