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Chapter 11

Revolutions in Educational Policy: The Vexed Question of Evidence and Policy Development

Hugh Lauder

One of Geoff Whitty's presiding concerns was the relationship between research evidence and policy. As he noted, 'It is important not to gloss over the disjunctions that exist between policy facing research and the realities of policy making in practice' (Whitty and Wisby 2016: 2). These disjunctions have been well captured theoretically by Ladwig (1994), while in the practical world we have to cope with the limited interest that policymakers have in evidence (Watermeyer 2019).

The difficulties posed by the vexed research–policy relationship are sharpened when we note that too often educational and indeed social science research is seen as a weapon to be used in ideological battles; we know too well that any scrap of evidence that can be legitimized as research can be hurled into the public debate. It is as if all forms of research have methodological equivalence when it comes to knowledge claims. In a post-truth era when, as Rudi Guliani recently claimed, 'truth isn't truth', and as Kellyanne Conway asserted, there are always 'alternative facts' (*sic*), the relativism that has been embraced by polarized political debate is exacerbated.

These issues are centre stage at a time when it is clear that the neoliberal paradigm in education, in England, is in its death throes. Across education, from higher and further education, through secondary and primary schooling to the early years, the fissures in this policy paradigm are appearing. In higher and further education, there are fundamental issues concerning funding, as the leading assumption

of policymakers, that this sector should be seen as the servant of the economy, crumbles (Brown *et al.* 2019; Lauder *et al.* 2018). In secondary and primary education, the state theory of learning, which views education as merely teaching to the test, has come to the end of the road. Too many students have suffered mental ill health under its influence (Brown and Carr 2019).

The argument of this chapter is that while at the inception of neoliberalism in education there was some intellectual credibility to the policy revolution that ensued, that is no longer the case. It is for this reason that the cracks are being papered over by rhetoric in order to keep the political interests associated with this policy paradigm in place. This is particularly the case when policies are based on ideological conviction albeit supported by what was at the time a novel theoretical approach to education.

However, there are two problems that need to be addressed in making this case. The first is that all revolutions are necessarily complex; new institutions are created, the existing are restructured and the relationships between them reconfigured. How then, can we best make the case that this is a revolution that no longer has an intellectual justification? Clearly, we need to grasp the underlying theories and evidence on which the architecture of neoliberalism has been built. In order to do this, this chapter examines three theories that may be considered central to the paradigm: markets in education, school effectiveness and human capital theory. Together, they cover the primary and secondary sectors and higher education. In order to analyse these three theories and the evidence that has been adduced for and against them, a modified account of theories is taken from Imre Lakatos (1970).

The notion of theory has been introduced because there are questions to be raised about the warrant related to evidential claims used in policy debates. This concerns what we mean by evidence. The desirability of evidence-informed policy is often cited but as it stands it smacks of empiricism, as if evidence can be considered apart from the theories that generate it. However, if we take a post-empiricist view of research, then, as Haig (1987) has argued, the most significant insight of post-empiricist epistemology is that it is from our best theories that we make knowledge claims.¹ These claims are always provisional because we may not always be able to assess what the best theory is at any given time and even if we do, it may be superseded by a better theory. In this sense the theories of neoliberalism may always be a work in progress, but, after 30 years it seems they have had more than enough time to prove their warrant.

The second problem takes us into the realm of politics and practice. Dismantling the neoliberal paradigm may be as difficult as it was to construct it. This means that we need to go beyond the questions of theory appraisal to articulate the paradoxes that a change of paradigm will involve, as a way of thinking through the application of alternative policies.

Lakatos' view of theories

Lakatos saw the distinguishing features of what he termed research programmes to be the development of a series of theories that retained their unity by virtue of a common world view, what he called the 'hard core' of a research programme. For example, in orthodox economics, which relates to two of the theories to be discussed, a hard core assumption is that of *homo economicus*, that people are calculating pleasure machines who can rationally plan the means to the ends of their self-interest.² This world view acts as a heuristic that points the way in which phenomena are to be investigated and interpreted, and the theories and methods to be used in that investigation. For Lakatos, it could be expected that every theory that is tested will encounter anomalies that challenge the theory. When this occurs, new theories are developed to explain the anomalies and to create new predictions and explanations. However, the new theories have to be consistent with the world view embedded in the hard core: a failure to achieve this is to employ ad hoc theories that are, in terms of the research programme, illicit. He referred to research programmes in these cases as degenerating.

Research programmes and policy

Research programmes may provide the framework for policy implementation but they do not guide the details of implementation, since that requires a range of further additional assumptions about, for example, local contexts, cultures and ethical considerations. However, in the cases being considered, each new policy step has an underlying theory that supports or justifies particular policies; when we examine the market architecture of education in England, this will become apparent. In this sense, the development of policy, of the kind discussed in this chapter, is analogous to Lakatos' notion of a research programme: each new step in the policy has a coherence with the underlying world view that drives

both theory and practice. In these cases, the underlying world view is that of neoliberalism, which, as Foucault (2008) argued, is closely related to the extreme tenets of human capital theory.

There is a further point. When we turn to the neoliberal approach to markets in education, it is apparent that, although there has been a clear attempt to change the practice and thinking of educationists, they have been applied in ways they resist because they do not correspond to their professional identities.³ In current debates this is clearly seen in higher education (Watermeyer 2019; Collini 2012, 2017), while younger school teachers are voting with their feet. The consequence of imposing crude proxies in incentive and accountability policies is that they produce undesirable unintended consequences. When we refer to these theories, the testing must also include such unintended consequences: something that is often neglected in educational research and policy (Zhao 2018).⁴ One way in which such unintended consequences can be identified is through counterfactual analyses of the kind developed by Gorard (2018), which is discussed below.

Markets in education

Markets in education were initially hailed as a solution to the problems of low educational standards and inequality of opportunity: neoliberal enthusiasts thought that markets should 'be allowed to work their wonders . . . for everyone's benefit' (Chubb and Moe 1992: 10–11). As such, the introduction of markets into the state sector of education was seen as a novel approach to these seemingly intractable educational problems.

If we consider the hard core of the theory of markets in education we should start with key concepts of orthodox economics, which are then applied to all areas of economics, where the orthodox view holds sway. These concepts form the hard core of the theory.⁵ The focus is on markets because they are considered the most efficient way to allocate goods and services. In terms of policy, there will always be historical and social factors that will come into play when markets are applied, as in the case of education. The standard policy strategy in this context is to argue that 'it makes good sense to determine their (markets) ideal form and examine why and how actual markets differ from the ideal' (Dasgupta 2007, chap. 4: 72). Where they differ, this is considered a market failure in which inefficiencies will be created. Hence, 'understanding ideal markets enables us to uncover clues as to how markets

could improve matters in situations where households, communities and governments don't work so well' (Dasgupta 2007, chap. 4: 72). In education, it is assumed that this world view, as to the superiority of markets, anchored in *homo economicus*, is then applied to families and, in particular, children. On this basis, school choice becomes central to the idea of markets in education. This is the hard core of the theory.

If we then turn to educational markets we can see that there are a series of testable theories that are developed to defend the hard core (Lauder *et al.* 1999). These are:

1. Parents will have equal knowledge about schools and the power to send their children to the school of their choice.
2. Schools will become more ethnically and socially mixed because less well-off parents will escape the iron cage of zoning or catchment areas.
3. Schools will become more diverse in terms of curricula and pedagogy as they accommodate to parental demands.
4. Education markets will drive up school performance through competition for students.
5. The quality of teaching will be raised in an education market. Bad teachers will be fired while good teachers' morale, motivation and performance will be raised.

Since a perfectly competitive market has many buyers and sellers, it is assumed that schools will be like small businesses. In this sense school effectiveness and good leadership are considered the responsibility of schools, as we shall see when we turn to the school effectiveness research programme.

Each of these hypotheses have been subject to testing and it is noteworthy that where the findings have not been consistent with these hypotheses there has been a competing explanatory account, framed by Bourdieu's theories of reproduction and distinction, that can provide more powerful explanations for them (Lauder *et al.* 1999). In other words, in an explanatory sense, there is a competing account to be given on the effects of education markets.

Of the hypotheses listed, the first is central and that is why much of the focus on education markets has been on parental inequalities in school choice. Here the general consensus from research has been that the introduction of markets exacerbates inequalities rather than reducing them (Reay 2018; Whitty *et al.* 1998; Ball *et al.* 1995; Brown 1990). But this raises a question as to how much time should be given

to see whether all parents acquire the knowledge and power to make good choices; in other words, until they become socialized into market behaviour. For example, Gorard *et al.* (2001) sought to argue that working-class parents could learn the 'rules of the game', but only after a period of time, which raises precisely the question of when in a research programme's development evidence should be used.

Complicating the policy application of the market research programme

Despite the enthusiasm of some market exponents, few governments were prepared to embrace untrammelled free markets, and auxiliary hypotheses and practices were introduced to lock home the advantage that markets were assumed to be able to provide.

The first concerned the publication of league tables of exam and test performance, so that parents, as consumers, could judge schools by their results. However, the raw results were seen as unfair to schools and teachers because they did not take into account the nature of the student intake, and so value-added scores or contextual measures were introduced into the league tables. While these were a significant improvement in principle, the value added that was taken into account was that of those eligible for free school meals. This measure led to misleading results when compared to more fine-grained measures of disadvantage (Lauder *et al.* 2010). The consequence is that school performance was being judged on questionable evidence. More recently, the government in England has scrapped contextual value-added scores and introduced a measure of student progress ('Progress' 8) but it is based on prior achievement and does not take into account the wider socio-economic factors that can influence educational achievement.

Underlying these judgements was a theory and policy that advocated the repeated testing of student performance because it would give added impetus to raising standards. Here we should note Carr's (2016) argument that the state theory of learning (Lauder *et al.* 2006) flies in the face of our best theories of learning. However, this theory of learning was also a way of meeting the New Public Management demand for accountability, and in this respect the latter may be seen as producing unintended consequences. As Bowles (2016) has argued, the demand for accountability may produce undesirable outcomes; in this case, teaching to the test, which has led, among other things, to the downgrading of the teaching of knowledge (Young 2008).

Testing may also have been introduced to strengthen what may be considered a flaw in the application of the theory of perfect competition to the real world: namely, that in many instances schools cannot be allowed to fail and close. Therefore, other spurs and incentives are required to induce teacher and school achievement. Thus, a further auxiliary policy was based on the creation of Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), a national inspectorate for the school system. In addition to classifying schools according to league tables, it was assumed that an inspectorate that issued summative judgements about school performance would enhance the information that parents needed to make informed choices, while at the same time ensuring that schools complied with the market rules that had been constructed. The problem has been, as Gorard (2018) has argued, that the judgements that Ofsted has made have been informed by league table results, which are related to school intake. As he notes:

The schools rated 'outstanding' are more likely to be single-sex, especially girls-only schools. They are staggeringly more likely to be selective than comprehensive, and much less likely to be the majority secondary moderns left over after the selection to grammar school. (110)

However, the state-led theory of pedagogy and testing and its underlying theory of learning is not the only augmentation, or, in Lakatos' terms, auxiliary hypotheses, to defend the market theory of education. New types of school have been introduced: charter schools in the United States and New Zealand, and academies and free schools in the UK, which potentially complicate the way education markets are applied.

This raises a significant difficulty in testing ambitious policies. Their effects are often clouded by additional changes, which make cause and effect difficult to disentangle. However, research can also shed light on these complexities. For example, Gorard's (2018) research reports on the counterfactual case in which if schools were more equally mixed, by removing formal and informal selection from grammar schools and academies there would be a 5 per cent improvement in exam results (206). When these auxiliary hypotheses and strategies are challenged by research, the question is raised as to what the beneficial effects of markets are, if we are taking the population of all school children rather than just the interests of the professional middle class (Ball *et al.* 1995; Brown 1990).

Given this analysis, it seems the introduction of markets in education has not met the early hopes. While there has been an apparent acknowledgement of the need for diversity in the curriculum in the introduction of free schools, this does not allow them to escape the demands of the machinery of accountability and the league tables and Ofsted reports by which competition and performance are measured. At the same time, the improvement in test and exam results have not eventuated by the government's own goals. Torrance (2018) reports that the tests at age 11 flatlined in science, maths and English between 2000 and 2010. While in 2017, 72 per cent of students met the new expected standards in reading, well below the 80 per cent standard that, he notes, was achieved in 2010. For school leaving exams for those aged 16, there is a rise in those achieving this outcome between 1975 and 2010, from 21 per cent to approximately 68 per cent, with a decline from 2010–2015 to 62 per cent.⁶ What is interesting about this apparent improvement in grades is that there is no uptick with the introduction of markets in the 1990s or their maturation.

Underlying this assessment, there are two key points to emerge. The first is that it is highly questionable that the focus on tests and exams is creating the kind of creativity and mental flexibility that will be required for the labour market that is now emerging (Brown *et al.* 2019). In part, this is because it is not clear that students who are trained for the test retain the gains officially recorded. We know, for example, that literacy skills atrophy if the students who have achieved them live in cultures where they are not used. The second concerns the theory that can provide the best explanations for school performance. There has been a school of thought that it is school composition or school mix that is a key determinant of educational achievement (Gorard 2018; Lauder *et al.* 1999). Market theory predicted that schools would become better mixed, which has not proved to be the case. Of course, there are limits to the integration of social classes in schools because those that do not have the advantages of cultural, social and monetary capitals outnumber those that do. In other words, while schools can certainly be better mixed, and this can make a difference to achievement (Gorard 2018), there will be a limit to the benefits that accrue. We will have to consider further ways of addressing this issue. Education needs to change, but we will also need to look outside the school, for, as Thrupp (1999) has noted, the primary causes of educational success and failure lie outside the school walls.

Given the complexities of the educational market in England, it is not surprising that there have been few attempts to measure the overall

success or failure of choice and competition in the education market. One study, by Gibbons *et al.* (2008), distinguishes between choice and competition and finds no effect on achievement as a result of school choice but finds a small effect for competition on achievement. While this is not an outcome that the hard core of the programme would have predicted, because it assumed parental choice would lead to higher achievement, the small effect of competition would be consistent, if disappointing. However, competition in this case has not been of the kind imagined by orthodox economists but enforced by a complex compliance architecture, in which success is, largely, due to teaching to the test, with all the undesirable unintended consequences.⁷

It is at this point that we should turn to the school effectiveness research programme, since the causal boundaries that it drew around the school as the focus of policy has proven to be equally problematic. This, however, has not much concerned policymakers, who have often assumed or rather hoped that test outcomes can largely be caused by school effects.

The received model of school effectiveness

The hard core of this research programme makes a series of assumptions that enable empirical research in this programme to be developed. These assumptions are as follows:

1. Schools as organizations have an effect on student outcomes such as exam success.
2. Schools have a significant degree of autonomy from the wider society to generate these effects.
3. These school effects are causal and therefore schools can be engineered to improve exam success.
4. Schools are structured as nested organizations; typically the school, the department and the classroom. It is by focusing on these and their relationships that we can discern the factors that improve schools.

While the school effectiveness research programme has undergone significant methodological changes, it can be argued that these hard core assumptions remained, until recently, at the centre of its research. That said, it should also be noted that in its early period school effectiveness research (SER) was distinguished from the school improvement research

(SIR), with the former being quantitative and empiricist and the latter qualitative. While SER, with the advent of multilevel modelling, can in principle address all four propositions, SIR focused more on the latter two. Where they have been combined utilizing a realist methodology, they have been in heterodox enquiries that have challenged the basic propositions of the received model, such as the Smithfield Project in New Zealand in the 1990s (Lauder *et al.* 1999; Thrupp 1999) and the Hampshire study of the early 2000s (Brown 2015; Lauder *et al.* 2010).

If we examine the first two propositions of SER, then the first point to make is that the research in SER has come to a consensus that somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of the school effect lies outside the walls of the school. These have been consistent estimates over 30 years, with few outliers. In turn, this led to a debate about the degree to which schools can be effective in raising achievement. Rutter (1979) was, among others, an early advocate of the view that improving schools can make a significant difference in individual student achievement. SER was given added political support because in neoliberal countries like the USA and England, great weight was placed on education to improve social mobility and alleviate poverty in the face of growing inequality. Hence the intense focus on SER and school improvement.

In part, SER seems to have adopted organization theory assumptions that changes to schools as organizations can bring about widespread improvements to them. Where there were areas of investigation such as the role of school ethos in promoting achievement, this was undertaken by operationalizing items, which when taken together and demonstrating statistical significance could be defined as ethos. In other words, this was a good example of SER's empiricism, in which there was no prior theory that was being tested.

But this focus ignored a key factor in school outcomes, namely the school composition or mix of students. In other words, the proposition, that schools have a degree of autonomy from society such that schools could have independent effects ignored the fact that every morning the school gates open and students from the wider society march in.

This is not a debate that has died. The success of London schools has raised the question of the cause of their test achievement. On the one hand, Burgess (2014) has argued convincingly that a clear cause has been the nature of the ethnic mix in London when compared to other parts of the country. In response, Blanden *et al.* (2015) have argued that, while the ethnic effect is a contributory cause, there are others relating to the history of London schools, especially at the primary level that also need to be taken into account. While this is a far more

sophisticated debate than those relating to the early days of SER and SIR, despite politicians continuing to articulate simplistic accounts of the effects of school leadership and management, it remains locked into the earlier debate by focusing on test outcome measures. This may have everything to do with teaching to the test more effectively and little to do with education. It tells us nothing about the manipulation of outcomes through school exclusions or issues of mental health or arguable knife crime.⁸ It is also telling that one of the leading researchers in SIR, Alma Harris, has argued that child poverty has an impact on school effectiveness and improvement (Harris *et al.* 2006). This is a significant advance for those that were once on the inside of the received research programme, one that challenges the original hard core propositions concerning the relative autonomy of schools.

We should place these recent debates within the earlier work of SER and SIR. The outcomes of this research were interminable checklists of what schools could do to improve. However, this cavalier advice was pitched at such a high level of abstraction that it failed to take into account the multidimensional aspects of improvements in school achievement and failed to place schools in their social and economic context (Lauder, Jamieson, *et al.* 1998). There are exceptions: Harris *et al.*'s (2006) discussion of school improvement in historically deprived areas is one. However, what the debate over London schools does is to take seriously history and context.

Thus, while some policymakers are clearly not up to speed with these developments, it can be said that the core propositions of SER have now changed. SER, which was once seen as the handmaiden of market policies in education (Slee *et al.* 1998), now seems to be treading a more independent path. Once issues of school composition and child poverty are taken into account then the idea that there are no social limits to the possibilities of school improvement has to be challenged. Building school improvement just on the foundations of re-engineering the organization and culture of schools in the hands of outstanding school leadership is far too unstable a basis for any widespread attempt at raising school achievement.

Evidence for such a claim comes from the observation that while schools in deprived neighbourhoods may achieve exam success from time to time, it is unlikely that the success can be sustained, simply because of the pressure on these schools and the likelihood of staff churn. The contrary claim could be made in reference to the success of London schools. Here, we have a test case as to whether, as Burgess (2014) has shown, the backbone of London schools' sustained success is the ethnic

composition of these schools; is it this that provides continuity and stability? If so, then it may be that this continuity has enabled successful school practices and cooperation between schools to be established. Or, should we consider the conclusion drawn by Blanden *et al.* (2015), that good practice in London primary schools preceded rather than accompanied the changes in London schools' student composition? What is clear is that the London case needs to be understood in relation to its context. Generalized claims for the transferability of the London experience would need to be treated with extreme caution.

The evidence concerning school composition and the impact of poverty on school achievement suggests that the hard core of this theory is now being abandoned, and with it a research programme directed by it.⁹ However, it remains to be seen as to when policy makers will follow this research lead. We may have some time to wait.¹⁰

The justification for the instrumental view of education: Human capital theory

The rationale of introducing an education market in England and applying intense pressure to raise exam scores has been economic. Underlying education policy has been the key assumption that in an imagined 'knowledge economy' ever more workers will need high-level educational qualifications to promote individual and national economic returns. The key theory(s) to legitimate this view has been human capital theory (HCT) and its offspring, skill bias technological change theory. However, whatever the virtues of this theory in the 1950s and 1960s, the period from the 1970s until the present day has not presented a labour market profile that conforms to its predictions and explanations. Two questions follow: if labour market trends do not reflect the predictions of HCT, how are we to explain this? And why has HCT retained currency to the point where major policy investments have been made in the development of mass higher education? There are good reasons as to why we should have mass higher education, but they are educational not economic.

In work undertaken with Phil Brown and Sin Yi Cheung over seven years, we have now reached the point when we can argue with confidence that HCT and its offspring are degenerating research programmes (Brown *et al.* 2019). To see why this is we should turn first to the hard core of HCT and its attendant propositions. The hard core, as with that of markets in education, is that of orthodox economic theory. A series of

propositions to defend the hard core with respect to education and the labour market then follow:

1. Students and their families calculate the costs and benefits of further and higher education. These calculations relate explicitly to returns in the labour market.
2. The more educated a student, the more productive they will be.
3. Employers note the productive potential of better educated students and will employ them at higher wages than less educated students.
4. Therefore, there is a virtuous spiral in which the more students engage in higher education, the more productive they will be and the more they will earn.
5. In particular, there is a premium that accrues to graduates over non-graduates.

The policy implications of this hard core are profound because human capital theorists, especially its doyen, Gary Becker (1964), argued that the benefits of a general education accrue to the individual and that it should be seen as a private good, paid for by the individual: hence the justification for tuition fees, and the way higher education is to be funded.

Two further points need to be made about the hard core set of propositions. The first is that the view of causation here is consistent with Say's law, in that it is the supply of students that creates the demand. This has been the dominant policy view in England, although there are different accounts of causation in the academic literature (Lauder *et al.* 2018). We also need to note the methodology that is employed, particularly since HCT conforms to the idea that economics should be modelled on an empiricist view of the history of the natural sciences, particularly physics. To this end, HCT seeks to establish law-like regularities.¹¹

When we examine the labour market trends in the UK and USA we find that since 1970, which may be regarded as the start of the fourth industrial technological revolution, there is on average a small graduate premium. However, the average wage hides much that is revealing. When the comparison between graduate and non-graduate earnings are disaggregated, the picture becomes far more complex. It is clear that those graduates in the top decile of the labour market have received returns consistent with the predictions of HCT: over time their wages rise and they earn far more than all other graduates and non-graduates. For all other graduates and non-graduates, wages declined between 1970 and 2010. In drawing this picture it is important to emphasize that women at all deciles have earned and continue to earn significantly less than

men. The same picture emerges when we look beyond first degrees to those with doctorates and master's degrees (Brown *et al.* 2019). A clear inference to be drawn is that we do not live in the world of a knowledge economy with a near infinite demand for graduate workers; rather, we live in a knowledge capitalist economy characterized by standardization and cut price brain power (Brown *et al.* 2011).

These data also speak to propositions 2 and 3. We now have a more highly educated population in England than ever, yet this has not been accompanied by a rising level of productivity. In fact, there is a productivity problem (Lauder *et al.* 2018). Moreover, there is now a significant proportion of underemployed graduates, with some estimates close to 50 per cent. It is the case that these graduates, although not doing graduate jobs, still earn more than non-graduates, for reasons that are not well understood. This would also contribute to that headline figure that there is a graduate premium, just not in the sense that policymakers assume.

Given these data, why has HCT continued to have such policy currency? If we go back to the empiricist aim in orthodox economics to establish law-like regularities, then the idea of a graduate premium does just that. And it is only by considering this methodological point that we can explain a puzzle: why have HCT theorists not disaggregated the data on educational earnings? An answer would be that it complicates and disrupts their search for a Humean causal theory, and, of course, it may lead to a refutation of their hard core assumptions. But then we know from Kuhn (1970), that researchers are committed to the hard cores of their research programmes and will not question them until there is a crisis.

For educationists the anomalies generated by HCT is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they have reluctantly played the game of talking about the importance of education to the economy, because that has justified government funding. On the other, they have often rejected this instrumental view of education. As neoliberal policymakers realize that their promise that a good education will lead to good jobs is empty, there may be a backlash against education.¹² Education will have to be defended on new philosophic and policy grounds.

Conclusion

The general conclusion to be considered in this paper is that the research programmes that have underpinned current policies with respect to

educational markets, school effectiveness, and the economic rationale for education are all in a process of degeneration. It would take a much longer analysis to firmly establish this point, but hopefully enough has been said here to at least make a *prima facie* case. If so, the question now is what policy lessons can be learned?

The first is that the main theories that comprise the revolution in educational policies, which established the neoliberal hegemony of education, are not subject to decisive refutation in a short time period. Rather, the painstaking task that educational researchers have undertaken is to take the propositions defending the hard core of the research programmes on which they are based, one by one, and subject them to testing. However, since these market-based research programmes and policies were indeed revolutionary the defence can always be made that people need time to be socialized into market behaviours. We have seen this in the view that all parents would eventually adjust to exercise market behaviour in their choice of schools. The further point is that, because these are ambitious policies there will be many complex elements to testing these theories, especially so in the light of policy adjustments. Nevertheless, what we are witnessing in all three major theories is the accumulation of anomalies: death by a thousand cuts.

This brings us to the second problem, which is one of policy development and implementation, rather than the intellectual grounds for the policy. Policymakers now face a conundrum. If the policies that have been developed over 30 years are part of degenerating programmes, then what kind of policy approach that is more open to evidence and testing is appropriate? An answer, which illustrates the conundrum, is to return to Popper (1963, 1966) and argue that policies should be developed incrementally and then tested. This suggests a slow roll-out with sound pilot studies. Many in the research and policy community would applaud such an approach, and, indeed, it is being attempted in some countries in relation to the revolutionary idea of universal basic income (IPR 2016). However, when it comes to education policy, how do we incrementally change policies when the neoliberal foundations have been shown to be flawed? The temptation is to implement a counter revolution. But that could lead to similar problems in terms of testing grand theories over time. The need to dismantle the educational policy architecture of neoliberalism is clear. And pressing. Young teachers are leaving the profession in large numbers because of this architecture and the attendant intensification of work. The key is to develop a new set of educational policies over time and incrementally, so that they can be more readily tested. But the tension between taking down the neoliberal

architecture and adopting incremental policies is also clear, as Geoff Whitty would have observed. To address this tension is beyond the realm of educational research, because it would require a change in political culture in which the grand gestures and concern about legacies, which have dominated policymakers' thinking, would have to be replaced by the humble work of developing educational policies that work for all.

Above all, once it is acknowledged that the relationship between education and good jobs is now fractured, there is an opportunity to revisit a debate which we have not had in the neoliberal Anglosphere countries for over a quarter of a century: that is, what should be the aims of education?

Notes

- 1 Why should we consider theories as the basis for knowledge claims? Our observations and the evidence we derive from them are always theory-impregnated: that is, knowledge claims are made on the basis of the theories and methods used to generate evidence. There is no form of pristine evidence.
- 2 The terms orthodox and neoclassical economics could be used interchangeably; in this chapter the term orthodox is used.
- 3 For a discussion of how neoliberalism seeks to change our thinking and behaviour, see Chandler and Reid (2016).
- 4 However, given what are mega theories in the context of education policy because their application is so widespread, working out the unintended consequences is particularly difficult.
- 5 These are critically discussed in Brown *et al.* (2019).
- 6 My thanks to Harry Torrance for clarifying these data. The latter figure is reported in: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667372/SFR69_2017_text.pdf. He makes the general point as follows: 'The upward trend in results has been observable since the 1970s and probably owes more to general trends in the health/wealth of the population and higher expectations of the system, amplified more recently by accountability pressures and "teaching to the test". A classic case of when a measure becomes a target it ceases to be a good measure.' (Private communication with the author).
- 7 For an analysis of the effects of the educational market in the USA see Levin and Belfield (2006), who see no significant effect in raising school achievement.
- 8 I owe this point to Harry Torrance.
- 9 It remains to be seen as to when policymakers will follow this research lead. We may have some time to wait. The children's commissioner, Anne Longfield, had this to say on 26 March 2018: 'Too many children in the north are facing the double whammy of entrenched deprivation and poor schools. They are being left behind. We need to ask why a child from a low-income family in London is three times more likely to go to university than a child who grows up in Hartlepool.' Reported in *The Guardian*, 26 March 2018.
- 10 However, Ofsted changed its policy in 2019 to judge schools on the basis of a broader education and student progress, rather than on the basis of exam results.
- 11 It was an error made by early economists that the methodology adopted by physicists was that of empiricism.
- 12 See Caplan (2018). See also the reviews of this book in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 40 (3): 430–40.

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