

From Constructive Solutionsto
CreativeDissent: Economiesof
Performanceand Ecologiesof
PracticeAmong English
Headteachersof Travellers

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Overview of Presentation

- Economies of performance and ecologies of practice
- English Headteachers of Travellers
- Moving from constructive solutions to creative dissent

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice

Identity work

“The new personal identity in teaching represents a more instrumental and situational outlook, with the substantial self finding more expression elsewhere. Identity work is still in progress and seems set to continue while teachers have to find ways of relating to two or more competing discourses” (Woods & Jeffrey, 2002, p.89)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice

“...we propose a different reading of the professional as caught between what we call an ‘economy of performance’ (manifestations broadly of the audit culture) and various ‘ecologies of practice’ (professional dispositions and commitments individually and collectively engendered). Our intention is not to set up yet another analytical/moral polarity, but to look at the question of the professional self and its disparate allegiances as a series of contradictions and dilemmas that frame the identity of the professional as an implementer of policy” (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, p. 109)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Economies of performance

“These coalescing registers of pupil assessment, staff training and performance measures, constitute what we came to call an ‘*economy of performance*’ expressed largely in terms of quantitative performance measures. They required universal curricula in order that standardized comparisons could be made locally and nationally, and so were felt to imply ‘delivering’ a set curriculum” (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, p.109; emphasis in original)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Ecologies of practice

“...it was clear that such an ‘economy’ [of performance] was always written against other beliefs and practices. Professionals’ talk was shot through with different warranting appeals. As well as those auditable commodities of the ‘audit culture’...professionals in both groups [of teachers and nurses] made frequent appeals to different sorts of registers which we came to label ‘ecologies of practice’.../

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Ecologies of practice

.../These comprised the accumulation of individual and collective experiences of teaching or nursing through which people laid claim to being 'professional' – personal experience in the classroom/clinic/ward, commonly held staff beliefs and institutional policies based upon these, commitments to 'child-centred' or 'care-centred' ideologies, convictions about what constituted 'good practice', and so on" (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, p.122)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Ecologies of practice

“...the most influential aspect of ecologies of practice is the classroom experience. It was there that innovations seem to have been tested, adapted, resisted, embraced or ignored. It was there that things had to ‘work’. And it was there that a sense of the vocational commitment and reward of the teacher was most vividly expressed ...” (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, p.124; emphasis in original)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice

“We can see that these ecological appeals were accommodations to the externally framed ‘economy of performance’. They called forth different characters, like the ‘recollected pupil’, ‘the coerced innovator’ and the ‘convinced professional’. These were cast in a shifting and conflicting emplotment of the ‘economy’ within a series of changing ‘ecological practices’.../

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice (continued)

Economies of performance and ecologies of practice

.../It became apparent that what was interesting was not any attempt to 'name' identities, nor even to attempt to define boundaries between economy and ecology in terms of 'characterized' outcomes (like 'deprofessionalization', 'audit culture' and so on). More interesting was the discursive dynamics between these different sorts of pressure. It was a theory of 'tension' that was needed rather than some reductive formula that would identify what was 'really' going on" (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, pp. 124-125)

English Headteachers of Travellers

Local Education Authorities have established Traveller Education Support Services (TESSs) for:

- Travellers on authorised Gypsy sites
- Travellers on unauthorised sites (Roadsiders)
- Fairground/Circus children
- New Travellers
- Travellers settled in housing for less than two years. (Currie & Danaher, 2001, p. 34)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Groups with whom and which TESSs have sustained contact:

- Traveller children
- Traveller families
- other [members of] TESSs
- local schools (including administrators, classroom and support teachers and students)
- the Department for Education and Skills (and its policies on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment)
- the Local Education Authorities
- other units within local government councils
- other government and non-government welfare agencies
- members of the general public. (Danaher, Coombes, Simpson, Harreveld & Danaher, 2002, pp. 20-21)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

The research project:

- Early March to early July 1999
- 23 semi-structured interviews with 27 headteachers and teachers
- 19 English TESSs (ranging from metropolitan London and rural southwest to industrial midlands and regional northwest)
- Over 200,000 words of interview transcripts
- Transformative approach to textual and thematic analysis (Rowan, 2001)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

The paper:

- Three respondents in this paper: Bronwyn (urban), Naomi (industrial) and Zoë (regional)
- Not necessarily representative of other participants in the study or of their colleagues throughout England
- Selected on the basis of exhibiting heightened reflexivity about their work and of being identified by colleagues as particularly effective practitioners
- The paper “do[es] claim, however, to have constructed a plausible and [perhaps] provocative re-telling” (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002, p. 132, n. 4) of the interviewees’ words and identities

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (government funding)

- Government funding “has actually mainstreamed Traveller education” because “...the [Traveller Education Support] Services have been setup in that way, and are discrete from other support services, [and] discrete from school budgets, [and] it has had the effect of raising awareness” (Bronwyn)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (legislation and funding)

- “So for instance we’ve really had a history where despite knowing the different communities that make up the travelling communities, nevertheless the funding and the legislation [have] largely failed to recognise the needs [of] the different communities. And I guess there’ve been some unwritten hierarchies of need within that situation, so that hostility, neglect, prejudice, poverty, [and] disadvantage have gained greater status than the general discussion around the educational needs of children within the different travelling communities, and how and what response we should be making to those different needs” (Naomi)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (European funding)

- “I think one of the energies and one of the attractions around the kind of pump-priming funding from Europe is that it has given us the chance to explore some options. But of course the downside of that is - and I refer to the new technology projects we've been able to promote - but you also set up a degree of expectation in the families and children and schools that, if there isn't any long-term planning or funding coming in behind those, [that] actually dashes those expectations and can be quite damaging” (Naomi)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (government target setting)

- “The target setting has made it more difficult for head[teacher]s to be inclusive automatically [and] to say, ‘What’s the situation? We have spaces; these children want them. Of course they can come. As long as I don’t have to include them in my SATs figures’”
(Bronwyn)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (legislation and flexibility)

- “I think one of the interesting things about some of the more recent government legislation has been the flexibilities that are occurring from 14 plus onwards for instance, where we can demonstrate a very real linkage and partnership between family-taught skills – if we’re talking about showmen’s youngsters - and the school curriculum. For instance, there’s the ability now to organise a school or a learning experience partly which can be vocational and partly which can be academic. I think [that for] Traveller youngsters it’s the meeting point – the point where they can begin to see the real relationship between education and their experiences, and actually how they can complement each other” (Naomi)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Economies of performance (designated personnel)

- “I really feel that there should be a directive from the [Department for Education and Skills] to schools to say that they should have a designated person in each school who will take responsibility for Travellers if they come to the school. I think if they did that and each school had to have a designated person our job would be easier, life would be better for the Travellers and I think then we may start to make some progress” (Zoë)

EnglishHeadteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (special needs discourse)

- “We draw on the two main reasons we would be giving extra support and that is mobility and ethnicity or culture, whichever term you would prefer. So we would say that the children have particular needs that are directly linked to either mobility, or ethnicity or culture, and sometimes both. That is why we are a supportive -; that’s why there is a need. They have particular needs, not special needs, and we try to be very clear. But we shouldn’t be included in descriptions of children with special needs, and it troubles me how quite a few do it, because that simply isn’t the case. We say that the special needs discourse is really applied in exactly the same way as it is to the general population. We would expect to see as many Traveller children with special needs as we would in the general population proportionally” (Bronwyn)

EnglishHeadteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (special needs discourse)

- “One of the things I think we’ve developed successfully here is an ability to look at a learning situation and to assess who it is that needs the support in that situation...is it the child who requires support in terms of induction into the school, into the social context, the routine? Is it the child who needs learning support, or is it in fact the curriculum that needs development and adaptation to allow access by the teacher? Is it the class teacher who needs support to understand this child as an early learner and for instance you get some class teachers who are incredibly worried if they don’t make up the gaps in the child’s learning within the four week stretch or the winter stretch that they’re in the school. Then those class teachers who say, ‘They’re only here for four weeks; why bother?’. We need to have the ability to say, ‘Where do we need to put in the support, and what kind of support do we need to put in?’” (Naomi)

EnglishHeadteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (special needs discourse)

- “They do have some special needs but not in the terms of ‘special needs’It’s getting away from that special needs label. They don’t see anything other than children who are behind their peers. I can only describe it to them as if somebody is knitting and they drop a stitch; you could pick it up and the garment would look perfect, wouldn’t it? You drop ten stitches, then you could pick those up and you might have a little line where you picked the stitches up. If you dropped fifty stitches and you’ve a great big hole, are you ever going to pick those stitches up? That’s what their learning gap is like. For some children you will never bridge that learning gap, but they’re definitely not special needs. But for some children they have got special needs. How do you decide what is a learning gap and when [has] a child got a specific learning difficulty? I don’t think we have assessment in place that is appropriate for Travellers to actually -.” (Zoë)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (social justice discourse)

- “All of the people I’ve met in this work [Traveller education], and you do say to people, “You must have come into it for the money, mustn’t you?”, just to make them laugh -. Everyone I know who does this kind of work, they have a very strong sense of justice. It seems that the choice to do it is sometimes accident, but coming out of a history of feeling that there are some children who we let down, and there are some children who don’t get a fair deal, and of wanting to put it a little bit.” (Zoë)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (social justice discourse)

- “It is determination, but I’m quite clear: I am here for the Travellers. We have some very good Travellers and we have some awful Travellers, but my prime concern is I’m here to access education, and I have to work within the bounds of the [Local Area] Authority, but I have to be fair as well. I think you’ve got to get it into perspective. I’m not here just purely to fight the corner of all Travellers because I won’t do that, but I’ll fight for justice for them, for equality of opportunity...” (Zoë)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (personality discourse)

- Bronwyn drew a sharp contrast between her belief that "...there is a perception of the support services that it's do-gooding ladies who are being kind to these poor things" and her own construction of her job "...as a way of...generalising their issues that I've been interested in with here of access..." (Bronwyn)
- "I like a challenge and I am a finisher, I see things through to the end. But I like variety, and there can't be any other job that offers the variety and the opportunity" (Zoë)

English Headteachers of Travellers (continued)

Ecologies of practice (personality discourse)

- “For me personally, it’s been about a commitment in looking at taking some responsibility for a job which to some extent I felt I was misled about. It was about ‘Here are some children out of school; all you’ve got to do is get them into school and the job’s done’. And then coming in and actually finding all the factors that operate against that process. So it’s not something I feel I can walk away from. Certainly I don’t feel tied to it, or I don’t feel any guilt factor about it....” (Naomi)

Moving from constructive solutions to creative dissent

- The broader significance of this analysis is its contribution to demonstrating how sometimes – in widely varying ways and for different purposes and with differential outcomes – teachers work outwards from constructive solutions to creative dissent, rather than inwards from creative dissent to constructive solutions. That is, instead of ‘tinkering at the edges’ and devising solutions within the context of the *status quo*, sometimes teachers envision and implement new ways of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ educational provision that dissent creatively from currently taken for granted assumptions about such provision.

Moving from constructive solutions to creative dissent (continued)

- In the field of Traveller education, this movement can be said to parallel the Travellers' own efforts to move from marginalisation and resistance to transformation of their educational situation (Danaher, 2001). Or in relation to the participants in this study, it is moving from Naomi's reference to "all we'll ever have is what we have" towards Bronwyn's evocation of "a way of ... generalising the issues that I've been interested in wherever of access..." (and to "access" might be added "inclusion" and "social justice").

Moving from constructive solutions to creative dissent (continued)

- This transformation from constructive solutions to creative dissent has been facilitated conceptually by understanding that economies of performance and ecologies of practice exist in dialectical, dynamic, fluid and recursive relationship to each other. This transformation has been examined empirically through this paper's focus on the role enactments and identity work of three English headteachers of Travellers. Finally, this transformation has crucial implications and vital significance for understanding and embracing potentially new ways of 'thinking' and 'doing' both Traveller education and teachers' work.

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