

S T A F F

**THE
MANAGERIAL
SCHOOL**

Post-welfarism and Social Justice in Education

Sharon Gewirtz

The State of Welfare

The Managerial School

Post-welfarism and Social Justice
in Education

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London and New York

First published 2002

by Routledge

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 2002 Sharon Gewirtz

Typeset in Times by BC Typesetting, Bristol

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Gewirtz, Sharon, 1964–

The managerial school: post-welfarism and social justice in education/
Sharon Gewirtz.

p. cm. – (The state of welfare)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. School management and organization–Great Britain.

2. Educational change–Great Britain. 3. Great Britain–Social
policy. I. Title. II. Series.

LB2900.5.G49 2001

371.2'00941–dc21

2001019454

ISBN 0–415–22485–3 (hbk)

ISBN 0–415–22486–1 (pbk)

The Managerial School

The relationship between welfare and the state has undergone a sustained process of reconfiguration over the past two decades and managerialism has played a key role in this process. In education, parents are now seen as consumers and schools as small businesses, their income dependent on their success in attracting customers within competitive local markets. At the same time, management practices borrowed from business – such as target setting and performance monitoring – now play a key role in regulating schools.

What kinds of schools are the reforms producing? What impact are they having on school culture and values? What are the social justice implications of applying a business model to the provision of schooling?

In *The Managerial School*, Sharon Gewirtz draws on in-depth interviews with teachers in a range of secondary schools and close observation of school practices to answer these questions. Through a comparison of Conservative and New Labour policies, she argues that New Labour's 'third way' for education is a contradictory mix of neo-liberal, authoritarian and humanistic strands that is not in any real sense a new educational settlement.

This empirically based account of over a decade of education reform offers a unique insight into the effects of managerialism on schools and a hard-hitting analysis of the inherent tensions in a system that undoubtedly perpetrates social injustice.

Sharon Gewirtz is Professor of Education at King's College London.

The State of Welfare

Edited by Mary Langan

Throughout the Western world, welfare states are in transition. Changing social, economic and political circumstances have rendered obsolete the systems that emerged in the 1940s out of the experiences of depression, war and social conflict. New structures of welfare are now taking shape in response to the conditions of today: globalisation and individuation, the demise of traditional allegiances and institutions, the rise of new forms of identity and solidarity.

In Britain, the New Labour government has linked the projects of implementing a new welfare settlement and forging a new moral purpose in society. Enforcing 'welfare to work', on the one hand, and tackling 'social exclusion', on the other, the government aims to rebalance the rights and duties of citizens and redefine the concept of equality.

The State of Welfare series provides a forum for the debate about the new shape of welfare into the millennium.

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Preface

The 1988 Education Reform Act fundamentally transformed the organisation of school provision in England and Wales. This major piece of legislation redefined parents as consumers, who – at least in principle – were given the right to choose a school for their child, rather than be allocated one by local authority bureaucrats. At the same time, schools were effectively reconfigured as small businesses whose income was to become dependent on their success in attracting customers within competitive local school markets. These were not free markets, however, as various mechanisms were put in place by the 1988 Act to enable a tight regulation of schooling by the state. In particular, the 1988 Act gave central government the right to specify precisely what was to be taught in schools and to monitor closely the performance of schools through the national curriculum, regular testing of students, the publication of those results and inspection. Since the 1988 legislation, a series of further reforms have consolidated and extended the marketisation and regulation of school provision. The New Labour government, first elected in 1997, appears to have adopted a more humanistic approach to the curriculum than their Conservative predecessors, who had been responsible for the 1988 Act. It has also sought to introduce a degree of compensatory funding for (some) socially distressed areas and uses the language of partnership and collaboration rather than competition. Nevertheless, in a number of crucial respects, New Labour policies represent a continuation of the Conservatives' crusade to make the provision of education more business-like.

The essays collected together here are about the effects that this business model of education provision is having on schools in England and, more particularly, on the culture and values which pervade them. What kinds of schools are the reforms producing? Who and what is valued in them? What impact are the reforms having on the roles of headteachers and teachers, on how they think and talk about their work and on the

nature of relationships inside schools? What are the social justice implications of applying business-like modes of organisation and management to the provision of schooling? And how compatible are these new modes of provision with the seemingly humanistic and social democratic educational commitments espoused by New Labour?

Throughout the book, the term ‘welfarism’ is used to represent the educational ‘settlement’ – i.e., the sets of languages, meanings, assumptions, values and institutional forms, practices and relationships – which framed the organisation of schooling between 1944 and 1988. And the term ‘post-welfarism’ is used to refer to the settlement inaugurated by the New Right-inspired reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. The shift from welfarism to post-welfarism is less clear cut and is messier in practice than the neatness that the labelling might suggest and some of this messiness will become apparent as the book develops. Nevertheless, I want to argue that there are important features that distinguish the post-1988 period from the preceding era. For the sake of convenience, the terms ‘welfarism’ and ‘post-welfarism’ are used to capture these two distinct phases and to signify the range of shifts in language, practices, purposes and values which have accompanied the drive to make schools more business-like.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the book. It begins by sketching out the main policy components of the shift from welfarism to post-welfarism and the conditions out of which this shift arose, drawing attention to key problems of the state that post-welfarist policies were meant to help remedy – problems of capital accumulation, social control and legitimation. Chapter 1 then goes on to outline the rationale and approach of the book, which is rooted in a critique of two dominant trends in research on education policy and practice. The first trend, which I refer to as the celebration-of-indeterminacy approach, is influenced by particular variants of post-modernist thought. The second is the growing and increasingly influential body of research into what has become known as ‘school effectiveness and improvement’. Whilst rooted within two very different epistemological traditions, both trends, I argue – albeit for different reasons – effectively underplay the extent to which state policies and the discursive and socio-economic contexts within which schools operate, constrain and shape what goes on in schools. The chapter concludes by arguing for an approach to the analysis of post-welfarism in education that overcomes the pitfalls of these trends. I suggest that we need to make use of insights from neo-Marxism, whilst not losing sight of the contribution that post-modernist theory can make to our understanding of policies and their effects.

Part I of the book, post-welfarism and the reconstruction of English schooling, examines the implications of post-welfarism for the culture, values and relations of secondary schooling. Culture is conceptualised in a very broad and simple sense to refer to the ways in which people think, act and communicate, to 'the material and symbolic artifacts of behaviour' (Thomas 1993: 12) (for example, methods of grouping students, school prospectuses, school uniforms) and to the meanings signified by behaviour and its artefacts. In this part of the book, ethnographic data are used to explore what managerialism means for headteachers, teachers and students working in a range of socio-economic contexts.¹

The research upon which the chapters in Part I draw was conducted in London schools. However, whilst it is important to recognise that London schools may have distinctive features, the insights developed from this research have, I would suggest, a wider applicability. The schools which took part in the research were chosen deliberately as critical cases to enable an exploration of what is happening in schools that are located in *an archetypically post-welfarist environment* – i.e., one where quasi-markets operate. And the cultural and value effects reported here are ones that will no doubt be familiar to those involved in schools in other parts of England, as well as in other countries where similar policies have been adopted. Certainly, there is now a growing body of research emanating from various parts of the world which appears to confirm some of the key findings reported here. (See Whitty *et al.* 1998 for a useful overview of research into school reform in England and Wales, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden.)

One of the consequences of post-welfarist policies in education has been to draw attention to, and enhance the role of, the headteacher and, since headteachers play a key part in shaping their school's response to the new policy environment, in any analysis of cultural and value change in schools a focus on the headteacher is vital. Chapter 2, therefore, considers shifts in the languages and practices of school headship. The chapter is grounded in an analysis of one school which, I suggest, is a critical case because it brings into sharp focus the discursive shift that a number of commentators have noted is evident on a larger scale in the education and welfare system as a whole. However, by focusing on the contingent and the local, the chapter also illustrates the varied and complex ways in which individual

1 See Appendix for details of the research methods used in the two studies upon which Part I is based.

headteachers may position themselves within the shifting organisational and discursive terrains in which they are located.

Chapter 3 explores the ways in which the education market functions as a system of rewards and punishments, a disciplinary mechanism, fostering particular cultural forms and socio-psychological dispositions and marginalising others. The chapter considers the case of a school that has had to confront the issue of institutional survival in a market context. The resulting value conflicts and ethical dilemmas faced by the staff and governors are discussed.

Chapter 4 explores the effects upon teachers of post-welfarist education policies, as mediated by the new discourses and policies of school managers. More specifically, it is concerned with the emotional, relational and pedagogical aspects of teachers' work. The chapter describes how the pressures created by managerialist discourses and the market environment – in particular, heightened forms of competition, assessment, surveillance and performance monitoring, and the intensification of the labour process of teaching – have led to demoralisation amongst teachers and to perceptions of a decline in collaboration and the erosion of creativity in classroom practice.

Chapter 5 challenges a central strand of managerialist thinking in education that so-called failing schools are largely the product of poor leadership and teaching and that, through the 'cascading of best practice', all schools can be a success. Drawing on ethnographic data from two schools, the chapter demonstrates the intricate and intimate connections between what school managers and teachers do and the socio-economic and discursive environments within which they operate.

Whilst Part I of the book uses case studies to explore specific aspects of post-welfarist schooling, Part II, *Assessing post-welfarism in Education*, 'stands back' from these studies. Part II attempts to draw together the threads of the analysis in Part I in order to make a broader assessment of the characteristics and consequences of educational post-welfarism and to speculate about the likely consequences of New Labour's 'third way' for education.

Chapter 6 begins by emphasising the complexity of the 'lived' post-welfarist settlement, and its contested nature and warning against the twin dangers of over-generalisation and 'golden-ageism'. It then goes on to identify the key features of post-welfarism in education. It is suggested that these define the contours within and against which diverse responses are articulated. The chapter concludes by arguing that post-welfarism is failing to ameliorate the problems it was meant to help solve and that it contains its own tensions and contradictions.

Using a conceptualisation of social justice, which has at its heart a recognition of the importance of diverse cultural identities, Chapter 7 presents a social justice ‘audit’ of post-welfarism in education. In this chapter, it is argued that the post-welfarist policies introduced by successive Conservative governments seems to have contributed to a regressive redistribution of educational resources and to have generated a number of forms of oppression – notably, an intensified exploitation of teachers, the increased marginalisation of working-class students and some racialised groups, and the circumscription of opportunities for the development of pedagogies that recognise and engage with diverse cultural identities.

Chapter 8 considers New Labour’s ‘third way’ for education, which, it is argued, comprises a contradictory mix of neo-liberal, authoritarian and humanistic strands. This final chapter draws upon the analysis of earlier chapters to speculate about the consequences of ‘third way’ policies for social justice, whether they represent a new educational settlement or a consolidation of post-welfarism and how far these policies are likely to resolve the tensions associated with the Conservative reforms.

The emphasis throughout this book is upon critique. This is because, whilst in particular settings managerialism may represent a field of constraints *and* possibilities (Clarke and Newman 1997: 104–5), the evidence upon which this book is based strongly suggests that within school settings the constraining features of managerialism tend to predominate – although as we shall see, these constraining features do not operate uniformly across different material and socio-economic contexts.

Acknowledgements

This book draws upon research into post-welfarism in education carried out over a ten-year period and it owes much to collaborative work with, and the support of, colleagues at King's College London and the Open University with whom I have worked during this time.

The project started in 1990 when I began work as a researcher at King's College London on a study funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (award no. R000232858) that looked at the operation and effects of markets in education in the wake of the 1988 Education Reform Act. I am indebted to the directors of that project, Stephen Ball and Richard Bowe, for giving me a job which enabled me to develop my interest in markets in education and for inducting me into fruitful and stimulating ways of doing collaborative research. Many of the arguments developed in this book were inspired initially by this joint work and Chapter 3 is adapted from an article that was originally published in all our names. I am grateful to Stephen and Richard for allowing me to use this article here. The markets research led to a second ESRC-funded study (award no. R000235544), which I co-directed with Stephen Ball. This study focused on the impact of market forces on the culture and values of schooling. Chapters 2, 4 and 5 draw on fieldwork and were inspired by conversations carried out as part of that study. Chapter 2 is an amended version of an article first published in our joint names, and I am grateful to Stephen for giving me permission to include it in this book. Thanks are also due to Diane Reay, who carried out some of the interviews in two of the case-study schools, to the ESRC for funding both studies, and to all the school governors and staff who participated in the studies. I am particularly grateful to the chair of governors at 'Northwark Park' school who read and commented on Chapter 3 and to the headteacher of 'Fletcher' school and the head of religious

education at 'Beatrice Webb' school who commented on an earlier version of Chapter 4.

This book also draws on thinking and writing I did as part of my PhD and I would like to thank Stephen Ball (again) and Geoff Whitty for the excellent advice and support they gave me in their capacity as joint supervisors of my thesis. My external examiner, Michael Apple, also made extremely helpful comments that I have tried to take on board.

There are other colleagues whose support has been invaluable. Alan Cribb, Meg Maguire and Chiz Dubé at King's have been good friends to me over the last decade. Alan has read endless drafts, helped me to clarify my thinking, has been a great source of moral support, and has generally exhibited saint-like qualities. Meg has also read drafts and remains a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. And I am grateful to Chiz for transcribing many of the interviews drawn upon in this book. Liz Cawdron and Helen Worger have provided excellent transcriptions as well and I am most appreciative of their work.

This book also owes much to the support of colleagues in the Social Policy Discipline at the Open University, who have for the last three years provided me with an incredibly warm, lively and inspiring context within which to work. I would particularly like to thank John Clarke who has given generously of his time and wisdom, reading and commenting on drafts of several chapters, Gail Lewis who read and helped improve an earlier draft of Chapter 7 and has helped stimulate my thinking more generally, Gordon Hughes who has managed to find time in his hectic schedule to read and provide useful feedback on other parts of this book, and Sue Lacey, Pauline Hetherington, Donna Collins and Nicole Jones for their brilliant secretarial support.

Early drafts of some of the chapters of this book were aired at meetings of the 'Parental Choice and Market Forces' group held at King's College London and I am grateful to all the participants in these discussions, some of whom have already been mentioned. The others are Gill Crozier, Miriam David, John Fitz, David Halpin, Hugh Lauder, Philip Noden, Sally Power, Carol Vincent and Anne West. I am particularly grateful to Carol for her very helpful comments on Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Last, but definitely not least, this book could not have been written without the ongoing support of my partner, Desmond O'Reilly, my three children, Flynn, Freda and Eva, and my friends, Jude Lancet and Carrie Supple.

Most of the chapters in this volume are revised versions of articles published elsewhere or contain portions of articles published elsewhere.

Sections of Chapter 1 and Chapter 6 originally appeared in 'Efficiency at any cost', in C. Symes and D. Meadmore (eds) (1999), *The Extraordinary School*, Peter Lang.

Chapter 2 is a revised version of 'From "Welfarism" to "New Managerialism" : shifting discourses of school headship in the education marketplace', *Discourse* 21(3) (2000) (co-authored with Stephen Ball).

Chapter 3 is a revised version of 'Values and ethics in the Education Marketplace: the case of Northwark Park', *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 3(2) (1994) (co-authored with Stephen Ball and Richard Bowe).

Chapter 4 is revised from an article originally published in the *Journal of Education Policy* 12(4) (1997), entitled 'Post-welfarism and the reconstruction of teachers' work in the UK'.

Chapter 5 is a revised version of an article published in the *Oxford Review of Education* 2(4) (1998).

Chapter 7 is revised from an article published in *Education and Social Justice* 1 (1998) and a chapter in G. Lewis, S. Gewirtz and J. Clarke (eds) (2000) *Rethinking Social Policy*, Sage.

Finally, Chapter 8 draws on material from 'Education Action Zones: emblems of the "third way"?', in H. Dean and R. Woods (eds) (1999) *Social Policy Review 11*, SPA and 'Bringing the Politics back in: a critical analysis of quality discourses in education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 48(4) (2000).

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1 Introduction

The changing politics of education: from welfarism to post-welfarism

This introductory chapter sets out the policy context and rationale for the book as a whole. It begins by describing the key components of the shift from welfarism to post-welfarism, the assumptions underpinning the post-welfarist settlement and the conditions out of which the shift arose. The chapter then goes on to outline the book's analytical approach.

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s, the English schools system was broadly shaped by an ideology and set of languages, policies and practices which together made up what can loosely be categorised as a *welfarist* settlement. The term settlement is used here to refer to the specific constellation of assumptions and arrangements – political, economic, social and institutional – which framed school provision during this period. The welfarist settlement was underpinned by a broad consensus amongst powerful groups – the major political parties, the trade unions and big business – and by a significant degree of popular support. However, contestation, conflict and fragility are defining features of all settlements – they can only ever represent a temporary ‘equilibrium’ (Gramsci 1971) – and the welfarist settlement in education was no exception. The instabilities of the welfarist settlement, which gave rise to the emergence of post-welfarist policies, practices and values, will be examined later in the chapter but first I want to identify the key policy components of the shift from welfarism to post-welfarism.

Welfarism entailed a formal commitment to distributive justice; that is, to the redistribution of social goods on a more equitable basis. It was grounded in the economics of Keynesianism and the politics of corporatism and was underpinned by the ‘social democratic consensus’ (CCCS 1981). I say *formal* commitment because, of course, in practice, welfarism failed to eradicate enormous social inequalities – although it might have had an ameliorative effect for some – and the label