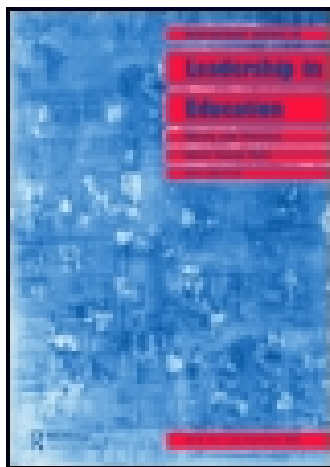


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***Get off my bus!* School leaders, vision work and the elimination of teachers**

STEVEN J. COURTNEY and HELEN M. GUNTER

In this paper, we argue that school leaders are removing those who embody or vocalize alternative conceptualizations of educator. It seems as if Collins' call in his 2001 book *Good to Great* to *get the right people on the bus* is being taken very seriously by school leaders seeking to raise standards. This is achieved by eradicating 'inadequate' teaching, and implementing the leader's 'vision', which we argue consists in silencing and potentially removing professional voice, knowledge and contributions. We present data from nine headteachers who talk about their vision and vision work, and in deploying Arendtian thinking, we think the unthinkable about how teachers can be rendered disposable and are disposed of. Arendt's political thinking tools help us to consider how, through routine practices, current models of school leadership enable totalitarian practices to become ordinary.

Introduction

Our investigation into claims and evidence about how students' learning outcomes can be improved has generated a shocking realization: we are witnessing in England the normalized acceptance of dismissing teachers (e.g. Stubbs, 2003), with contract termination for newly qualified teachers (Lepkowska, 2012) and early retirement for experienced teachers (Yarker, 2005) who do not meet mandated performance practices and demands for the speedy delivery of national standards. For example, Bob Hewitt tells the story of resigning after 30 years as a teacher because he refused to write lesson plans in the prescribed way instructed by school inspectors, and his story concludes 'and one thing's for sure: they cannot run gulags on their own' (Hewitt & Fitzsimons, 2001, pp. 2–3). What we have identified is that such incidental evidence is coming into the public domain in different locations in the media and research outputs in ways that needs our attention. Such stories indicate that leaving the job is different from workforce turnover and requirements for quality, and is linked with the modernization agenda based on neoliberal ideas about the integration of the workforce with business owner requirements. Those

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contracted to *manage* the business are deliverers, and to do that they need to contract those who can deliver. The popularization of Jim Collins' (2001) business model of getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus has spoken to those charged with implementing what Ball (2007) identifies as the rapid modernization of the state in a competitive and globalized market place. In this paper, we engage with how school leaders as local *managers* embody and model whom the right people are, and how they articulate this through their vision. Those who are different, or do and say things that are different in ways which contradict these leaders' *vision* for the school, or those whose practice is judged as not *raising standards* sufficiently or speedily, are being removed. No official data-sets are available to examine the scale of this, and no project has set out to systematically examine teacher removal, but recognition that it is an emerging feature in the literatures (see above), combined with our evidence, suggests a trend that is becoming normalized and needs to be brought into the public domain for recognition and scrutiny.

We begin by examining this emerging situation in public education and we use the example of England to illuminate the changes that are taking place in western-style democracies. We then inter-relate vision and vision work to this, and show the problematics of visioning. We then read our data through this lens, where we open up for scrutiny how visioning is being conceptualized and enacted. We ask some tough questions about visioning as a control process, and we draw on Arendt to identify totalitarian tendencies within the discourses of professional practice. Warnings about this exist from, for example, Gunter (1997), and particularly Angus (1989), who wrote:

Principals and administrators, in the belief that they are maintaining traditions of strong and effective leadership, may cross the boundary between the advocacy of a particular vision or value system and the exercise of arbitrary power. (p. 77)

We suggest that what is new in the current context is the inter-play of five elements and our socially critical analysis of these. First are the increasingly unequal power relations between actors in the system—the policies we are analysing require a workforce which is disconnected from traditional sources of legitimacy and authority including professional codes of practice and signature pedagogies. Second is the operationalization of these relations through visions, which are fabrications whose goal is the local enactment of ideological policies seeking to raise standards. Third is the expression of these power relations in overt punishment for ideological non-conformity, which is increasingly lauded as *best practice* and misrecognized as leadership. The erosion of professionalism means that teachers are subjected to a regime of rewards and punishments, where punishment may mean disposal. Fourth is the impact of new types of school, independent of the local authority (district) and authorized to set pay and conditions for staff, which facilitates structurally and legally the disposal of teachers. Fifth is the speed with which this culture of disposability has become normalized in English education discourse and practice; this,

recalling the rapid rise of some totalitarian regimes, is a reminder that no system is safe from these threats to professional identity and employment. Our intention is to put changes in school leadership and Arendtian thinking side by side to generate important perspectives about public service reform. In doing so, we make an empirical and conceptual contribution to the field, where our data and their theorizing present new and troubling insights. We suggest the need for this type of scholarly activism within the school leadership field, particularly as it gives recognition to Bauman's (2000) claim that 'there is no choice between *engaged* and *neutral* ways' (p. 216) in juxtaposing thinking tools and data.

From good to great?

Gray and Streshly (2008) applied to public education Collin's (2001) prescription for improving business: 'the researchers found that the key to these companies' success was their CEOs. They also found that the CEOs of the successful companies exhibited certain specific powerful characteristics and behaviors' (p. 3). In applying this to successful school principals, they present eight characteristics including the 'unwavering resolve to do what must be done' (p. 6) concerning results. Connected to this is a set of behaviours where decisions about practices come after the identification of the right people to deliver. Collins (2001) argues that great leaders know how to 'get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats' (p. 41). In Gray and Streshly's (2008) terms, 'the great principals learn to manipulate their systems in order to gather the right personnel to do what must be done at their school sites—despite often confronting overwhelming bureaucratic obstacles' (p. 7). They celebrate how, through their visits and interviews, they identified how 'highly successful principals (had) almost fanatical strategies for getting the right teachers for their school, eliminating teachers who did not fit with the vision or focus of the school, and only then making decisions about the way to go in moving their schools to greatness' (pp. 7–8). The language used is about getting the *right* people and getting *rid* of the wrong people, where barriers from unions and professional codes of conduct can be removed through exercising 'latitude to hire and fire', being 'selective' and 'persistent in getting people' (p. 131).

This approach to what business calls *human resources* that need *management* is a strong feature of public education systems. The focus on the headteacher or principal regarding performance appointments and outcomes is located in the school as an independent or autonomous *self-managing* and increasingly *self-governing* business-as-provider in a competitive market place. For example, successive UK governments have pursued this policy in England through creating various forms of site-based management. Local management of schools (LMS) from 1988 enabled local authority (LA)-maintained schools to assume the responsibility for hiring and firing staff based on formula funding and the exercise of a parental preference for a school place (see Gunter, 2008). Schools established outside the LA created new forms of independence

through City Technology Colleges, grant-maintained status, academies and free schools, and new curriculum brandings such as studio schools for vocational education, and where agreed terms and conditions of employment could be disregarded for localized pay deals and contracts (see Gunter, 2011).

New Labour from 1997 pursued a policy of *workforce remodelling* where investment was made into non-teacher roles (e.g. school business managers, teaching assistants and administrative staff), and where PricewaterhouseCoopers (DfES/PwC, 2007) advised that the person leading local educational provision need not be a qualified teacher but could come from other parts of the public sector, or the private and voluntary sectors (see Butt & Gunter, 2007). This generated questions about professional identities and boundaries, where non-teachers began to adopt the duties of qualified teachers, and the acceleration of the academy programme from 2010 has seen the appointment of unqualified people into teaching roles (Gunter, 2011). The combination of local terms and conditions of employment with a widening of the pool from which staff can be appointed has dealt with concerns that teacher performance could not be handled without cumbersome processes, lengthy professional development programmes and union obstruction. The principals of new types of schools are enthusiastic about such changes (see Astle & Ryan, 2008), where Daniels (2011) gives an account of searching the country to get the right people onto the *Petchey Academy bus*. While the profession had a poor reputation for high workload levels, not least in ways that affected recruitment and retention, the shift towards performance-related pay and individualized inspection grades meant that business management would attract the right type of people who could deliver the right type of outcomes. The profession was characterized as replete with people who either did not care about the right things and hence had to be removed (see Stubbs, 2003), or who were constrained by unnecessary professional codes and cultures and so needed freeing up to be able to deliver effective and relevant learning outcomes (see Barber, 2007).

The impact of this on the profession has been studied through focusing on the influence of business management structures and cultures on teachers and teaching in national systems, and global trends connected with neoliberal strategies and managerialism (e.g. Ball, 2003; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Eacott, 2011; Galton & MacBeath, 2008). What has not yet been fully examined is how such processes produce forms of state-sanctioned disposability of teachers: this is more than dismissal based on incompetence or early retirement. Mostly, only a few cases come to light (see Gunter, 2005) such as Yarker (2005), who not only recounts his own story of leaving teaching but through a case of his daughter's school illuminates how headteachers are complicit in deprofessionalizing practices. What we are concerned with is how the performance regime of high-stakes testing in combination with local independence of schools is actually *getting rid of people off the bus*. Gunter with Hall (2013) present a case study of Birch Tree Academy where just 25% of the teaching staff and 50% of the support staff remained from the predecessor schools. This was seen as a positive move by the principal:

I absolutely 100% knew that I was not taking all them shit people out of the predecessor schools ... I wasn't prepared to have them because I know that if you give me two rusty sheds at the bottom of the garden and excellent people, I'll give you a school. You can't give me a building like this and crap teachers, the kids will wreck the building.

Researchers have identified the increased personalization of responsibility to improve test scores by headteachers that this quote illuminates (e.g. Whitty, Power, and Halpin, 1998), and the impact of the Ofsted inspection regime on language and practice (e.g. Courtney, 2014; MacBeath, 2008; Perryman, 2006; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998). However, those who focus on the relationship between leadership and school effectiveness and improvement have uncovered and accepted the disposability of headteachers (Stoll & Fink, 1996), but retain the focus on headteacher leadership without examining the relationship between successful leadership and the getting rid of teachers (e.g. Day et al., 2011). They emphasize capacity-building regarding how teachers learn to change and adopt new ways of teaching and assessment (e.g. Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998), and accept the distribution of leadership to them as both necessary and empowering (e.g. Harris, 2008). However, our evidence shows that the situation has changed rapidly, and previously assumed benign processes of vision and mission are being used to remove teachers who are declared *incompetent*.

Visions and visioning

Official policy texts developed by successive UK governments and educational organizations in England are replete with notions of vision and visioning, and these have intensified over time. Such interventions present a sense of agency that fits with the traditional autonomy of the headteacher in charge of *my school*, but also renders headteachers as *middle managers* in the delivery of external policy reforms. For example, Ofsted—the non-ministerial government body responsible for, *inter alia*, inspecting schools in England—has shifted from insisting that leaders ‘realise an ambitious vision for the school’ (p. 38) in its 2009 framework for school inspection, to a requirement by 2012 that inspectors evaluate ‘how *relentlessly* leaders, managers and the governing body pursue a vision for excellence, for example, through ... the extent to which staff, pupils, parents and carers are engaged by and contribute to *realising the vision and ambition of leaders*’ (Ofsted, 2012, 18—our italics). This shows an expectation that the vision derives from leaders alone, who must pursue relentlessly its realization by all stakeholders in the school community. What sort of leadership, in the sense of persuasion and influence, can exert such a wholesale change in *everybody* within the organization by such relentless means? We suggest that it is not what is understood as educational leadership which is being called for here, but a form which generates concerns about the removal of professional discourses with the potential for productive dissent. Studies of headship in England show that it is increasingly risky (see Thomson, 2009), where positioning in relation to the complexities and intensification of reforms results indicates strong trends in compliance (Gunter & Forrester,

2009, 2010), and while headteachers ‘work to advantage their school and students, what they do—their agency—is always framed by a decision about whether they are prepared to play to their own positional detriment’ (Thomson, 2010, p. 17).

The spaces where the interplay between such calculations about agency and structure are located are increasingly squeezed and difficult to challenge through professional learning. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (formerly National College for School Leadership) has sought since its establishment in 2000 to provide the sole way of knowing what it means to think about and do leadership (Hopkins, 2001b). There is a wide range of (password-protected, and often undated and hence timeless) online support resources to promote this leadership under the heading, *Good Practice for Leaders*. One typical article is called *Creating a Vision* and states that a vision:

should involve and empower individuals, promoting buy-in from the entire organisation. Vision should inspire everyone to aim for and achieve common goals. (National College for Teaching and Leadership, n.d., unpagged)

This is one example of scores of similarly deliberately decontextualized policy texts produced by the National College that exhorts the need for vision and legitimating vision work (see Gunter, 2012), with a preference for *relentless leadership*. In a report commissioned by the College, Hill and Matthews (2008) insist that effective National Leaders of Education ‘focus relentlessly on the quality of teaching and learning, inclusion and raising achievement’ (p. 52). Similarly, in guidance for governors in urban schools selecting and guiding a new headteacher, the National College (2005) asserts that ‘the effective urban head *cuts through the complexity* to reveal the real priorities for the school, articulating a clear, compelling and realistic *vision of success*. This clarity of vision underpins a *relentless focus* on the actions needed to deliver’ (p. 42, bold in original).

The production of such policy texts and practices (e.g. state-designed and endorsed training and accreditation programmes, see Gunter, 2012) is located in knowledge production that cuts across a range of researcher groups. Those who work in leadership and management (Davies, 2005), improvement (Hopkins, 2001a) and effectiveness (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) accept and exhort the need for vision and vision work. For example, in scoping and promoting *The Self-Managing School*, Caldwell and Spinks (1988, 1992, 1998) present leadership underpinned by vision and the building of commitment to the vision. Other writers have promoted vision through the articulation of transformational leadership as the most appropriate model for delivering change locally (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach, 1999). Here, the job of the leader is to inspire and command individuals to feel that they belong to and can sign up to the leader’s view of where the organization is going and what this means for their professional practice (see Gunter, 2001).

The construction of this vision and vision-work discourse has a number of elements: first, that the objective is always high attainment in the school as a unitary organization, whereby examination results along with

inspection grades and league-table positions are used as proxies for standards. Second, a leader-centric culture constructs the headteacher as a functional leader, who does leading and exercises leadership and who is causally responsible for such outcomes. Third, headteachers as leaders have agency through direction setting, charismatic command of loyalty and commitment, and through *the right to manage* others' attitudes, activity and performance. Fourth, this agency is exercised through formulating, communicating and enacting his or her vision, which is employed or invoked to motivate staff.

Visionless leadership constitutes poor or absent leadership. Such a discourse is evident in the rituals of vision work such as keynote talks to staff, students and parents, symbols on websites and within the school; strategic planning and key development policy and bidding texts; and day-to-day activities such as walking and interacting in corridors and classrooms, setting agendas for meetings and engaging with teaching and learning as vision-informed enactments. So vision work is idealistic and practical, inspiring and deliverable, controlling and enabling.

Requiring researcher scrutiny is the dominance of vision and vision work and its relationship with *relentless leadership* in the form of the personal responsibility for student outcomes—you lose your job if examination results are inadequate. The operationalization of vision work and consequently what it means to do leadership has changed—it is no longer discursively even necessary to invoke collegiality. Visions are the property of leaders, who should enact them relentlessly and are authorized to have them enacted by their objects, who are all other actors in and within the sphere of schools. No limits are placed upon this agency because where pupils do not attain highly or make good progress, it must be attributable to deficits which, whilst not all originating in the school (e.g. poverty, low aspirations) are all presented as remediable through appropriate school-centred activities. (Many deficits, however, *are* located through policy texts in the school, e.g. poor teaching and/or leadership). If responsibility for deficits of any provenance is to be located within the school sphere, then heads' agency must be recognized or constructed as sufficiently extensive to effect the necessary change, or for their failure to do so as being their fault. Consequently, the scope of their agency includes the power to dispose of those who cannot commit to, openly contradict or unsatisfactorily perform that vision. Hargreaves and Harris (2011), for instance, in presenting research commissioned by the National College, report that a local councillor described how the 'shared vision is about having ambition and nurturing the aspirations of our young people. Although the levels of deprivation might be high, that's no excuse for low attainment' (p. 46). Raising issues about learning and seeking alternatives would be interpreted as recognition of rival visions within homes, classrooms or staffrooms; there is only one vision to be delivered.

Relentless leadership consisting in vision enactment tends to dominate during those times of high-stakes accountability which Smyth (1989) explains are a result of periodic economic crises in western capitalism which are displaced into crises of the legitimacy of its institutions, especially education. Social and economic failures become remediable through

enacting *strong* leadership in schools, whose (standards-derived) *truths* dominate discourses not only of attainment, but of social justice and equity (Connell, 2013), following the logic, *we are giving children better life chances if they get these grades*. Vision enactment requires not even the façade of consensus, and so need not be a leadership activity at all, in the sense that followers need be induced to participate; change is mandated through authority. This underpins many of the claims made about *strong*, *effective* and *successful* leadership and much of our data.

Creating a vision is consequently a misrecognized activity that distinguishes those in positions of hierarchical authority and termed leaders for discursive purposes from other workers in school, and legitimates authoritarian activities and mandated change:

Although, on the surface, AH and NH appeared to be transformational leaders who consulted people about their clear and powerful visions of how the school should change, in reality they used these visions to drive people forward relentlessly down a particular path ... (Busher & Barker, 2003, p. 62)

Without this invocation of vision, the misrecognition of authoritarianism as leadership is impossible. It is this phenomenon—the increasing promotion and effects of authoritarianism masquerading as leadership through vision work to serve the reform agenda—which is our focus.

Troubling visions and visioning

The normality of vision in the policy, researcher and professional lexicon, and its need to be spoken and used makes any critique problematic. For example, we may question what is problematic with this type of statement: ‘vision helps schools to define their own direction and to develop an attitude that says *we’re in charge of change*’ (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 51). Concerns have been raised about operationalization, importantly by those involved in making reforms work as policy intellectuals (e.g. Fullan, 2001; MacBeath, 1998; Southworth, 2005), but beyond the functionality of making change work there is little fundamental critique. Visioning is seen as a benign approach to getting externally determined work done, but it is not usually interplayed with theories of power, where manipulation and indeed the removal of staff who challenge or have legitimate rival visions as experts in pedagogy and subject knowledge is not usually confronted.

Critical and socially critical work examines how professionals do their job and how this relates to wider power structures that generate advantage and disadvantage (see Thomson, 2001, 2009); this has enabled questioning about knowledge production within and for the education leadership field (e.g. Gunter, 1997, 2012; Gunter, Hall, & Bragg, 2013; Thomson, 2008). An examination of the power processes underpinning the formation and purposes of transformational and visionary leadership has prompted concerns about authoritarianism with its emphasis on simultaneously separating and connecting the leader from and to a range of followers (see Allix, 2000). However, we would like to raise concerns

generated by our data about a trend towards something more worrying, and hence in our paper we would like to interrupt visioning and vision work by challenging both purposes and practices.

We plan to do this through deploying Arendt's historical and political analysis about totalitarianism. After all, Hitler and Stalin both had visions and did vision work, and rendered people disposable through war and mass murder. The details are captured in Gunter's (2014) account of how Arendt's thinking is illuminative of our current situation. It is out of the scope of this paper to engage fully with Arendt's work and her arguments in detail, and so we present the specific ideas that we intend deploying in our critical analysis of visioning.

Totalitarianism has four key features: (a) ideology; (b) total terror; (c) destruction of human bonds; and (d) bureaucracy (Arendt, 2009). Vision discourses and work in education demonstrate how all four of these are evident in texts and research findings. (a) Ideology: the creation and use of the fiction of the school as an independent, self-managing organization that can set its own direction through vision and vision work; (b) total terror: the use of data and/or required *good practice* to remove underperforming headteachers, teachers and others labelled as opponents, particularly through the rendering of publicly funded employment as surplus to requirements in an efficient and effective *for-profit* education market; (c) destruction of human bonds: the shared histories, experiences and the use of professional discretion to set agendas within teams and classrooms are shattered through individual performance regimes, surveillance and the need to succumb to leader control with reward and blame/shame practices; and (d) bureaucracy: organizations such as the National College act as a site for legitimizing preferred models of leadership, and give a veil of modernization and status capital for professionals who secure accreditation and acclaim.

The *vita activa* is about labour, work and action (Arendt, 1958). Labour is activity for survival; there has been a move to construct professional practice as labour based on a seemingly neutral language of targets and data, where ticking boxes and demonstrating compliance matters. Work is done when something is crafted and has the capacity to outlive its creator, and so building new schools and investment in training is illuminative of this. However, much that has been work (e.g. lesson preparation) has been restructured and recultured as labour through the delivery of externally written lesson plans and schemes of work. What is increasingly missing from education is action or the capacity to do something new, what Arendt (1958) calls 'natality', on the basis that how people engage with each other illuminates 'plurality' with different views and strategies. While visioning based on headteacher agency suggests forms of action, in reality this is a fabrication as headteachers have to engage in activity to deliver what they are directed to do, and are co-opted into the culture of modernization.

The *vita contemplativa* (Arendt, 1963) focuses on the capacity to think; through a study of the Eichmann trial, Arendt identified the banality of a person who never thought through what he was doing with a defence of *following orders*. In carrying out orders, Eichmann demonstrated

banality, and used labour and work to discharge his murderous duties. In rendering a whole group surplus to requirements, the Nazis made the unthinkable happen. Within public education, a catastrophe is unfolding through a banality of leadership, or what Arendt (1963) identified as 'thoughtlessness' rather than 'evil' or 'stupidity'. Vision and visioning prevent a person from engaging with the world from another's point of view: visioning is rendering trained and graduate professionals who do not fit to be rendered surplus as a means of opening up educational services to market forces.

In undertaking this analysis, there are at least two caveats to be noted: first, while Arendt argues that the conditions for totalitarianism are always in evidence, it is not inevitable. She argues that there is a catalyst that shows how those conditions come together, and our job as researchers is to reveal that. Second, we are mindful of the potential offence that could be caused by seeming to equate the Holocaust with changes in the school workforce. Following Arendt, we understand what is distinctive about these two events and time periods, but when we juxtapose them there is something important that needs our close attention. In doing so, we want respectfully and necessarily to ask searching questions about how professional skills, values and knowledge are being disappeared.

Research design

The data for this paper are drawn from an investigation of the leadership of new and established school types in neoliberal and neoconservative times. The starting point was to map the school types, especially those emerging in the last 10 years, and while this is a fluid landscape, we identified a total of 90 school types. We categorized these into nine meta-types and mapped all the secondary schools in a large metropolitan area. Where insufficient schools fitted the type, we extended the search geographically. Characteristics suggestive of typological distinctions are rarely discrete or incontestable, and so this number is subjective as well as dynamic, but what is clear is that a single legal construct—the academy—is being used as a template to build a wide range of new types of school including the studio school, university technical college (UTC), free school and alternative provision academy. As supply-side responses to the *problem* (conceptualized in market terms) of lack of choice, they each target a different *sort* of pupil, or market. The resulting lists of schools were filtered according to criteria which varied from the universally applied, such as not choosing schools rated inadequate by Ofsted, to the contextual and iterative, such as the decision to select only women-led examples of types in certain, latterly finalized categories to counteract any inadvertent gender imbalance as the headteachers confirmed their participation. From the resulting shortlist of around three in each of the nine categories, the first was invited by email to participate, moving to the second in the event of non-consent. Some desired types were merged or discarded at this stage, as the particular combination of features of participating schools rendered them obsolete. Finally, nine headteachers, or principals

Table 1. The sample

Pseudonym	School type—pupils aged 11–16 unless stated otherwise
Jane	Sponsored academy in a chain (i.e. a group having the same sponsor).
Ellen	Pupil Referral Unit (for pupils excluded from mainstream schooling).
Rod	Studio school (vocational, for pupils aged 14–18).
Bridget	Voluntary-aided Catholic school with teaching-school status (i.e. recognized as ‘excellent’ and with responsibility for co-ordinating local systemic improvement).
Les	Federation (i.e. single governing body for multiple schools) of local authority (district)-maintained, cross-phase special (i.e. for disabled pupils) schools.
Hazel	Community comprehensive (i.e. non-selective), science specialism.
Will	University Technical College (focus on technical education with university and industry partners, pupils aged 14–18).
Paul	Free school (new academy—not a replacement for a former ‘failing’ school): parent-led, comprehensive.
Phil	Academy converter (i.e. changed status to obtain regulatory freedoms): selective grammar, 11–18.

(see Table 1), agreed to be interviewed three times over 18 months for around one hour each round. This feature was designed to capture any flux over time, an essential part of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and also to generate data on a different theme each time. The first interview round in May–June 2013, from which most of the data in this paper are drawn, sought through narrative enquiry to establish principally the career histories and values of these leaders.

The interview transcripts were fully transcribed and member-checked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Our thematic analysis of the data, supported by using Arendt’s political thinking tools, help us to consider how, through routine practices, current models of school leadership enable totalitarian practices to become ordinary. So we turn now to examining what is new in this phenomenon and which requires investigation: what happens when visions fail to inspire and motivate all in the way promised under this cult of leadership; what happens when standards fail to rise in accordance with expectations; and embodied dissent troubles the claimed unity of means and method? Finally, what authoritarian practices are concealed behind and enabled by vision talk?

Getting on and off the bus

Our findings demonstrate that headteachers as visionary leaders are internalizing and enforcing the standards agenda through *their vision*; that dissenting or non-conforming teachers are either disposed of, or their professional identities re-written such that what remains is unrecognizable and, importantly, compliant. We argue this illuminates totalitarian tendencies sustained by surveillance and data to enable disposability.

Those in senior roles in schools such as headteachers or principals accept the descriptor of leader who does leadership as their professional practice, and they promote the ideological fiction that they can and do legitimately engage in vision work and that it makes a difference. As

expected, assertions reveal that leaders conceptualize vision as a property they alone in the hierarchy possess, and that it and their belief in it underpin activity:

I have a very, very strong and well-defined vision of what I want this school to look like. (Paul)

I suppose being a head means to me, right now, is about having that leadership and having that ... vision and having that drive. (Ellen)

[I have] clarity of vision for what an education, a good education looks like. (Jane)

You just get a feel for what's the right decision. (Will)

The founders appointed me because, when they interviewed, I was the one that resonated most with what they were aspiring the school to be.

And probably was able to vocalise things that they couldn't vocalise but knew they wanted. (Paul)

If I believe something's right, I do it. (Rod)

... there is also a large streak of this; ... I'm never wrong. (Les)

Having a vision that is convincing for others is key to appointment and sustaining that role. The acceptance of this demonstrates the power of ideology in generating a shared disposition and language from across a range of headteachers with different professional backgrounds. Following Collins (2001), it seems that these heads are the right people on the bus and in the right position as leader, and the key issue for them is how they ensure the school workforce are the right people.

Leaders establish through vision work the primacy of the standards agenda in the purposes of their school, and hence of education. Jane, for instance, reports a conversation with her staff following her appointment to a new sponsored academy replacing a formerly low attaining urban school: 'What is the purpose of the Academy? Well, they thought it was about community cohesion. And I said, *No, it's not. It's about raising standards for children*'. Ellen similarly equates educational goods solely with outcome accreditation, '... if children are not leaving with qualifications, we're doing nothing; we've babysat them ...'. This standards agenda is linked unproblematically to the needs of employers, 'if we don't teach problem-solving and solution-focused approaches to learning, how are we ever going to compete on a world stage?' (Hazel).

For these leaders, good leadership is 'being completely uncompromising and relentless about standards for children, I think is the reason why we've been so successful here' (Jane). The adoption of the official purposes of leadership as performing persistence and ruthlessness helps handle the unremitting nature of the job. Its purpose is to effect rapid, continuous, purposive change and consequently a verb often used is drive (especially forward); 'I've seen a different leadership style to Wilshaw's work equally as effectively in terms of driving people forward' (Will).

Here, Will is decrying what he sees as the harsh methods of Wilshaw as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, whilst reinforcing the idea that workers must be driven by leaders. He repeats this idea when talking about his own practice, saying 'I've never been work-shy, and that I think has also helped me drive it on'. Jane speaks of her sponsor's 'expectation that you would drive a coach and horses through what had gone before to deliver better outcomes for children and the only measure was outcomes for children'. Here, drive has taken on an even stronger meaning; she has a mandate not just to change, but to destroy what was there before. She too characterizes her leadership in the terms 'driving things forward'. Hazel says 'I put in the roles at middle leadership that I really know can drive things forward'. The activities related to leading are characterized through such language as relentless, quasi-mechanical and de-humanized.

All the respondents construct and pursue their vision in an authoritarian rather than collegial manner, though some are more comfortable with admitting it than others. At one end of this continuum are those who report exercising authority unilaterally, e.g. 'and we decided at that time, well, *I* decided at that time ...', but prefer to invoke an illusory consensus; 'because it can't be that one person thinks that, it has to be... a consensus within the school' (Bridget). At the other end are those like Paul, who is explicit about his control over the school: '... if you're wanting to work at [this] school, this is what you're buying into'. Similarly, Jane expects to exercise total control over her staff and grounds her authority in the reform agenda:

Here are the teacher standards, this is what you're expected to do, you're not doing it. So, I'm going to give you some time to do it, and if you don't, then it'll be conduct, then it'll be capability, then there will be consequences.

So leadership is about the giving of a warning designed to correct conduct; if this fails, the next stage is to train teachers into the required capabilities; if *this* fails, the teacher will face unspecified *consequences* as a euphemism for dismissal or contract non-renewal. The standards agenda encompasses teachers as well as pupils; the performance of the former becomes measurable as a product of the latter, and is expressed as universal, undeniable truths. The performance assessment of teachers has the effect of distancing Jane from her role as lead professional whose role is to articulate a contextual interpretation of appropriate practice. She is instead an enforcer of extrinsically derived and validated competencies, and minimum standards that change continually (these are *floor targets*, where the percentage of children in a school reaching a particular standard such as 5 A*-C grades keeps rising as governments seek to improve quality). Challenging this, raising alternatives and knowing about what is going on is construed as opposition to the leader's vision, and is consequently constructible as contrary to universal notions of *good practice* and *what works*, a theme we identified elsewhere in the data: 'I've never ever, in all my time teaching, ever known anybody who wants to be a worse teacher, who actively says, *I want to be worse*' (Bridget). Dissent, in this context, is unthinkable.

Historical studies of headship show that forms of *autocracy* are very deeply embedded in the education system in England (Grace, 1995) but our data say there is no pretence of disguising absolute power. Many of these heads articulated their position and role as one of regal power:

And it's, you know, the King is dead, long live the King. (Jane)

... you sort of almost begin to feel a bit like the Queen. (Paul)

I think whatever happens, you're King in your own school, aren't you? (Phil)

And unaccountable power:

I think as heads, we're all a bit megalomaniac. (Phil)

Even concepts of leadership meant to invoke participation, such as distributed leadership, are re-imagined such that what is produced is a sort of omniscient, ubiquitous leader, 'I think it really is about *having this distribution throughout*, being accessible at lots of different levels' (Hazel, our italics). What is being distributed is not the leadership, but the leader, where the will of the leader (or Fuhrer) is known and enacted. For some, the territory they wish to control extends further than their own school—their ambitions are quasi-imperialist:

I'm no longer satisfied with having an impact in this community. I mean I do believe that our education system is letting down hundreds of thousands of kids every year. And I think somebody needs to say something about that. And I want the opportunity to start to have that sort of a voice. (Paul)

Importantly, the acceptance and promotion of a crisis in education combined with a salvation narrative enables vision work to be credible to the self, to identity and to the right to have a voice in ways that confirm the crisis and its solution.

Totalitarianism works through a range of human technologies, not least surveillance. Leaders monitor staff performance at all levels continually, and while much activity occurs (walking around, watching, listening and studying data), in Arendtian terms it is a form of labour as a means of survival. First, senior leaders who surround the headteacher are monitored to ensure they are communicating and enacting their leader's vision correctly: '... I will monitor all the time whether the two Assistant Heads in charge of teaching and learning are really truly taking the message through' (Hazel). This is especially so across the federation where Les is the executive head, 'we meet regularly now as an SLT, every single week. They're minuted, they're actioned, so there, there's monitoring'. Surveillance is both facilitated and concealed by state-mandated bureaucracy; performance management processes, for instance, reduce the complexity of teaching and learning to obedience to and proselytization of the vision of high standards:

The first [performance management] target is on general compliance ... The second one is quality of performance ... The third one is pupil outcomes ... what percentage of your pupils have made expected or better progress? ... Target four is about contribution to the vision. (Paul)

Task delegation happens within this paradigm of tight control, and is misrecognised as *distributing leadership*, where Jane is able to say ‘... and I think the ability to step back and allow other people to take forward the agenda at the right time, once you’ve modelled it, once you’ve given it direction, once you’ve given birth to it, as it were, is key to it’. There is no hint here that the agenda taken forward is shaped by those people. Staff performance further down the hierarchy is also monitored continually. Lesson observations are routine ways through which to categorize and *know* teachers, e.g. Ellen says that she puts ‘... a lot of accountability around teaching and learning, work scrutiny, lesson observations, etc.’, and Hazel states, ‘we’re still watching people teaching and we’re doing work scrutiny’. Therefore, performance concerns not only outcomes but also the micro-management of options, choices and decisions regarding feedback on exercise books through to feedback about teacher routines.

Tough messages are given to staff whereby the vision disrupts identities. Importantly, much of the early work on the necessity and benign role of visioning was about connecting direction with values. Much was written about enabling the profession to speak about what matters to them, and how their views about this in relation to the vision was a key process of contribution and integration (see Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993). The situation has now shifted. Values do not matter, and indeed Arendt (1963) argues that values did not prevent Nazism, and neither did rational arguments. What is happening is the use of data and judgement labels to demonstrate a crisis in the school and/or in the person’s practice:

The predecessor school staff thought that the school was a good school. It wasn’t. So the first thing was to present to them... this is where the school is at, and this is where ‘good’ is. And there’s a massive gap between the two. (Jane)

And actually it’s the robust monitoring that, so for example, something came up on attendance, where it’s oh well, we’ve got practices right, and then actually when you see the raw figures, this puts [name of person] in a very difficult spot ... (Les)

Where staff are retained but are deemed problematic in their attitudes and articulations, leaders engage in activities which re-fashion identities to make them conform to the vision:

We’ve done a massive amount of work over five years now around teaching and learning styles. People here are, I think, well, they’re used to change [laughs], cause it’s just the way the school is. (Rod)

It is about, in some cases, changing people’s embedded way of doing their job. But we’ve worked well at doing that. (Paul)

Or heads can eliminate dissent before it presents, by recruiting according to the vision:

... just before Easter we did our next round of teacher recruitment for September. I created a 40-page document that outlined the commitment; this is what you are buying into if you want to work at this school ... There are expectations that they teach in a certain way, and that's explained in the documentation. And we have an ethos and a vision for education that's explained in the documentation. (Paul)

Leaders, then, exercise control over their staff's identities and practices by enforcing their vision through technologies of communication and surveillance operationalized by a combination of vision and data. It seems, moreover, that dissenting or uncontrollable teachers, or those whose practices fail to conform to the standards agenda, are disappeared.

One way in which leaders can dispose of teachers is through re-structuring the school. Ellen exemplifies this; 'I'm just going through the re-structure where I've got people who've lost their jobs'. This is a curiously dissociative way of saying this, whose effect is to deny her own agency in carrying out the re-structure and removing people. Jane is more direct about her role in the process and its relation to standards:

... the question should be, what do we need to do to ensure that they [the pupils] do get it? ... And it was changing the language, it was changing the culture. So part of it was done with the re-structuring. And I was very fortunate in that the predecessor school had a number of acting positions, so I didn't have to transfer people into those roles.

Bridget, at the time of the first interview, was shortly to lead the take-over of another, less successful school, which she described as being one 'that has been really dropping down from Good to Satisfactory to Requires Improvement'. Bridget uses the language of the standards discourse to promote the idea of continued deterioration and to justify her subsequent re-structuring, despite there being no drop other than semantic from *satisfactory* to *requires improvement* (the latter being the new term for the former). Importantly, she intends to thwart the TUPE (The Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations) legal process for safeguarding staff when schools close and an academy is opened:

I think we've got a school where teaching and learning's not good enough, which is something that I'm going to have to address. And it's going to be where some people are going to just be expecting that if they sit there, they'll be TUPE'd over to this school. And so I think that there's going to be a lot of challenges in terms of competencies and redundancies.

Whilst re-structuring conceals the disposal of teachers within bureaucratic conversations about surplus roles, outright (constructive) dismissal, following capability procedures or coercion, is very much evident in our data. The headteachers interviewed were open about the extent to which the disposal of teachers is a legitimate tool to achieve school goals:

This is how it's gonna be. You're either on the bus or you're off the bus. And if you're on the bus, then we'll do everything we can to help and support you. But if you're not, then you're off the bus. And that's either through redundancy, through a restructure, through a change in roles, through a capability, through, 'do you know, what? This isn't the job for me, I'm applying elsewhere. (Jane)

So... you kind of like say to somebody, 'look, I've got real concerns about your performance and I'm going to do something about it'. But I'm not saying, 'you're bloody rubbish, you need to get out'. You know what I mean? So it's a much more professional but quite robust system, so you know, people have left already this year. (Les)

This is my vision, this is what I'm passionate about. If you don't like it, come and talk to me about it, let's talk about that. But I know what it feels like to be in a school where your values don't match those of the organisation. And, I got out, so my challenge would be, this is what this school is about. (Paul)

It's all about the type of people, the right people and chucking out what wasn't needed and getting in what was. And in any school, if you ask any Head if they could change ten percent of their staff, they could make an impact somewhere. And it's like football ... if you buy the best players, you get some success. And if you don't get some success, the manager gets sacked. And I think a lot of what happens in schools is a bit like that. (Phil)

Staff who have fought it [the vision] are being given the message that they're not welcome here. (Paul)

Significantly, the banality of visioning is evident here, but unrecognized by the speakers. Through labour and work processes of competency and performance assessments, and contractual agreements, people are in or out. They are reduced to a label and dismissed:

There were so many people who were inadequate, the Local Authority knew they were inadequate, they were never gonna change; they'd been inadequate for years. And some people who should never have been allowed near children, let alone inadequate teachers. And they should never have been allowed to transfer to the Academy. And I spent 18 months, two years in one case, having to take remedial action. (Jane)

Whilst headteachers and principals of all types of school dispose of teachers, the ability of academy leaders to set their staff's pay and conditions means that in these schools, the discourse is more intense and disposal is easy:

We do have one member of staff who we are going to sever contract with because they haven't bought into the ethos ... so we are making use of performance-related pay and our performance-management processes and the fact that everyone when they sign a contract signs up to a twelve-year [*sic*: he meant month] probation length of time with us ... and I think that will be an interesting message to the rest of the staff. (Paul)

And quick:

Staff who in their first year have shown that they are not engaged with the school and they are not working with us and are not taking advice and guidance on how to improve, will be asked to, ahm, as I say, not return in September. (Paul)

There is no sense of taking action to discuss and create alternative approaches, to resist the removal of people who have a shared history with them as fellow professionals but who are now deemed surplus to requirements. Importantly, there is no sense of linking this with the deprofessionalization of the profession through the employment of non-trained people to teach (see Gunter, 2011). Interestingly, the very headteachers and professionals who are making this vision work are now facing criticism of doing an inadequate job (see Henry, 2012). What this illuminates is that whereas tyrannies remove their enemies, the shift to totalitarianism is when the *innocents*, who have done what was required, then face removal. Show trials in totalitarian states show how people accepted their guilt and punishment; it will be interesting how the headteachers speaking here engage with their own inevitable disposal.

Conclusion

Collins (2001) uses a seductive metaphor about *getting the right people on the bus* which aligned with popular contemporary business discourses concerning the efficient production of high quality, desirable goods and/or services. In that context, the quality of workers is one of many variables affecting corporate outcomes, and is susceptible to improvement first through a technology of managerialism which constructs those outcomes as quantifiable, and second, through the dismissal of staff to recruit instead the sort and standard required. What is problematic and novel is the effect of the transliteration of this way of thinking about leadership and outcomes to the context of schools and education. Once headteachers are appointed as the right people on the bus, their thinking is a form of banal leadership that focuses mainly on labour and sometimes work, but rarely action. Busy and overworked headteachers are immunized from thinking politically, and the ideological job that vision work does prevents recognition of this. However, the data suggest that the interplay between the vision of what to do and the people who will do it is more complex than Collins' (2001) prescription. Heads appoint and remove people to deliver the vision, where changes to the vision are in the hands of those to whom they are accountable, a complex mix of their employers, sponsors, and—through legal contracts—to the government of the day (and its agents) in London. Hence, while visioning and vision work suggest a smooth technology, in reality headteachers find themselves in contradictory and tense situations, where visioning may reap rewards or it may not rescue them from disposability (Gunter, 2012).

Thinking this through using Arendtian analysis suggests that something very damaging is taking place, and we have identified totalitarian tendencies within these accounts: first, ideology—the standards agenda dominates what is meant by a *good education* in regard to work-ready skills and dispositions, and how pedagogies and curricula should respond through the vision with discipline through vision-work. The school as autonomous and independent is an ideological fiction that is used to support and enable visioning, and so controls imaginings about the

educational process and the place of the professional within this. Second, total terror—we have shown how dangerous it is to dissent or fail to measure up; it is not clear what *inadequate* actually means and so all are vulnerable to identification and denunciation. We would also emphasize how *total* a phenomenon this is. For what is happening to qualify in Arendt's terms as totalitarian, the attitudes we describe should be reflected and reproduced outside the field of education. That this is indeed the case is exemplified by a question from the journalist, Andrew Marr (2012), to the Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw:

How do you get rid of the people that you want to get rid of, however? If you're talking about a culture change, you're talking about getting rid of people too. (unpaged)

Human disposal is a societally accepted and promoted organizational goal, going beyond the normal processes of hiring and firing which have historically refreshed and improved the skills and knowledge of the school's workforce, to become a mechanism aiming instead at *culture change*. Such an environment enables Wilshaw in the same interview to respond that '... it's about good performance management in schools, and up to now I don't think it's been robust enough and that's something we're going to look at much more carefully' (Marr, 2012, unpaged), and for that response to be understood as correct, necessary and appropriate. We have argued in this paper that the de-humanizing effect inherent in conceptualizations of humans as human resources has contributed to this avowed readiness amongst school leaders to contemplate disposal as easily as, and in some cases more easily than, their training and development in order to fulfil organizational objectives. Enabling this totalizing discourse is vision work, which is a compulsory activity of educational leadership and consists in school leaders implementing relentlessly the ideology of standards, and misrecognising the external provenance and homogeneity of this mission as contextual, personal and unique. The third criterion is the destruction of human bonds; this is achieved partly through the use of labels, such as 'inadequate', which reduces both the complexity of educators' activities, knowledge, skills and humanity such that the emotional work of disposal becomes manageable and the act itself banal. The final element is bureaucracy; the act of teacher disposal is concealed behind occasionally multiple organizational re-structures. Teachers are known and hierarchized through the data produced by their students' performance in standardized assessments; through lesson observations; and work scrutinies. The names of those judged *inadequate* are invariably on a spreadsheet with the head, who is expected to take action against them. The objectivity of the measures evidencing, or *constructing* their failure is simultaneously undeniable and illusory.

Who, then, has found themselves *off the bus* and what are the implications of this for the profession? It follows from our analysis that those who raise questions about the standards agenda and have alternative approaches to assessment and accreditation constitute an important part of the *disappeared*; this is not simply an individual tragedy for those teachers concerned, but a collective one for the profession. Our findings

support Goodson's (2014) conclusion that the state is purposively re-fashioning teachers' identities through the reform agenda such that experienced teachers who have vocationally, ethically and professionally based identities are purged from the workforce systematically in favour of predominantly younger practitioners who perceive teaching as *just a job*, and are ideologically more inclined to accept the increasingly dominant discourses of audit, performativity and standards. These leaders manage education services in ways that we suggest has moved beyond panoptic performativity (Perryman, 2006), to resemble more the totalitarian practices of complicit agents. The implications for the profession are clear; this management of teachers such that the discursive dominance of the standards agenda is sustained will lead to a profession consisting mostly of those who believe, or who stay quiet. As the employment status of teachers increasingly reflects casualization, which is a goal of neoliberal agendas (Connell, 2013), so those who understand themselves as professionals are reduced to a labour market at the bottom of the hierarchy. When combined with the personal notion of visioning, accountability to those who endorse that vision through appointment (reward and dismissal) and the impact of new types of school whose legal status makes employment more insecure, then the existence of public education done in public and with the public is challenged. Sooner or later, following Arendt, we suggest that this may not matter; as the recent spat between Wilshaw and the then Secretary of State for Education in England, Michael Gove demonstrates (see Adams, 2014), when the regime has eliminated its opponents, it will turn on its friends. This could be interpreted as pessimistic; yet, there is much in our data to suggest this is a legitimate position to take. However, in Arendtian (1958) terms, the capacity for *natality* or to do something new is evident, not least that we have identified totalitarian trends and not totalitarianism. Our contribution is therefore not only empirical and conceptual, but is also reflexive: we have here taken seriously one of the responsibilities of socially critical researchers to engage in scholarly activism through gathering evidence and theorizing in order to illuminate seemingly dark times.

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