
Social exclusion: licence through ambiguity

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss some of the implications for state education that arise from what I argue is the ambiguous and flexible nature of the term 'social exclusion'. I briefly consider the conceptual relationship between social exclusion, poverty and deprivation. Using the metaphor of story, I explore the operation of the term in the New Labour project, with particular attention to some of its implications for education. In the final section of the paper I consider some issues arising from New Labour's social inclusion imperative in relation to educational policy and practice in a Scottish context. The potential of a state-sponsored discourse of exclusion to influence the conceptual backdrop to teachers' reflections is briefly explored. Such considerations would seem relevant to other contexts in which the educational state realigns social policy within the margins of a new political narrative.

Political discourse as narrative

One way of conceptualising political discourse is through the metaphor of story or narrative. The notion of a political narrative is not an attempt in any way to trivialise political discourse but has utility in its ability to foreground the conscious work of building and maintaining a representation of the social world. Political parties tell us a story. Through their story they aim to achieve many purposes, not least of all the maximisation of voter share. Such narratives must be descriptive, evaluative and orientative; they must signal priorities and positions across a continuum of issues and concerns.

What is not included in such narrative is also significant. What a story obfuscates or omits often reflects a particular view of the world, or a combination of ideological and strategic thinking aimed at electoral success. Such narratives are also dynamic. A representation of the social world cannot be fixed, permanently anchored; it must be maintained, defended and expanded in the face of changing circumstances and unforeseen events.

In the politics of a 24-hour media society it would seem hard to contest the need for any credible narrative to address such themes as economic stability and prosperity, social cohesion, identity, social well-being and the provision of essential services. In late modernity, within the narratives of nation states, the positioning of national education projects has become an essential thematic for both internal and external audiences. The educational dimensions of such narratives ultimately have implications at the level of practice and policy implementation, some of which I will explore in the final section of this paper.

A further defining feature is that such discursive constructions are aimed at a mass audience, and mainly delivered through the intermediary of a media who, in turn, are able to place a layer of representation on the narrative through the processes of selection and presentation. The business of politics can be viewed through the story metaphor as a process of struggle to achieve the dominance of one narrative in competition with others. Having succeeded in gaining ascendancy, the effort of the narrators must then focus on holding onto primacy within the discursive arena.

The work of narrative is therefore central to the political task of gaining and exercising power. The effort of narrative creation and maintenance serves to spotlight language as the very medium of struggle. The selection and use of language is the craft that underpins successful narration; ideas, concepts and metaphors must be chosen like different building materials and arranged to form a coherent representational edifice.

Social exclusion

The architects of New Labour's narrative following the 1997 UK election¹ selected the concept of 'social exclusion' as a central part of the foundation on which the intellectual structure of New Labour's social policy would subsequently rest. The social exclusion concept made its entry into the main arena of British political discourse first in August² and then more fully in December³, following New Labour's election victory of May 1997.

Fairclough (2000, p 52) highlights the significance of such events as the first manifestation of a concept that would be subsequently put to work extensively in the New Labour narrative. Fairclough's pinpointing of the debut of social exclusion illustrates the dynamic construction of New Labour's narrative. This implies an active decision at one point in time to adopt and deploy the exclusion concept by those within the party elite with a locus in constructing and sustaining its narrative.

The detection of such discursive decisions raises the question of motive in relation to the selection and presentation of the constituents of a particular political discourse. Why then did New Labour, in common with other social democratic governments (Gray 2000), opt for social exclusion as opposed to some combination of other related ideas such as poverty, deprivation, disadvantage or underclass?

The 'social exclusion' term and its associated forms have become well established in the language of New Labour since their general election victory and have began to appear more and more in the official statements, priorities and objectives of public sector organisations. This increasing proliferation in government discourse would suggest that the exact meaning of this term is evident and not problematic. This assumption must be contrasted with the views of researchers working in the field of poverty and social exclusion. Even a cursory inspection of the literature reveals a lack of agreement over the meaning attached to this term: 'As yet there appear to be no unique, formal definitions of social exclusion that would command general assent' (Room 1995, p 235).

There is a tendency among some writers on social policy to use the terms 'social exclusion' and 'poverty' synonymously, whereas many of those involved in research and engaging with the technical issues in this field would argue that the notions are related, but certainly not one and the same concept. Atkinson and Hills (1998) observe that the meaning of the term is ambiguous, but this has not been an impediment to its widespread usage. They speculate that the term has become established precisely due to this ambiguous element that permits its flexible use across divergent positions. Atkinson and Hills go on to propose three elements as essential to any definition of social exclusion: relativity, agency and dynamics.

Social exclusion must have a relative aspect built into its meaning. To be excluded can only make sense in relation to exclusion from a particular society or subgroup within that society, in a particular cultural and historical context. Exclusion can be the experience of an individual, but is often experienced by groups or whole communities.

The notion of agency relates to the idea that the act of exclusion is transacted through an individual, group or institution within the society. Atkinson and Hills (1998) illustrate this conception with the example of individuals excluded from work as a result of the actions of other workers, unions and employers or through government agency. An individual can also be the agent of his or her own exclusion from the labour market through non-participation.

Through the idea of dynamics, the dimension of time is included in the conceptualisation of social exclusion. Exclusion occurs not just because an individual is without employment at one point in time, but also because there is little prospect of gaining employment in the future. This can also include the notion of inter-generational exclusion, where exclusion is passed down through generations of families and across communities.

Deprivation is an attempt to map out the extent of need or deficiency in terms of material and social resources. Low income, for example, becomes more detrimental when combined with poor housing, health problems and a lack of social services. Deprivation indicators are used as a means to capture and quantify in some way the multi-faceted nature of material and social disadvantage, together with inequalities in services and amenities.

Leaving aside disputes as to whether poverty should be measured in absolute or relative terms, some relative notions of poverty suggest that there is shared conceptual ground between conceptions of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. Townsend's (1979, p 31) definition of poverty is one example we can consider:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.

Duffy (1995, p 5), however, locates social exclusion in terms of having clear blue conceptual water in relation to notions of poverty:

... a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political, and cultural life, and in some characterisations, alienation and distance from the mainstream society.

Room (1995, p 243), discussing the conceptualisation of notions of social exclusion, suggests that they have a:

... focus primarily on relational issues: in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power. Social exclusion is the process of becoming detached from the organisations and communities of which the society is composed and from the rights and obligations that they embody. These communities may, on the one hand, involve particularistic loyalties – to fellow workers in a trade union, to a local neighbourhood, to a professional organisation; or they may, on the other hand, involve membership of a national community, as expressed, for example, in the egalitarian social rights of modern welfare systems.

In considering social exclusion and notions of poverty it is possible to identify two concepts that are distinct, and yet possess considerable overlap in the frameworks from which they are constructed. At a simplistic level, notions of poverty could be said to be concerned with a shortage of resources, particularly disposable income, while social exclusion engages in wider issues of participation in the principal social institutions and structures of a society and the denial of rights of citizenship – whether civil, social or political.

Room (1995) attributes such differences in approach as reflecting the different intellectual traditions that have produced divergent paradigms of research and thought. Poverty research has its roots in a 19th century Anglo-Saxon, liberal vision of society. Social exclusion, on the other hand, is located as developing from the conservative and social democratic traditions of continental Europe.

New labour and the exclusion concept

The days following the 1997 election victory were characterised by almost daily policy announcements, as New Labour politicians articulated ‘on message’ using language littered with metaphors that had them ‘hitting the ground running’, ‘knowing what they are about’ and ‘motoring ahead’. Blair⁴ signposted the place of social exclusion in New Labour’s project by launching the Social Exclusion Unit in December 1997. This policy unit, based in the cabinet office, was to have the role of tackling social exclusion and coordinating efforts to combat social exclusion across all government departments. It was charged with bringing together agencies, professionals, experts and the voluntary sector in this cause, and was to be an example of what New Labour rhetoric would call ‘joined up thinking’. Education was an obvious facet to be located within any attempt to manage such a policy strategy.

The term the ‘Third Way’ has become a signifier for the collective political narrative of New Labour. The Third Way element could also be described as a coherence-promoting theme across the complex story that New Labour has sought to communicate.

The Third Way stands for a modernised social democracy, passionate in its commitment to social justice, and the goals of the centre-left, but flexible, innovative and forward-looking in the means to achieve them. (Blair 1998)

Anthony Giddens (1998) is commonly identified as a guiding hand for the architects of the New Labour project. The concept of social exclusion is central to Giddens’ articulation of Third Way politics. Having said this, it is important not to simplistically equate Giddens’ thinking with New Labour’s project. There has, for example, been no attempt by New Labour to constrain elite self-exclusion (Young 1999). What the use of the social exclusion concept permits and facilitates for New Labour is a movement from a position of equality – the reduction of a social inequalities stance in the narrative of Old Labour⁵ – to this new flexible term, which allows greater scope in narration.

Giddens argues that in the context of globalisation there is no possibility of electoral success on a platform of redistribution. He therefore sets out a role for government in redistributing what he calls ‘possibilities’. Whereas the discourse of Old Labour painted a canvas of the social world marked by inequality, and therefore remedied by some shape or form of redistribution, social exclusion in the narrative of New Labour allows a range of treatments to be prescribed for social inequality that do not foreground or draw attention to questions concerning the origins of social inequalities or redistribution as a counter to inequality.

Social exclusion at the bottom is not the same as poverty. The majority of those who are poor at any one time would not be ranked among the excluded. Exclusion contrasts with being ‘poor’, ‘deprived’ or ‘on a low income’ in several ways. It is not a matter of differing from others in degree –

having fewer resources – but of not sharing in opportunities that the majority have. In the case of the worst urban areas or neighbourhoods, exclusion can take the form of a physical separation from the rest of society. In other instances it may mean lack of access to normal labour market opportunities. (Giddens 2000, p 105)

In the Giddens formulation of social exclusion it is possible to clearly discern a discontinuity among those at the bottom of society in terms of income and disadvantage. The excluded are not necessarily the poorest of the poor. Simply living on a low income, to the extent of being in poverty, does not confer the status of being excluded. Individuals may live lives characterised by multiple deprivation – but again, this is not the same as being excluded.

A defining element in Giddens' conceptualisation is the operation of 'opportunities'. In his construction of Third Way sociology, the two central opportunities are employment and education (Giddens 1998). This Third Way model of society presupposes that citizens can be poor – technically in poverty – but have access to civil and political rights, have a way into wider social institutions and have a hope of some future participation in education or labour markets. The excluded, in comparison, are marooned on an island off the coast of the 'strong, active community of citizens' (Blair 1997), separated by having no future prospect of rejoining the mainland. Giddens' solution for their release is to construct a temporary bridge by the redistribution of opportunities. Notably, Giddens follows his discussion of exclusion by approving the New Democrat formulation that welfare should offer a hand-up and not a hand-out (Giddens 2000, p 106).

Discourses of exclusion

For interpreters of political narratives, Levitas (1999) offers a useful analysis of the discourse surrounding social exclusion in a UK context from which she identifies three distinctive discourses (see Table I). Each of Levitas' discourses is differentiated by its understanding of the origins of exclusion and the implicit response or orientation that it contains, signifying the necessary course of action required for its reduction or remedy.

This analysis highlights for us the discursive flexibility of the exclusion concept enabled through its ambiguous nature. What then does the New Labour narrative reveal when examined using a framework of Redistributionist, Moral Underclass and Social Integrationist discourse?

Table I: Levitas' three discourses of social exclusion (Levitas 1998, p 7)

Discourse type	Characteristics
Redistributionist discourse (RED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understands poverty as the main cause of exclusion, and uses increases in benefits to reduce poverty levels • constructs citizenship as opposite to exclusion • is not confined to material inequality, but critically highlights inequality across themes of social, political and cultural participation • attends to unearthing the processes that give rise to inequality
Moral underclass discourse (MUD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constructs the roots of exclusion as located in the cultural deficiencies of the excluded, implying a response that is underpinned by efforts to engineer cultural change • draws upon underclass discourse and cultural explanations of poverty
Social integrationist discourse (SID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on the detrimental outcomes from a lack of participation in mainstream society and its institutions and practices • views participation in the labour market as fundamental to integration • integrates individuals detached from society by moving them away from unemployment and into paid work

The three discourses identified by Levitas are idealised and do not claim to reflect the complexity of political discourse. It is possible to point to instances of political narration that conform closely to RED, MUD or SID. In actuality, political discourse is more often characterised by some combination of the discourses above, with the social exclusion concept acting as a 'shifter' or slider between them.

Significantly, the analysis of both Levitas (1998) and Fairclough (2000) present New Labour's discourse as primarily consisting of a combination of SID and MUD. This offers some insight into the function that social exclusion plays in the intellectual foundations of New Labour's project. The scarcity of RED exposes New Labour's retreat from egalitarian aspirations of equality – ie equality of outcome, which is characteristic of Old Labour – towards the conception of equality in terms of opportunity (see Brown 1996).

Process or status?

Considering two of Atkinson and Hills' dimensions of exclusion – relativity and agency – spotlights another aspect of the discursive flexibility contained within the concept of social exclusion. Through the construction of discourses of exclusion, it is possible to present exclusion as a status relative to some datum or as a process that foregrounds causes or agents of exclusion (Berghman 1995). For example, we could say that helping the unemployed back into work is a remedy for exclusion; or that due to the shortage of suitable employment, people experience exclusion.

This capacity of the exclusion concept to slide between exclusion as social status or process is important in understanding its use in policy narratives. Here we can draw links to Levitas' discourses. SID and MUD tend to construct exclusion in terms of status or condition, while obfuscating considerations of agency. RED contains a relationship to critical social analysis, with a focus on agency. In common with the prevalence of SID and MUD in New Labour's policy narratives, social exclusion is present within RED discourse, predominantly in the guise of status or condition.

A consequence of New Labour's adoption of an integrationist/status position within the construction of a state narrative of exclusion is the outworking of this logic across social policy making. Education is not immune from such logic, orientating the educational state toward the prevention of the future exclusion of young people from poor communities by an agenda of zeal for basic educational attainment. This could be contrasted with a logic that centres process, recognising young peoples' origins in communities transversed by processes of exclusion, and eliciting an educational policy response shaped within the boundaries of a RED perspective.

A comprehensive exploration of the conceptual relationship between social exclusion and poverty is outside the scope of this paper. The short discussion above may serve, however, to indicate that conceptual clarity or common meaning must not be taken for granted when encountering this concept across fields of discourse. The discussion above has drawn on academic literature in terms of theorising and scholarship surrounding poverty, but it must be noted that our main concern is toward an exploration of the concept as used in New Labour's political discourse. The idealised interests and needs of the academy in terms of language must be contrasted with the work of language within political discourse – the former with a focus on clarity, precision, insight and understanding; and the latter weaving concepts, ideas and impressions into a complex narrative that can gather support and stand the strain of political contest.

A distinctly Scottish narrative?

The restoration of a Scottish parliament⁶ has created, in narrative terms, a new tension. This tension arises from the threat posed to the coherence of New Labour's Westminster discourse by any distinctively local narrative developed by the party in Scotland. The Social Exclusion Unit has a remit for

England and Wales, and New Labour's policy stance toward such areas as education, health and housing now lie within the province of the Scottish parliament. In the Scottish context, 'social justice' and 'poverty' are more centred in the policy discourse of the New Labour-dominated Scottish Executive⁷. The extent to which this language difference is constructed to resonate with Old Labour sentiments and the constituencies that characterise Labour's Scottish electorate remains an open question. Theories of social justice are contested, but a distinction should be made from any ideal of inclusion – indeed, aspirations of equality and inclusion can come into conflict. Gray (2000, p 22) asserts that to equate the two is an error;

Equality and inclusion are distinct values. Often they overlap, but sometimes they are competitors. Policies that promote social inclusion are commonly understood as somehow necessarily advancing an ideal of equality. This is a mistake. Sometimes they do, but that is an unintended consequence. Supporters of inclusion do not pursue an ideal of egalitarian justice, but an ideal of common life.

The inclusion ideal reaches out toward social cohesion and this may at times occasion a reduction of inequalities, but that is not its main concern. Other policies aimed at inclusion may offend against equality; for example, creating incentives for an elite to stay within public services. In 1999 the Scottish Executive⁷ published a policy statement entitled: 'Social Justice ... a Scotland where everyone matters'. It presented the '... vision, our targets and milestones for delivering social justice'. Notably absent within the document is any definition or discussion of the nature of social justice. The construction of social justice underpinning the paper is implicitly defined through the targets that the paper sets out for its achievement (see Table II).

Table II: Summary of targets for social justice (Social Justice, Scottish Executive 1999)

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximise educational attainment for all young people• Ensure all 19 year-olds are in work, training or education• Achieve full employment, and encourage national participation in lifelong learning• Take older people out of poverty and improve their quality of life• Reduce inequalities between communities, and improve local environments |
|---|

Table III: Aims of inclusion strategy (Social Inclusion, Scottish Executive 1999)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all children, regardless of their social backgrounds, have the best possible start in life • Ensure there are opportunities to work for all individuals who are able to do so • Ensure that individuals who are unable to work or are beyond the normal working age have a decent quality of life • Ensure that all individuals are enabled and encouraged to participate to the maximum of their potential |
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All of the targets, it could be argued, fit comfortably into the UK-wide social exclusion narrative of New Labour, and it would seem possible to substitute any references to ‘social justice’ with ‘social exclusion’ without any disruption to this document’s coherence. Another interesting dimension of the targets is the emphasis on education; involvement of children, young adults and all citizens is the new model of the good society. The discourse of the document is overtly SID, with traces of RED in relation to children and older people.

In addition to this policy paper, the Executive published Social inclusion – opening the door to a better Scotland that same year. This policy document set out the Scottish Executive’s position on social exclusion and its strategy for creating inclusion. The aims of this report (see Table III) when viewed in parallel with the targets for social justice suggest that the social justice discourse of New Labour in Scotland is more rhetorical than substantive, and that such policies are informed by themes of participation in work, education and civic society in common with New Labour’s UK-wide discourse on exclusion. The subsequent output of inclusion-related papers, briefings and research contracts from the Scottish Executive serves to underline the dominance of this concept in relation to social policy.

The discussion above raises important issues in relation to education. Such issues take on particular significance to those with a commitment to reducing existing social inequalities through state systems of education. In the final section of the paper I consider three issues arising from New Labour’s social inclusion imperative in relation to policy and practice in a Scottish context.

Education and inclusion: the depth of ambition

New Labour’s education policy in relation to exclusion is best described as preventative, arising from consideration of the relationship between low levels of attainment, unemployment, poverty and delinquency. Historically, educational attainment has been a class-mediated phenomenon as consistently evidenced in the sociological literature (Burgess 1999). Within a Third Way conception of social exclusion, more space for tolerating difference and structural inequality would seem to exist. The allocation of

additional resources to schools that serve poor communities could be seen in terms of redistribution, or as an inclusive policy aimed at protecting those most at risk from future exclusion, or as some combination of both (Table IV).

Such a policy must be examined closely, focusing on how it will impact on existing patterns of inequality. Any success in preventing exclusion and creating opportunity would conceivably overlap, but the breadth and depth of such a project is a central consideration. Should the focus be on inoculating those most at risk from exclusion; or should a more ambitious policy project be planned, to comprehensively address disadvantage and differences in opportunity? This is an open question in the UK context, and the answer must emerge in the not-too-distant future when funding, projects and initiatives can be analysed and evaluations made.

Table IV: Government initiatives: Social inclusion – opening the door to a better Scotland (Scottish Executive, 1999)

Key New Labour Scottish initiatives	
Community schools	This was a pilot project that allocated additional finance to a small number of schools in each local authority over a period of three years. The schools, serving children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, were to be developed along the line of the American ‘Full Service’ school. It included the addition of staff and the integration of social work and health professionals.
Early intervention	Local authorities were allocated additional funding within a framework of policy goals and encouraged to develop approaches to early education that would increase and support attainment in children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
After-school learning/study support	Funding was allocated to local authorities to provide after-school support for pupils. This generally took the form of additional classes, support with homework, and learning projects.
Alternatives to exclusion (from school)	Policy pressure was applied to local government to discourage the practice of temporarily excluding pupils from school as a response to indiscipline. Schools were encouraged to seek alternative sanctions and to develop in-school approaches to temporary exclusion.

Education and inclusion: the standards imperative

Policies are enacted or translated into some tangible form within a particular context in institutions such as schools. Education policy driven by an inclusionary project will shape the background to practice within a school, as will other policies. Concern for social inclusion is one policy alongside others. In the complex social reality of educational institutions, differing policy objectives and aims can generate conflict and competition in the actualisation and outworking of their demands. The aggressive pursuit of a

'standards agenda' by New Labour has created a set of institutional goals and pressures that, it can be argued, do not sit harmoniously with inclusionary ambitions for state education.

The standards agenda has its origins in the influence of what Ball (1999) has called 'global policy paradigms'. This international discourse heralds the end of economic nationalism and the arrival of the global economy; capital no longer has any respect for national borders and will flow to regions where the skills and education base match its requirements. In this context, flexibility and employability are key concerns in economic prosperity. This neo-liberal discourse places a new premium on international comparisons of educational attainment. National policies must be understood in this context, reflecting New Labour's concern with competing successfully in a 'knowledge economy' and in contributing to social cohesion through employability and preparedness for participation in paid work.

The creation of individual learning accounts, initiatives on lifelong learning and a university for industry are policies that focus on producing a skilled and flexible workforce. In the Thatcher project, education was underscored due to its perceived economic importance, with the needs of industry and employers an important touchstone. With the New Labour project, this economic dimension is strengthened further by the concern for meeting the demands of what is perceived as a new economic condition signalled within its narrative by such language as 'knowledge economy', 'knowledge-driven economy' and 'information age'.

Two broad themes could be suggested as driving New Labour's objectives in education: what could be called, for want of a better expression, 'the social cost of educational failure dimension'; and 'the economic supply side dimension'. The economic theme is by far the most dominant and has given birth to the standards agenda, with its essence of 'performativity': control, targets, league tables, national testing, reviews of teacher education and a focus on literacy and numeracy.

At the level of the institution, this raft of output-focused policies has unleashed a set of forces that draw resources, time and effort into maximising achievement in examinations and other recognised performance indicators. Performativity (Lyotard 1979) pressures generate disincentives for schools in relation to pupils with behavioural difficulties or special educational needs, and create a temptation to invest effort and resources in moving pupils on the edge of target-validated achievement up to approved attainment levels. If credentials are a means to greater social mobility, performativity may in all likelihood widen patterns of inequality and so militate against any minor theme of inclusion. Research is needed in order to map the outcomes and consequences of such policy conflict on existing patterns of inequality.

Education and inclusion: teacher education

The notion of the 'reflective practitioner' (Schon 1983) has gained ground across the discourses of various caring professions, including teaching. This presupposes an intellectual landscape that provides reference for any attempt

to make sense of the complex dynamic world of the classroom, school and local community. The role of language as constitutive of such a landscape is apparent. The appropriation of any personal framework for reflection by the teacher is conceivably influenced by the experience of pre-service teacher education.

A focus on reflection foregrounds the role of language within the academy and in theorising the work of the teacher. Practitioners are encouraged to observe, gather evidence, reflect, and develop their practice using informal and formal theoretical frameworks. The calculated formation of the presence, or absence, of a critical dimension to reflection is a contested question. Should teachers confine their reflection to the classroom or within the perimeter of the school grounds, or should they be encouraged to engage with wider historical, political, economic, social and ethical questions?

If teachers operate exclusively within a set of horizons delineated by the dominant discourse, it follows that their frame of reference will in many respects be prescribed. The nature and curriculum of initial teacher education is contested and has been impacted by the ideological ambitions of the Thatcher and Blair projects. If Third Way politics involves what Peters (2001) has called a project of 'cultural reconstruction', language choice can be viewed as constituting a narrative through which power is exercised in the service of such goals.

If teachers allow the discourse of the Third Way to set the parameters, dimensions and limits of reflection – and therefore engagement – this would suggest the closing down and obfuscation of issues and factors that could be argued from another position in the discursive field as signifying dimensions of exclusion. Curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, the distribution of resources, school management and organisation could all conceivably act as agents of exclusion. Such avenues of enquiry are expressly opened up by conceiving of social exclusion as process, as distinct from exclusion as status or condition. Such questions will continue to raise dilemmas for those involved in initial teacher education.

Through the representation of exclusion that is constructed in the New Labour narrative, the concept of social exclusion is tamed, rendered manageable and put to work. Given the space for a wider conceptualisation, there is conceivably significant potential for this concept to bite its handlers. The New Labour project has its own internal logic and coherence. Differing conceptions of exclusion expose its internal tensions and illuminate contradictions and omissions. Those with a commitment to increasing the advantages gained from state education for children and young people from our poorest communities must commend the existence of a social inclusion and social justice dimension within the New Labour project.

This provides a common point of departure in exploring how best to overcome disadvantage and reduce structural injustice. However, optimism for this task must be tempered by the knowledge that New Labour's attachment to the dominant neo-liberal form of market capitalism casts a long

and deep shadow over any social policy aspirations towards those whose lives are marked by poverty, deprivation or exclusion.

The shift in centre-left parties from advocacy of social-democratic equality to the defence of social inclusion may have helped resolve some difficult issues in electoral strategy. The ideal of inclusion may be more philosophically defensible than social-democratic egalitarianism. Nevertheless, inclusion has no advantage over equality as a political response to the social and political dilemmas of globalisation. Social inclusion and market globalisation are opposing political ideas. It is not difficult to envisage circumstances in which recognition of this is made unavoidable. (Gray 2000, p 35)

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Notes

1. The Labour Party won the 1997 UK general election with a landslide victory. This was in sharp contrast to the result in the 1992 election, which heard predictions from some political commentators to the effect that the Conservative Party would remain in power well into the next millennium and that Britain had in effect become a one-party state. The scale and extent of the change in the political landscape, which took place between 1992 and 1997, should not be underestimated. The reasons why New Labour won so convincingly are to be found in an examination of the fortunes and activities of both parties in the preceding years. They include many factors such as the Conservative Party's lack of popularity, its loss of reputation for economic management, its disunity over Europe, and a procession of scandals and allegations of sleaze. On the Labour side, such critical factors as the 'Blair effect' (see Note 4), party reforms and the policy portfolio constructed by the 'modernisers' contributed to Labour success (see Norton 1998).
2. Speech given by Peter Mandelson on 14 August 1997 at the Fabian Society.
3. Speech given by Tony Blair on Monday, 8 December 1997, at the Stockwell Park School, Lambeth, regarding the launch of the Government's new Social Exclusion Unit.
4. Tony Blair's election to the UK leadership of the Labour party (1994) following the unexpected death of John Smith is a key

element in understanding the repositioning of Labour. The subsequent transformation of the Labour Party into to an attractive alternative for government has been termed by some political analysts as the 'Blair effect'. Blair gathered around him a group of 'modernisers' who became central within a project of party reform that led to comprehensive electoral success in the UK elections of 1997. This project centred around an acceptance of many of the ideas and reforms of the Thatcher project, strong central party discipline, the symbolic abolition of clause 4 (the party's commitment to public ownership), a distancing of the party from the trade unions, the personal appeal of Blair himself, and the adoption of a highly sophisticated approach to media management and attention to presentation.

5. The term 'Old Labour' has come to be used to describe the policies, political positions and alliances within the party that still hold to such positions, which predated the emergence of New Labour. Old Labour is associated with the politics and beliefs of the post-war social democratic consensus connected to the centre left or moderate left.
6. The first Scottish Parliament for almost 300 years was elected on 6 May 1999. As part of its election manifesto in 1997, New Labour had proposed a programme of constitutional reforms including a referendum on a Scottish Parliament. The Parliament was to have devolved powers over such areas of health, education, criminal justice, housing and local government. Other areas would be reserved to the Westminster UK Government (known as reserved matters) – for example defence, foreign policy, welfare.
7. The Scottish Executive is the Scottish equivalent of the Westminster cabinet in taking government decisions and policy making on devolved matters. The Executive is comprised of a first minister and a cabinet.

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