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Fast-track leadership development programmes: The new micro-philanthropy of future elites

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Fast-track graduate schemes are an established pathway into corporate and policy elites, and fast-track leadership development schemes are increasingly common entry points to public sector professions. In education, Teach for All is an international network of fast-track leadership development programmes such as Teach for America and Teach First, in England and Wales (Ellis et al. 2015). In England, the fast-track model has been translated across public sector domains with Frontline, in social work, ThinkAhead, in mental health social work, and Police Now, in the police service. This chapter explores the relationships between Teach First and Frontline, an equivalent programme for the social work profession.

Previous research has identified the ways in which Teach for All programmes, are re-articulating teacher professionalism, professional knowledge or are implicated in the broader transformation of education (Smart, et al., 2009; Labaree, 2010; Ellis, et al., 2015). Drawing on Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach, this chapter explores how fast-track leadership development schemes represent complex social issues, such as educational inequality and child death by abuse, as problems to be solved by individuals identified as highly talented and the application of a repertoire of corporate rationalities, discourses and practices. In particular it is the representation of high-calibre individuals – individuals who would not normally have become teachers or social workers – as the solution to complex social that frames their participation in fast-track schemes as a form of new micro-philanthropy, where their participation in public professions and thus their contribution to the public is conditional on re-working and re-culturing professional practices and commitments in line with corporatising processes.

The case is presented using secondary sources, news reports and organisational communications that were posted on Teach First (<http://teachfirst.org.uk>) and Frontline's (<http://thefrontline.org.uk>) websites.

Corporatisation and new philanthropy

This chapter explores processes of corporatisation, where corporate and financial elites are economically and culturally reworking and reconfiguring education in line with corporate interests, rationalities and repertoires of action (Saltman, 2010). A prominent mode of corporate elite intervention in public education is through forms of new philanthropy and venture philanthropy (Saltman 2009a; Saltman, 2010). Informed by established discourses and traditions of philanthropy and charitable giving by wealthy individuals, new philanthropy is characterised by donations that accompanied by the application of corporate practices and methodologies to public domains, such as education, with the aim of realising 'clear and measurable impacts and outcomes from ... "investments" of time and money.' (Ball, 2012: 70) Venture philanthropy extends the application of business rationalities to aggressively realise returns of investments and open new markets for future investments (Scott, 2009).

New philanthropy funds and invests in-and-across policy communities and networks of think tanks, foundations and innovative programmes such as Teach for America and Teach First (Reckhow, 2013; Savage, 2016). These networks are purposed to re-work and re-structure education, re-orienting educational purposes and practices in line with imperatives for national economic competitiveness and working to open up markets for exploitation (Lipman 2014). This economic and cultural re-working of education serves to unsettle public and civic values, purposes and commitments to education and reframe them as private and individual (Saltman, 2009a). A key feature of new philanthropy therefore is that corporate elites give, fund or invest in public education but this contribution is conditional on re-working, re-structuring and re-culturing education in line with elite interests, rationalities and practices.

Fast-track leadership schemes as new micro-philanthropy

In this chapter I seek to extend the focus on new philanthropy from powerful corporate elites of the present to individual prospective members of future elites. Fast-track leadership programmes seek to encourage the so-called 'best and the brightest' into public professions yet this participation in and contribution to the public is *conditional* on restructuring and re-culturing of teaching and social work, indicative of new micro-philanthropy.

Fast-track leadership development programmes represent an alternative to traditional routes into the public sector professions. Defining public sector profession is not an uncomplicated task. Notions of the *public* are complex, contested and subject to continual processes of transformation (Newman and Clarke, 2009). Furthermore, *profession* and *professional* are fluid and contested concepts, reflecting in part the power of one group to extract the status from society (Rueschemeyer, 1983; Randall and Kandiak, 2008). Professionalization conceptualises the processes through which individuals are trained, qualified, inducted and progress into a particular occupational group and develop competence in the relevant nomenclature, theories, tools, roles, responsibilities and values (Loseke and Cahill, 1986). Furthermore, professionals and professionalization function in relation to broader institutional processes that in turn inform 'how social obligations are forged and how a society recreates itself through the practices that comprise systems of exchange.' (Saltman, 2010: 125)

The following sections explore the ways in which Teach First and Frontline represent complex social problems as tractable by so-called high-talent individuals and re-work and restructure professional training and trajectories as conditional for the participation of its participants.

Teach First – Ending educational inequality

In the lineage of Teach for America and Teach for All, Teach First was founded in England in 2002 as a leadership development programme with the mission of ending educational inequality. Teach First is both a registered charity and a company by limited guarantee. By 2016, Teach First employs 490 operations staff, works in 966 schools, and has an annual income of £60.6 million (Teach First, 2015a; Charity Commission, 2016).

Teach First recruits high-calibre participants who train for 6 weeks at a summer school, in addition to on-going leadership development training, and commit to teach for 2 years in a school in a disadvantaged community, in order to improve teacher quality and consequently pupil outcomes. Once the participant completes the two-year programme he or she becomes a Teach First ambassador and a 'Leader for Life' (Teach First 2016a: unpagged), advancing the organisation's mission to end educational inequality while remaining in the education sector or continuing into a career in business, finance, policy or social enterprise.

What's the Problem Represented to Be?

Teach First's mission states that 'no child's educational success is limited by their socio-economic background' (Teach First 2016b: unpagged). Teach First argues that ending educational inequality requires transformational change across society by a 'movement of leaders' constituted by the ambassador network. Quoting Chairman Mao on revolution, the founder and Chief Executive Officer, Brett Wigdortz (2012) explains that this ambassador network will form 'A benevolent tsunami of leadership [that] is about to wash away generations of educational inequity. It's the only thing that can' (unpagged).

Whether Teach First can end educational inequality is an open question. For advocates, Teach First presents a pragmatic and sufficient inducement for high-calibre individuals to try teaching, especially given the evidence suggesting increased pupil outcomes for pupils with Teach First teachers (Allen and Allnutt, 2013). For critics of Teach First the programme drop-out rate after two years varying between 30% and 70% (e.g. NAO, 2015) characterises Teach First as an expensive distraction, disparaging the teaching profession, and reproducing middle-class privilege through claims to 'natural ability' (Smart, et al., 2009). Furthermore, Ellis and colleagues (2015) question Teach First's focus on the classroom and teaching as the site for improving pupil's educational outcomes as this ignores non-school effects, such as societal and structural causes of poverty and disadvantage, as a greater source of variation in children's outcomes (e.g. Berliner, 2014). Indeed, Teach First's mission statement

– that a pupil's background should not affect their educational success – is a laudable aspiration but suggests individualising and neoliberalising discourses and narratives wherein individual success is defined by individual effort and investment (Bailey, 2013). The case that high-talented teachers can end or at least address educational inequality is recurrent but questionable hope for educators the world over (Apple, 2013); nevertheless, it is this claim that legitimates Teach First's location of its participants, to educate but also to learn how to become a leader for life (Bailey, 2013).

Teach First as new micro-philanthropy

As the name implies, in Teach *First* participants agree to teach first and then advance the mission either in the education sector or beyond education. For Teach First the purpose of the participant teaching phase is to hone 'invaluable leadership skills, humility and confidence' to become a 'Leader for Life' (Teach First, 2015c: unpagged). The decisions and opportunities of Teach First participants are structured through the promotion of discourses and training in transformational leadership and innovation and significantly the disruption of professional development in and beyond the teaching profession implicate Teach First in the production of a cadre of neoliberal social entrepreneurs. (Ellis, et al., 2015, p1). The participant phase is temporary and incubatory where the Teach First trainee works to transform the life chances of the pupils they teach in addition to transforming themselves, ranging from and including their employment prospects to their ability to influence societal change through the ambassador network (Ellis, et al., 2015).

For example, Teach First has established an Innovation Unit to support ambassador projects, launching a total of 36 social enterprises and seven free schools in ten years (Teach First, 2015d). The social enterprises are predominantly education focused, including a pupil peer-mentoring support programme (Franklin Scholars) and a social impact investment in education services (Right to Succeed). Within this programme there is also an equivalent fast-track leadership development scheme for social work (Frontline), to which I now turn.

Frontline – Transforming vulnerable lives

Frontline is a social enterprise and fast-track leadership development scheme in social work, with the mission to ‘transform the lives of vulnerable children by recruiting and developing outstanding individuals to be leaders in social work and broader society’ (Frontline, 2015a: unpagged). The scheme began with a 3-year pilot in London and Greater Manchester between 2013-2016, training 102 participants. In 2016, Frontline was commissioned to expand nationally and train 1,000 participants by 2019 (Frontline, 2015b).

Frontline recruits high-calibre individuals into social work for a commitment of two years with the potential of participating in a movement to influence societal change in social work or beyond. Once recruited, participants undergo a 5-week training course at the Frontline Summer Institute where they learn practices such as systemic practice and motivational interviewing. The first year of training is in frontline child protection work in a unit under the supervision of a senior and qualified Consultant Social Worker, following the ‘Hackney Model’ of ‘best practice’ (Cross, Hubbard and Munro, 2010). In the second year of the programme the participant is a qualified social worker, working in children’s services child protection, while developing their leadership skills and studying for a masters qualification. After the two years the participant becomes a Frontline Fellow and advances the mission within or beyond social work.

What’s the Problem Represented to Be?

For Frontline, social work is a profession with an image problem and thus does not appeal to high-flying graduates whose traditional career paths would not normally be in social work but in finance or higher-status professions such as law, journalism or the civil service. For example, a Frontline report questioned the academic background of social work masters courses, that, ‘of the 2,765 people starting social work masters-level courses last year, only five completed their undergraduate degree at Oxford or Cambridge’ (MacAlister, Crehan, Olsen and Clifton 2012: p7). Once social work is ‘rebranded’, high-calibre individuals will be

appointed and trained, becoming 'Outstanding social workers [who] can transform life chances for vulnerable children' (Frontline, 2015c: unpagged).

Frontline's rationale, therefore, neatly associates the dire consequences for children failed by child protection or the care system with the potential for 'life changing' social workers to transform children's life chances. In this the initiative builds on evidence-based sector reviews questioning the quality and capacity of social workers (SWTF, 2009; Munro, 2011; Narey 2014). In addition, arguments for trusting professional judgement and therefore seeking to improve the quality of social worker ability to make decisions (Munro, 2011).

There are, however, alternative perspectives on the problems facing social work and the children and families they work with. High-profile media discourses and processes of children's services transformation in line with performance-accountability logics have worked to blame individual social workers for failing to prevent child death by abuse in high-profile media cases of the tragic and untimely deaths of a series of young children (Franklin and Parton, 1991; Garrett, 2009). The location of blame for 'preventable' child deaths with social work practice has been extensively critiqued (e.g. Munro, 2005). Alternative perspectives encourage understanding and engaging with root causes of family dysfunction and breakdown, in terms of the socio-economic causes of inequality, violence and poverty (Pemberton, et al. 2012; Parton, 2015). Nevertheless, the United Kingdom Conservative government has sought to engender an ideological shift in social education, away from sociological understandings of the societal causes of social problems and towards an emphasis on individual agency (Garrett, 2016). The state currently frames the issue of child protection narrowly in terms of, for example, improving the efficiency of child protection processes in social work practice (e.g. HM Government 2013). Social work operates within the neoliberal authoritarian state, defined in part by the reduction in state benefits and preventative services, and an increase in statutory intervention and the placing children at risk in care (Parton 2015). Finally, the sole emphasis in Frontline training on child protection

practice and single interventions (e.g. systemic practice) risk narrowing and replacing more complex and critical forms of social work (Higgins, Popple and Crichton 2016).

Frontline as new micro-philanthropy

The Frontline leadership development programme has re-designed social work education. Frontline functions to recruit and train high-calibre individuals into social work. News articles on Frontline often feature students at elite universities, such as Charley from Oxford University and Charlotte from Edinburgh University, who would not normally have applied to become a social worker but changed their mind on learning about Frontline and they decided to try social work (Brindle 2015). The compression, re-culturing and reorientation of entry in social work can be understood as the conditions on which participation in the scheme is presented by Frontline and participants' acceptance is structured.

The compression of the training period prior to entering social work is foundational to fast-track schemes. Frontline participants spend 5 weeks at its Summer Institute whereas masters-level courses typically involve 1 year of study in a university before 1 year spent on placement. Frontline's academic lead, Professor Donald Forrester, explained the rationale for a compressed training process is expressly to present a competitive offer to high-calibre graduates:

In an ideal world a five-year qualification would be fantastic, but we have to be realistic about the options open to graduates and the funding available for social work education. The most academically able have a lot of options, so we need to make this as attractive as possible for them. (McGregor 2013: unpagged)

A second condition is the re-culturing of social work practice so that social work becomes a leadership profession. The attempt to re-make social work as a leadership profession was recognised as controversial within the social work profession (e.g. Forrester, 2013). Frontline trains and positions its participants to perform numerous forms of leadership, both in the

participant phase to ‘constructively “disrupt” and challenge within their systems’ and then ‘as *a driving force in participants’ lives wherever their journey takes them.*’ (Frontline 2016: unpagged)

The third condition is that participants join the programme under the obligation to commit to working in social work for only 2 years, before advancing the mission within or beyond social work.

Fast-tracks to elite transformation

Fast-track leadership development programmes, such as Teach First and Frontline, are indicative of re-professionalising projects, supported by and interpolated with corporate elites and corporatising projects.

The claim that corporate, and indeed policy and social elites, supported the emergence of and continue to work with Teach First and Frontline is not controversial. Teach First emerged from an engagement between Charles, Prince of Wales, headteachers and business leaders to address the poor performance of inner-city London schools. The global management consultancy McKinsey and Company produced a report identifying Teach For America as a potential approach for recruiting high-calibre individuals and locating them in the inner-city schools. Brett Wigdortz, a McKinsey employee, became the Teach First founder (Wigdortz 2012). Teach First lists amongst its corporate sponsors some of the richest and most prominent financial, industrial and charitable organisations in the world, from Google to Goldman Sachs. Frontline’s ‘founding partners’ include Big Change, Boston Consulting Group, The Queen’s Trust and The Credit Suisse EMEA Foundation and ARK – an international educational charity founded by hedge fund financiers and with 31 Academy schools in the UK, (Frontline, 2015d). There is a case that for these corporations, Teach First and Frontline functions as a scheme for corporate elite recruitment, producing corporate ready, transformational leaders.

The emphasis on the production of network of leaders, a cadre of elite neoliberal social entrepreneurs (Labaree 2010), however, suggests a more ambitious corporate elite project in re-professionalising public professionals and reworking notions of the public in line with elite interests and worldviews. A significant foundation of the ways in which Teach First and Frontline represent complex social problems is that they are tractable by the agency of an aggregate of individual transformational individuals, oriented by a mission to end educational inequality. These representations arguably align with corporate elite interests in that they are individualising, depoliticising and work to foreclose the necessity of, for example, structural attempts to redistribute wealth (Dean 2016). In addition, fast-track leadership development schemes inhere and promote a repertoire of discourses, practices and ideals from the corporate world, including the corporate ideal of the transformational leader (Saltman, 2010), a corporate view of the 'war for talent' (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001: p1), and orientations to disruptive innovation opening up new sites and spaces for investment and marketization (Lipman, 2014).

The representation of social transformation through the individual agency of high-calibre individuals also extends and seeks to entrench corporate rationalities, practices and values by reworking entry points into public professions as a form of new micro-philanthropy. Teach First but especially Frontline seek to encourage high-calibre individuals to become teachers or social workers instead of the expected choices of entering higher-status or better-remunerated careers. It is important that in both programmes participants receive payment while training. However, inspired by the mission of ending educational inequality, the high-calibre individual in choosing Teach First and teaching or Frontline and social work is – at least in the short-term – foregoing a higher rate of pay or increased status from becoming, for example, a financier, barrister or journalist. Thus this counter-factual *loss* becomes a *gift* to the public (Saltman, 2010), and a form of new micro-philanthropy.

We can understand new micro-philanthropy as the conditional transformation of professional training and trajectories so that high-talent individuals will join public sector professions. The rationale is founded on statistical evidence that high-talent individuals, judged by attendance at elite universities, do not become teachers or social workers. The offer to become a teacher or social worker is therefore structured to suit the interests and preferences of the *best and the brightest*. In Frontline professional training is compressed in time, practice is re-cultured around narratives and discourses of transformational leadership, and commitments and obligations to a profession are reduced to 2 years with the opportunity to join an elite network of Frontline Fellows.

It is the opportunity to join Teach First and Frontline as a site and process of personal and leadership development that is perhaps the greatest and most seductive condition of new micro-philanthropy. There are, of course, many possible motivations and trajectories for prospective Frontline participants. Nevertheless, fast-track programmes re-structure participation in professions, unsettle commitments, re-orient professional trajectories, and open opportunities to engage in forms of neoliberal social entrepreneurship for participants.

The origin of Frontline is indicative of the potential dynamics of the Teach First ambassador network, a movement of leaders oriented to ending educational inequality. Josh MacAlister, a Teach First ambassador co-founded Frontline, with ARK – an international educational charity funded by financiers. MacAlister can be understood as quintessentially the type of transformational, mission-focused leader that Teach First aims to produce and support as part of its ambassador network and movement of leaders. MacAlister's trajectory is remarkable, from a Teach First participant to successfully co-founding and becoming the Chief Executive of Frontline are indicative of the potential benefits of locating high-calibre individuals in leadership development programmes.

If participating in fast-track leadership schemes there is a case that the capacity to transform oneself into a transformational individual and lead processes of societal change may remain

within structures of corporatising elite structures. For example, Frontline translates and adapts the representations of complex social problems from Teach First to social work. Teach First represents the problem of ending educational inequality as possible through its network of ambassadors. Frontline is founded on the belief that transformational individuals working in social work and beyond can create societal change. Both programmes emphasise the transformative power of individuals, and therefore individualising and neoliberalising narratives of social processes and narrow forms of professional practice. The adaptation and translation of corporate practices, rationalities and repertoires of action such as transformational leadership from education to social work in part explains how Frontline has secured the support of financial and corporate elites.

Conclusion

New philanthropy and new micro-philanthropy are argued to represent an intersection between corporate elites and the corporatising project and the ways in which so-called high-talent individuals are positioned in relation to participating in public sector professions and contributing to the public. No one would sensibly argue for less talented teachers or social workers. Fast-track leadership development schemes such as Teach First and Frontline, however, represent complex social problems as tractable by the agency of high-talent individuals to transform society, whether working in education or social work or in business and finance. It is the claimed potential of these individuals that would become 'leaders for life' but not teachers social workers *for life* that materially and symbolically locates their participation in the programme as a philanthropic act. Yet, in line with a corporatising project, the contributions of elite, powerful or high-talent individuals to the public are conditional on and conditioning in seeking to re-work, re-culture and re-structure the public and public professions in line with corporatising interests, rationalities and repertoires of action.