

From Ideological Apparatuses to Governing Education Dispositif: Discourses and Contexts of Leadership

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This paper¹ aims to show how the policies of leadership represent a key *dispositif* (apparatus) for neo-liberal school reforms. In particular, in a foucauldian perspective, the concept of *dispositif* plays a strategic role at the intersection of governmentality, regimes of truth, and technologies of the self. The *dispositif* is a historical formation of heterogeneous elements as discourses, institutions, rules, scientific knowledge(s), and so on: ‘[t]he apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements’ (CF: 194); sort of a *contextual and mobile configuration* (see Revel 2015). Grounded on a ‘new’ conception of power and challenging its ideological function it is distinguished from other conceptions of State apparatus, such as the ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (Althusser 1971).

As for the specific field of educational leadership we should ask how a *dispositif* involves knowledge (*savoirs*), practices and technologies that situate head teachers as subjects (and objects) either for the enactment of educational policies or for leading schools as organizations. In doing so, we should weaken the emphasis on ideological role of leaders; that is on leaders as part of those ‘intellectuals/high rank civil servants’ of the State, who play a crucial function in maintaining the *bourgeois hegemony* (Buci-Glucksmann 1975).

Thus, in order to adopt a *beyond ideology* foucauldian perspective the paper:

1. shows the centrality of *dispositif*: in particular it discusses the way in which Foucault distances himself from ideology, in his concern with power and knowledge as it evolves towards regimes of truth and technologies of the self.
2. illustrates knowledge (*savoir*) about educational leadership developed, since the ‘80s, drawing on both organisational and managerial sciences; it also highlights reactions to the leadership mantra coming from critical scholars; this requires two interpretative dimensions: discursive and epistemic;
3. demonstrates how this knowledge is linked to forms of governmentality which shape leadership *dispositif* through policies, technologies and practices of training, organization and assessment that subjectivate the head teachers;
4. proposes a critical deconstruction of the *dispositif*, in order to identify emerging ‘potentials’ (Gronn 2009) of *democratic leadership*, as well as knowledge based on alternative truths.

The ideological ‘suspect’

Foucault’s analysis rejects ideology as the proper tool which enables us to understand the evolution of forms of knowledge, as well as they are intertwined with practices of power. Since *Archaeology of knowledge* Foucault draws a close connection between ideological functions and scientific knowledge. In a ‘discursive formation’ the difference between scientific knowledge and

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other forms of knowledge, as well as the identification of its ‘ideological functioning’, implies an archaeological analysis of the practices: “(i)t is to treat it as one practice among others” (205).

Science (or what is offered as such) is localized in a field of knowledge and plays a role in it. A role that varies according to different discursive formations, and is modified with their mutations. [...] In any discursive formation, one finds a specific relation between science and knowledge; and instead of defining between them a relation of exclusion or subtraction (by trying to discover what in knowledge still eludes and resists science, what in science is still compromised by its proximity to and the influence of knowledge), archaeological analysis must show positively how a science functions in the element of knowledge. *It is probably there, in that space of interplay, that the relations of ideology to the sciences are established* (AK: 203-204, italic mine).

Olssen has noted how:

In place of such a view which distinguishes ideology from science or truth, Foucault substitutes his theoretical notion of “discursive practice” based on a minute and detailed analysis of practices that make particular forms of historical practice possible. The concept of discursive practice does not dissolve truth but rejects the distinction between ideology and truth or ideology and science. As our identities and our bodies are constructed through such discursive practices, *the partitioning of truth from falsehood is problematic*” (1999: 127, im).

The emphasis on practices, through an ‘anti-institutionalist’ approach (as presented in PP: 42 and HS: 117) focused on *microphysics of power*, leads Foucault to suspect of the ideological issue more and more. Nowadays that the second (TIP) and the third (PS) *Lectures at the Collège de France* have been published this suspicion appears completely explicit for what Balibar recalled about the ‘dealing of Foucault with Marxism’ (TIP: 285-289). Without explicitly mentioning his master, Foucault reacts to Althusser’s conception of ideology through the discovery of the ‘formidable’ knowledge (*savoir*) regarding the social crime enemy (a discovery that pairs the ‘formidable’ one regarding the ‘dissoluteness’ at the origin of theories of desire, including psychoanalysis), which has to be understood in terms of relations of power (at the time still ‘disciplinar’) (PS: 133).

Here a different conception of power is in play: ‘power is not conceivable as an instrument, as something possessed, nor as an ideological apparatus, but must be thought of as a primary and constitutive factor’ (Harcourt 2015: 288). Power cannot be divided between repression (the Repressive State Apparatus that works by violence) and ideology (the Ideological State Apparatuses). In respect to Althusser’ distinction between ideological and repressive apparatuses Foucault proposes a more fluid conception instead of the State apparatus model: ‘an intra-state system’ or ‘relays-multipliers of power, (PS: 209) where the emergence of the idea of the State as an ‘*episode in governmentality*’ (STP: 248, im) comes to the fore; whereas ‘[t]he state is nothing else but the *mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities*’ (BBP: 75, im).

Thus three implications relevant: firstly, the abandonment of a *conspiracy* theory of the leading class and of the bourgeois hegemony like in Gramsci. Secondly and methodologically, there is no ‘unspoken’ and invisible’; in the discourse ‘both a certain transparency and certain forms of exclusion [...] are integral part of the analysis and transparency may be so transparent to obscure’ (Harcourt 2015: 289). In a comment to his *Archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault

clarifies: '[w]hat I look for are not secret, hidden relations, that are more silent or more profound than the consciousness of people. I try rather to define relations that are on the surface of discourse; I try to make visible what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things' (quoted in PS: 289). Thirdly 'ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material economic determinant, etc. For these three reasons, I think that *this is a notion that cannot be used without circumspection*' (TP: 118, im).

Therefore it is in the transition to the genealogical phase that the analysis of the practices focuses more clearly not only on the knowledge (*savoirs*), but on 'regimes of truth' intertwined with power relations which make the *dispositif* a central knot for Foucault's theory of the power/govern, as noted by Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982).

The question here is the same as the question I addressed with regard to madness, disease, delinquency, and sexuality. In all of these cases, it was not a question of showing how these objects were for a long time hidden before finally being discovered, nor of showing how all these objects are only wicked illusions or ideological products to be dispelled in the [light] of reason finally having reached its zenith. It was a matter of showing by what conjunctions a whole set of practices – from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth – was able to make what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist. That is to say, what I would like to show is not how an error – when I say that which does not exist becomes something, this does not mean showing how it was possible for an error to be constructed – or how an illusion could be born, but how a particular regime of truth, and therefore not an error, makes something that does not exist able to become something. It is not an illusion since it is precisely a set of practices, real practices, which established it and thus imperiously marks it out in reality.

The point of all these investigations concerning madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, and what I am talking about now, is to show how *the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (dispositif)* of knowledge (*savoir*)-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false (BBP: 19, im).

Therefore, *dispositif* – that in the following section will be useful to interpret leadership policies – becomes central to biopolitics and governmentality, well beyond the couple knowledge/power still linked to the conception of the 'disciplinary society' (which finds its acme between *The Punitive Society* and *Discipline and Punish*). Here, with a further step forward, regimes of truth and the problem of government open up spaces for reflecting on the constitution of subjectivities (see Senellart 2014, in GL), the so-called ethical phase of Foucault's work.

The abandonment of ideology combines here with the issue of subjectivation, which challenges a theory of the ahistorical and monolithic subject and explores the constitution of diverse subjectivities within the subject himself, along with historical and contingent formations.

There were practices – essentially the widespread use of incarceration [...] – that sent me back to the problem of institutions of power *much more than to the problem of ideology*. This is what led me to pose the problem of knowledge and power, which for me is not the fundamental problem but an instrument that makes it possible to analyse the problem of the relationship between subject and truth in what seems to me the most precise way.

What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or no delinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on. I had to reject a priori theories of the subject in order to analyse the *relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power*, and so on.

[The subject] is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself. You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfil your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject. In each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself. And *it is precisely the historical constitution of these various forms of the subject in relation to the games of truth which interests me* (ECS: 289-290, im).

Therefore our questions are the following: how do discursive formations arise to fabricate the ‘reality’ of leadership? What are the epistemic premises, the regimes of truth that define leadership? Which kind of subjectivation encapsulates head teachers through technologies of governmentality? What freedom can be practiced? There is space for ethical choices? What alternative truths are in play to resist against neo-liberal education policies?

Discourses and contexts²

In the last decades the education field has seen a flourishing of approaches and theories on leadership that have increasingly made possible to talk of *adjectival* leadership, while there has been a shift from administrative to management studies to knowledge about leadership. It is not easy to systematise these wide literature but among the most relevant attempts it has to be mentioned the interpretative map proposed by Gunter and Ribbins (2003) and most recently da Gunter (2016). Gunter (2012) herself refers to the role that different regimes of practice play in reproducing knowledge on educational leadership, highlighting how leadership has become one of the most relevant levers of change in New-Labour educational policies. Gunter focuses on the positioning of social actors within the broader socio-economic and political fields, from policymakers to edu-business consultants, from critical scholars to head teachers.

In this contribution the analysis of leadership regime of truth is stressed using both dimensions of discursive formations: the scientific paradigms and the enlarged system of leadership knowledge (*savoir*) (this one recalling the ‘ideological functioning’ for the archaeological Foucault). The first dimension refers to Seddon’s (1994) distinction between ‘categorical’ and ‘relational’ education contexts. The other discursive dimension refers to the classical tripartition between divergent discourses: *welfarism* and *bureau-professionalism* (Clark and Newman 1997); *neo-liberal managerialism* (Thrupp and Willmott 2003); and *democratic-critical* (Grace 1995; 2000).

Ball highlights how discourse is a ‘polymorphic, supple and adaptable’ (2006: 2) heuristic device to analyse education policies which enables us to give a thick account of the interplay between the cultural and structural aspects of social life and the agency of human and non-human actors. Providing an example, the conceptualizations of distributed leadership could be classified

² This § and the following one are based on reflections already developed in Serpieri, Grimaldi and Spanò (2009).

using discourse as analytical tool. In this perspective, it is possible to identify three different discourses within which distinctive conceptions of distributed leadership have been developed. The welfarist *bureau-professionalism*, or *welfarism*, which emphasizes both the requirements of formal and procedural rationality and the legitimacy and autonomy of professional expertise. The *neo-liberal managerialism*, which promotes the introduction of efficiency and quasi-marketization for the provision of public services and the management of public administration. The *democratic-critical* discourse, whose distinctive features are progressively emerging as a reaction to neo-liberal policies.

While the first discourse depicts leadership as a professional practice and the managerialist one conceives of it as a 'matter, a resource that could be devolved or delegated (distributed), the democratic-critical discourse re-interprets it as a metaphor. In such a way, the democratisation of distributed leadership challenges the legitimacy of the concept of leadership in itself. More specifically it questions its hierarchical nature, that is its understanding as a function exerted by one or more actors taking organisational roles and enacting formally delegated powers. Thus, the metaphorical interpretation offered by the critical scholars suggests that the distribution of leadership has to do with both its processual constitution (the process of its making) and its 'natural' instantiation within heterogeneous networks of both human and non-human actors.

The discursive dimension within which they are framed is not the only distinctive feature of the different conceptions of distributed leadership: ontological and epistemological presuppositions differ as well. Further we consider such presuppositions very relevant in the light of the lack of 'ology' (Fitz, 1999) that characterizes most part of leadership knowledge. In our matrix we propose to intersect the three discourses with the dimension of context. Grønn and Ribbins (1996), drawing on Seddon's work on education contexts (1994), propose to define contexts as conceptual frameworks that enable to understand leadership. Contexts allow taking into account both the biographic identity and its diachronic and relational dimensions, delved through ethnographic methodologies.

Following Serpieri (2008) and his further elaboration of the idea of context (Serpieri, Grimaldi and Spanò 2009), we distinguish here between two different types of contexts:

- a) *individual-interactive contexts*, where the focus is on leadership-style or social interactions among leaders and followers: human actors are at the ground of ontological presumptions;
- b) *network-practices contexts*, where the subject is decentred in favour of an ontology of praxis and the re-production of practice is understood as a complex process in which human agents, institutions, cultures and material artefacts intertwine and influence each other.

The map presented in Tab. 1 allows us to classify texts and interpreters of leadership through the intersection of discourses and contexts, sort of a guide through the labyrinth of leadership theories and conceptions. Looking at the map three conceptions of distribution appear, as an example of how even the same term could refer to very diverse leadership regime of truth. The first one is recognisable through the connection between the ontology of practice and the welfarist discourse (*distributed leadership in practice*). Another conception could be called *delegated* (instead of distributed) *leadership* because it stresses the managerialist perspective, grounded on the ontology of the human.

The third one refers to the anchoring of leadership practices to social *division of labour* and to power relationships in the field of education. Thus how these regimes of truth are

organised by technologies of governmentality, producing practices of subjectivation through a specific leadership dispositif?

Tab. 1. Discourses and contexts of educational leadership

Discourse	Welfarist (Bureaucratic- professional)	Neo-liberal (Managerialist)	Democratic (Critical)
Context			
Categorical: individual- interactive	- Instructional - Moral	- Transformational - System Leadership - Distributed (<i>or to be distributed?</i>)	- Styles (<i>of micropolitics</i>) - Micropolitics - Collaborative
Network- practices	- Sustainable - Distributed (<i>in practice</i>)	?	- Feminist - <i>Greedy</i> leadership work (<i>distributed</i>) - Ecological - Democratic - Configuration - No leadership at all (<i>neo-liberal tyranny</i>)

Leadership: a neo-liberal ‘dispositif’?

As already briefly indicated, the dispositive bears on the relationship between regimes of truth, technologies of governmentality, and forms of subjectivation and, as for the wonderful metaphorical definition proposed by Deleuze (1999), it cannot be interpreted simply as an heterogeneous assemblage of disparate elements, but it is also traversed by dynamic field of relations, to allow some approximation of a particular preponderance or balance of forces at a given time creating both subjects and objects. Here Foucault gives a fairly comprehensive account of what he means by ‘historical-practical nominalism’ (Hacking 2004), which can be defined as a specific epistemological attitude which at his most presents interesting analogies to Rorty’s ‘anti-representationalism’ (1991), or to the ‘ontic’ approach (*ontology in situation*) as emerges from interpretations of Giddens’s structuration theory (Grimaldi 2012). In a recent work focusing on policy dispositif neo-liberal education policy dispositif in England, Bailey (2013) recalls the *scalar* dimension of a dispositif that can be located both at the micro and at the macro level. Foucault himself has insisted on the movement between those different levels of analysis, at the moment when his ‘strategic’ conceptualisation of power was prevailing.

There is no discontinuity between them, as if one were dealing with two different levels (one microscopic and the other macroscopic); but neither is there homogeneity (as if the one were only the enlarged projection or the miniaturization of the other); rather, one must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work (HS: 99-100).

In this respect, leadership can be understood as a policy dispositif that produces its effects both at the macro level (from accountability to quasi-market, etc....), and at the micro levels of organisation and management in every single school. As the editors of *Critical Studies in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Series* argue, neo-liberal education has involved a 'Transnational Leadership Package', made of theories, paradigms, methodologies and techniques; using a single word: a 'discourse' of leadership, that has crossed over borders, contexts of national educational systems, subverting the traditional 'field of Educational, Leadership, Management and Administration' (Thomson, Gunter and Blackmore 2013: viii). More specifically, the *leadership design* (Gronn 2003) of neo-liberal education is instrumental toward aims of entrepreneurship, competition and selection. As Gillies argues:

Leadership is said to be instrumental to those ends, capable of achieving what was not possible under previous regimes where the emphasis may have been on such things as administration, management, expectations, and professionalism. Leadership, therefore, is a *tool designed for a particular purpose. It is designed to achieve what might not otherwise be achieved* (2003: 21, im).

Thus, in our map, it can be noticed that different conceptions and approaches to leadership representative of a managerialist discourse avoid the serious questioning of educational context and adopt ontologies based on human, especially leadership qualities and interaction with followers.

In this sense, the case of distributed leadership is exemplar if one traces its continuity with *transformational leadership* that originates from business management during the '70s and the '80s. At the beginning of the '90s in fact Leithwood fully develops his concept of transformational leadership, focusing on its fundamental role for improving school contexts through professional expertise and innovation. A 'transformative' leader, simply defined, is a person who can guide, motivate and influence others to bring about a fundamental change. This is a conception that still presents a large amount of voluntaristic and heroic individualism, focused on a leader who aims at developing a shared organisational vision. Leithwood, being a 'smart' managerialist, recycles this idea in most recent explorations of distributed leadership. As a matter of fact, he tries to pin his label on this innovative approach in his most recent handbook with an introduction entitled 'New Perspectives on an Old Idea' (Leithwood et al. 2009). The old idea is nothing more than the process of values sharing already reported in his transformational leadership approach and now readapted to the distributed perspective. For this reason he frantically tries to distinguish between normative and descriptive perspectives and to bring together, with a perfect 'categorical style', several discussions of the positive or negative effects of distributed leadership approach. Nevertheless the context approach is always the 'same': survey, questionnaire, Likert scaling and so on.

Another effort to reinvigorate distributed leadership has been made by Harris (2008a; 2008b), whereas she has tried to explicitly mark the distance from the *excesses* of managerialism. This marking implies a contextual and a distributing shift. In fact on the one side Harris tries to re-connect her understanding of distributed leadership to the broader socio-economic and political environments, highlighting their influence on schools' performances. On the other side, she presents herself as the 'champion' of distributed leadership in a managerialist vein. Not by chance Harris, following a functional and pragmatic approach, adapts distributed leadership to education policies actually focused on external accountability, standardisation and schools

competition as levers for improvement. Nonetheless, a careful examination of her extended works highlights how those shifts regard the surface' of her conception of distribution. For the case of the contextual shift, Thrupp and Willmott sarcastically criticize Harris's effort to re-contextualize distributed leadership arguing how her recent works 'exhibit the [...] tension of promoting the importance of context while presenting a largely decontextualized analysis' (2003: 102). Intentionally or not, leadership seems to become the end rather than the means, and more specifically a depoliticized and decontextualized end.

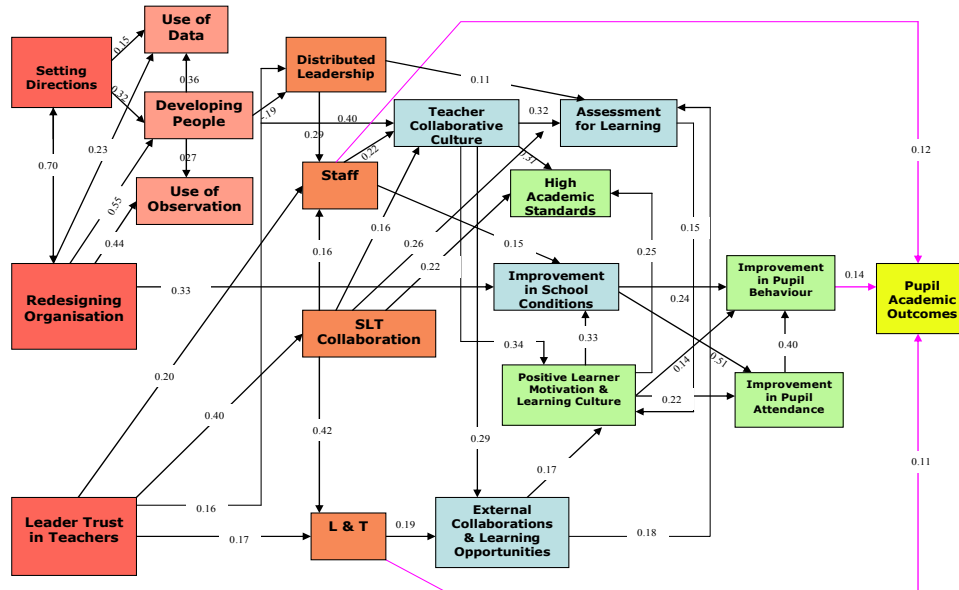
In fact Harris's conception of distributed leadership actually differs ontologically and epistemologically from Spillane's one because this author could be seen as an interpreter of the welfarist discourse with a deeper and thick interest about educational contexts. Distributed leadership is conceived in terms of practice (Spillane, 2006), that is as interactive processes among human actors and non-human actors as routines, artefacts and so on, that mediate interactions themselves (Gronn, 2000). On the contrary, Harris relates distributed leadership to interactions between leaders and followers where the latter become holders of 'bits' of leadership, on the basis of a desirable explicit organisational design provided by the leader herself, that focuses and stresses the positional aspects of social structure, roles and procedures. Thus, distributed leadership continues to be conceptualized within a functionalist frame as a response to the organisational school leaders' needs.

This neo-liberal dispositif of distributed leadership is definitively put in practice in a very ponderous research-report that tries to demonstrate the *Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes* (Day et al., 2009), whereas the methodological and statistical paraphernalia of an empirist and deterministic paradigm are deployed (Fig. 1). And so it is possible to find such an idea of distributed leadership: it is a mere variable – certainly not a process in an educational context; within some path analysis models it is located as *intervening* variable between *independent* variables such as: leader trust in teachers, redesigning organisation, setting directions, etc.; and *dependent* variables such as: improvement in pupil behaviour and attendance and academic outcomes (measured in a standardized way); together with other *intervening* variables typical of the managerialist conception of a professional culture to be manipulated such as: senior leadership team collaboration, teacher collaborative culture, staff climate, etc.

It seems clear how this knowledge is connected to practices of head teacher's selection, training, evaluation and promotion that explicitly recall knowledge(s) that subjectivate leaders as school managers, whose organisation and objectives are flattened on the model of educational enterprise. To discuss about this leadership dispositif that subjectivates the head teachers enabling them to redesign the educational context, both external and within the school, and where what strategically count are personal 'super' qualities, sort of a clever *puppet master* of distributed leadership, Niesche observes:

The dominant paradigms of leadership through heroic performances, leader designer frameworks and best-practice models that are so pervasive have little or no rigorous theoretical underpinnings, and as such the feasibility of these 'more traditional' approaches in terms of providing a means for critical self-reflection needs to be seriously questioned (2011: 18).

Fig. 1 Heads Perceptions of Leadership Practices and Change in Pupil Outcomes over Three Years (source Day et al., 2009)



Note all coefficients in the model are positive except that between 'developing people' and 'leadership distribution' (0-19). This suggests that in schools where heads feel the need to lay more emphasis on 'developing people' there may be less attention to 'leadership distribution', which may follow in a later phase after successful capacity building (see chapter 9 on layered leadership).

Leadership deconstruction

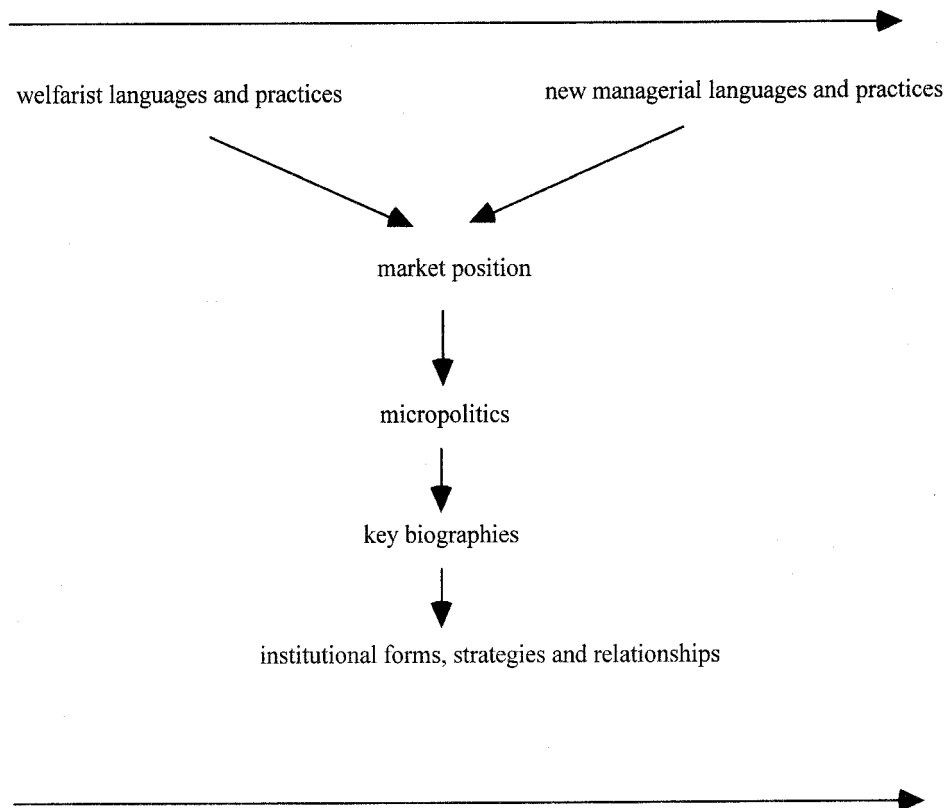
Leadership as policy dispositif, of which transformational and distributed are probably the most relevant ones, produces a regime of truth and technologies of governmentality to put in practice a neo-liberal education model pursuing educational goals congruent with those of competitiveness, selection, performativity and so on. In such a way it subjectivates head teachers, teachers, students and families as *entrepreneurs of themselves* (for this metaphor see BBP).

Nevertheless, studies that are inspired by a democratic-critical discourse show a much more complex and articulated knowledge of educational 'reality', where the work distribution, or division of labour between professionals causes a 'greedy' work for educational leaders and their staff (Gronn, 2003; Thomson, 2009). Still grounded on human ontology, the pioneering research of Ball (1987) and Blase and Anderson (1995) on school 'micro-policies' had already shown how very often the issue of power and the political struggles are removed (Hatcher, 2005) when a hierarchical nature of leadership is implied, according to neoliberal regimes of truth. Thus, it should be emphasized that critical knowledge(s) about leadership countervail neo-liberal knowledges on the one side, adopting more sophisticated conceptions focused on a democratic idea of leadership significantly 'engaged' in a structural and cultural educational context, as for the case of Woods' democratic leadership (2005) inspired by Archer's *morphogenesis*. On the

other side, critical contributions conceive of the leadership dispositif just as one of the *tyrannies* (along with accountability, performativity, and so on) of neo-liberal education, as witnessed by the absence of the leadership theme in the ‘critical’ *Handbook of Sociology of Education* (Apple, Ball, Gandin, 2010).

This is the case of Ball and his colleagues, who more recently have developed an interpretation of leadership as imbricated into discursive formations and educational contexts, that Gunter has signalled as an original way of ‘not researching leadership’ (2013). Thus, in researches conducted on the shifting from welfarist to neo-liberal discourse (Gewirtz and Ball 2000), the head teacher is conceived as discursive *catalyst* in school contexts (Fig 2). Such understanding of school leadership refers to sophisticated and thick descriptions of head teachers’ and teacher’s biographies, seen as a key interpretative dimension useful to understand the shift of the welfarist discourse toward the neo-liberal ones.

Fig. 2 Discursive Shift (Source Gewirtz and Ball 2000)



Such ‘key biographies’ do not play any causal role, as for the neo-liberal leadership dispositif, meanwhile are rather intended to show how school contexts change through complex, non-linear and contingent processes. A genealogical interpretation of problematisations is put into play: and

biographies show how some processes of re-subjectivation are not ideological, but catalyse, code and recode and enact diverse educational truths.

A precious contribution in this direction comes from recent researches on policy-enactments in schools (Ball et al. 2012), where it is important to: ‘taking context seriously’, together with ‘policy artefacts’, ‘discourses, representations and translations’.

Thus, policy enactment involves creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices – and this process involves ‘interpretations of interpretations’ (...), although the degree of play or freedom for ‘interpretation’ varies from policy to policy in relation to the apparatuses of power within which they are set and within the constraints and possibilities of context. Policies are not simply ideational or ideological, they are also very material (Ball et al 2012: 3).

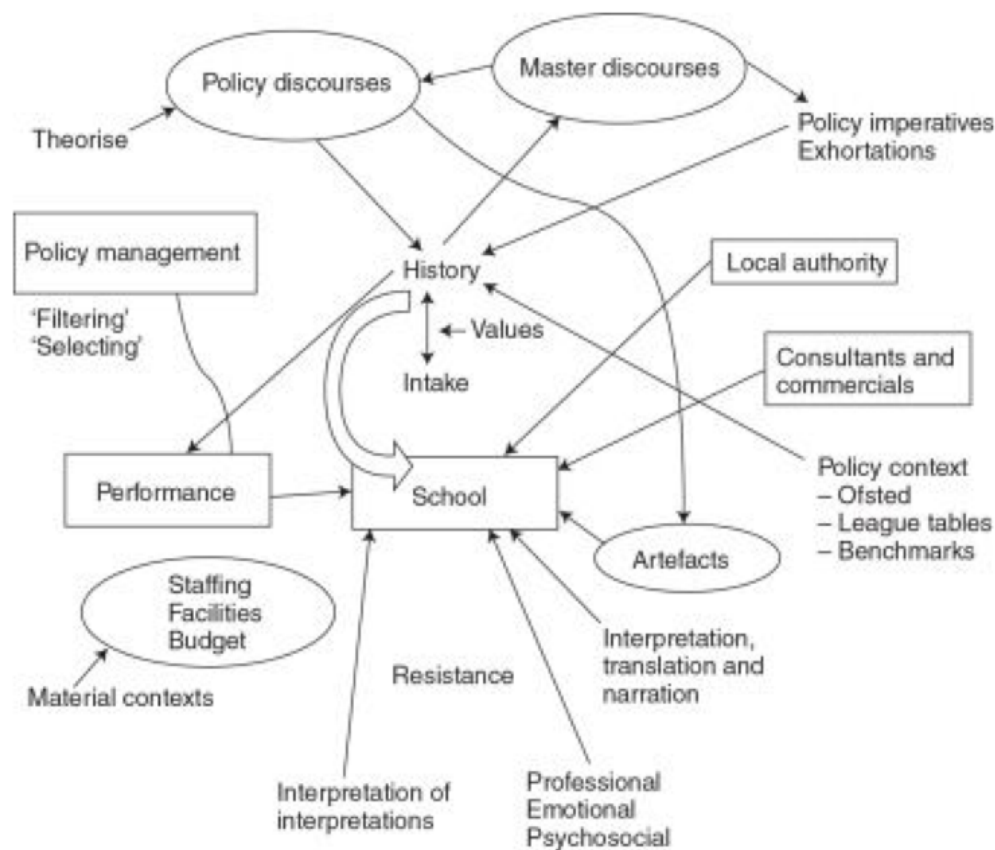
These researchers, inspired by *practice* epistemology and ontology (where processes and non human actors do matter) and democratic and critic discursive formation, do not leave space for leadership as dispositif in a neoliberal way. They show how some roles are enacted by educational professionals, such as ‘narrators’, ‘entrepreneurs’, ‘transactors’, ‘translators’, and so on, but there are no any leaders (49). In other words, they propose a ‘leadership configuration’ (Gronn 2010), that is a plurality of roles or, even better, a ‘contextual configuration’, historically situated, and ‘mobile’, open to ethical freedom and creativity (Revel 2015) in a foucauldian way. Moreover, the authors construct a map of such a school configuration where, paradoxically, both leader and leadership disappear (Fig. 3).

[W]e offer a visual account of our thinking about policy enactment... The school represents our starting point; it is central but not necessarily in the centre, its history and intake (and connected values) are central too but also fragile. In the diagram, the school looks embattled – all those arrows bearing down on it – but those are also its components, such as the material context of staffing, facilities and budgets and the diverse discourses and policies that constitute the school. Performance looms large – although the size of the boxes carries no particular meaning – and its specific construction is shaped by the institutional ‘management’ of policy. History, intake and values mediate policy, policy contexts and discourses, as they find expression in the school. There is a lot of human action in this diagram: policy interpretation and translation (as well as interpretations of interpretations); professional and emotional dimensions; and the filtering and doing of policy work. There is also resistance, and we left this aspect deliberately unconnected, as its expression in murmuring and discontents [...] are to some extent free-floating, rather than systematic. Neither the model, nor the account of the model we are giving here is comprehensive or finished. [...] A model that is in flux like this and that can develop into its own dynamic is exactly what we had in mind (Ball et al. 2012: 143)

Such a configuration, which could be labelled ‘without leadership’ (Serpieri, 2008), opens up interesting scenarios that allow us to explore the ‘potentials’ (Gronn, 2009) of a ‘democratic leadership’ (Woods, 2005), in order to *deconstruct* the neo-liberal dispositif of leadership. This perspective drives us to reflect on the way in which head teachers can carry on their discourse about leadership: critical, resistant, and bearer of truths that are different from the neo-liberal discourse; but also to explore the ethical spaces of freedom (Laidlaw, 2014), that let head teachers to enact a *parrhesiastic life* (Ball, 2015; Ball and Olmedo 2013). However, foucauldian

lesson reminds us that an escape from dispositif and regimes of truth is never fulfilled and that we will always be subjectivated through diverse technologies of governmentality: according to our ethical choice of practicing a ‘courage of truth’ (CT), to think other ‘possibilities’ (Ball 2013) for exploring more democratic leadership configurations outside of neo-liberal policy dispositif. This is a lesson that goes beyond ideological petitions and presumptions.

Fig. 3 Thinking about Policy Enactment (source Ball et al. 2012)



Abbreviations for Foucault's works [original date]

- AK [1969] (1972) *Archaeology of knowledge*, London: Routledge.
- BBP (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- CF [1977] (1980) 'The confession of the flesh', in Gordon, C., (ed) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, Brighton: Harvester Press.
- CT (2011) *The courage of truth: lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DP [1975] (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, London: Penguin.
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