

Title: Challenging School Reform from Below: Is Leadership the Missing Link in Mobilization Theory?

Howard Stevenson, School of Education, University of Nottingham.

Abstract

This article presents research relating to the experiences of union and community-based campaigns that have sought to challenge the establishment of academy and free schools in England. Such schools are removed from local government control and are seen as a defining element of the neoliberal restructuring of public education. The research draws on social movement literature, and particularly mobilization theory, to better understand the dynamics of such campaigns and the contexts in which they can either thrive or wither. In the article I argue that mobilization theory provides a useful framework for such analysis but that it fails to adequately reflect the importance of individual agency and the role of leadership at a local level. Leadership of such campaigns is often assumed by individuals reluctantly, and often defies traditional descriptions of ‘leadership’, but must be recognised if mobilization theory is to avoid being overly deterministic.

Key words: teacher unions; social movements; school reform; community organizing.

Address for correspondence: Howard Stevenson

howard.stevenson@nottingham.ac.uk

Introduction

For over a quarter of a century England has been in the vanguard of the neoliberal restructuring of public education. Since at least the late 1980s England has provided a test bed for many of the more radical experiments in education reform (Jones, 2002; Tomlinson, 2005; Ball, 2013; Mortimore, 2014). This became particularly apparent during the period of the 2010-2015 Coalition government during which time the pace and scale of change was unprecedented – as one senior local government official commented ‘*It’s a revolution, and it’s happening right now*’ (Stevenson et al., 2012). Perhaps the most substantial and far-reaching area of reform has been the promotion of academy and free schools as “independent state schools” that sit outside of the local government structures and accounting for more than half of the secondary schools in England by the time of the 2015 general election. Such schools can be seen as central to the long-term commitment to reposition public education as a marketized good and open to private capital investment and accumulation (Simon, 1987; Ball, 2007).

As a project of privatization the goal of converting all schools to become academies (DfE, 2010) is controversial and has been contested. Although key features of the commitment to academies has been the subject of national cross-party consensus, the experience of trying to drive through wholesale “academization” has often met with community-based resistance (Yarker, 2009).

This article focuses on the experiences of those who have sought to develop localized “anti-academies” campaigns. It draws on social movement literature, and in particular mobilization theory (Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1988; Kelly, 1998), to develop

an understanding of how, and under what circumstances, such collective mobilizations develop. By attending to the circumstances in which anti-academy campaigns emerge and the particular role played by individuals who take on leading roles in them, I argue that the missing element in mobilization theory is that of leadership.

The article begins with an overview of the academy (and free schools) policy in England, and locates this in the wider context of public education restructuring. It then sets out the relevant debates that underpin the paper, in particular those relating to social movements and mobilization theory. Following presentation of the data from a range of anti-academy campaigns I argue that mobilization theory can be over-deterministic in its analysis of collective campaigns and that greater account needs to be taken of the particular ways individual agency can shape outcomes. The study is significant because it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how community-based campaigns that advocate for public education develop and impact policy enactment. The shift to market models, the concomitant closing down of spaces for community engagement and the collective response of those who challenge these developments are phenomena evident in many different contexts (examples include Ravitch, 2014 in the USA; Pestano, 2015 in Chile; di Carmine Saviano, 2015 in Italy). It is important therefore to develop a deeper understanding of how the public voice is inserted into the increasingly privatised world of education (Burch, 2009; Anderson and Montoro Donchik, 2015).

Identifying the Policy Context

Academy schools were first established in England by the then Labour Government as a “turnaround” strategy for schools located in areas of social disadvantage and designated as “failing” (Gunter, 2010). Such schools were located

outside of local government control and were exempt from several key regulations including curriculum and employment issues. Although technically a school of a new type, Labour's Academy schools shared many of the features of Grant-Maintained (GM) schools that had been introduced by the Conservative government in 1988 (Simon, 1988).

In May 2010 a Coalition government of Conservatives (majority party) and Liberal Democrats was formed and immediately committed to a huge expansion of the academy school programme from the 203 academy schools at the time. The long term objective was identified as the academization of all local authority maintained schools (DfE, 2010) and there developed a twin-track strategy whereby governors in "high performing" schools were allowed to decide for themselves if they wished to academize (known as "converter academies") whilst "failing schools" were expected to academize, but under the tutelage of a high performing academy, or "academy chain" (known as "sponsored academies"). Governors of "failing schools" that refused to consider academy status could be compelled to convert with the school being forcibly removed from local authority control and taken over by a sponsor ("forced academization"). Any new school established was to be referred to as a "free school". Free schools could be established by non-local authority sponsors, which might be, for example, groups of parents, teachers or faith groups. Once established a free school would operate with very similar governance structures to an established academy school (Hatcher, 2011).

The developments described above have inevitably led to the decline in influence of local authorities, and the growing importance of sponsors, most obviously in the form "multi-academy trusts" and "academy chains" that run groups of academy schools (Simkins & Wood, 2014). By the end of the Coalition

government's term of office, 56% of secondary schools and 13% of primary schools were academy schools, either converter or sponsored. Although a system transformation in many respects, the numbers of academies had fallen well short of government targets (especially in the primary sector) and the rate of conversions had slowed considerably (Mansell, 2014a).¹

Ever since the introduction of GM schools following the 1988 Act the introduction and expansion of these types of schools have been controversial and contested. Advocates have adopted the language of autonomy and choice (Adonis, 2012) whereas critics have highlighted the break up of a system rooted in public service values, and underpinned by some notion of democratic accountability and community control (Benn, 2012). For many there is a wider concern of increased private sector influence in education and the long term goal of a system of state education that is publicly funded but privately provided (ATL, 2013; TUC, 2014).

Struggles over the academization of schools, and before that the campaigns that challenged the drive to grant-maintained status (Murch, 1997), must therefore be located in a struggle about the nature and direction of the wider welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 2012 and 2013). Whatever the specific interests and motivations of campaigners, the actions they organise seek to 'interrupt' (Apple, 2006) and challenge an increasingly privatised, and market-driven, model of welfarism.

Interrupting Restructuring: Social Movements and Mobilization Theory

The interest of this article is in understanding the contexts and experiences of campaigns that have sought to challenge academization at a local level and to better

¹ Following the May 2015 general election, and the election of a Conservative administration, the government committed to a renewed expansion of both the free school and academy school programmes. It also indicated that previous regulations requiring consultations would be significantly relaxed.

understand the circumstances in which such campaigns develop. The starting point for this analysis is to draw on social movement literature, before looking in more detail at the specific contribution of mobilization theory.

In recent years a substantial body of literature focused on the sociology of social movements has emerged (Olson, 1971; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 2011; Castells, 2012) although examples of applying this work in an education context are limited with Anyon (2014) being the most notable exception. Whilst it would be inappropriate to claim a singular definition of what is meant by a social movement, the approach presented by Tilly and Wood (2013) that social movements sit apart from both electoral movements (political parties) and labour movements (trade unions) and are distinct from individual campaigns, or the organizations that represent them, offers a useful point of analytic departure. However, such an approach tends to generate a focus on macro-level developments, with an attendant danger that local experiences, and the micro-level analysis of social movement activity is neglected. For the purpose of this article I am not claiming that the campaigns against academization represent a social movement *per se*, but that the location of such campaigns in a space that is neither electoralist nor traditionally ‘industrial’ does make Tilly and Woods’ analysis a useful starting point for analysis. These campaigns also provide an insight into the “on the ground” experience of community activism, or what are sometimes referred to as “micromobilizations” (Zald, 1996). The challenge however is to move beyond descriptive analysis and capture the dynamics of movements in motion to better understand the circumstances in which such campaigns emerge and develop, or not.

This need is in part addressed by mobilization theory as a body of work that has consistently sought to understand how, and under what circumstances,

individuals begin to act collectively to challenge the injustices they experience (Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1988; McCarthy & Zald, 1997, McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). Broadly this approach has focused on the “resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movement to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (McCarthy and Zald, 1997, p. 1213). In this article I draw in particular on John Kelly’s (1988) use of mobilization theory and identify four key concepts that underpin the theory - *interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity*.

The first component, *interests*, recognises that collective action must be predicated on a sense of injustice in which interests are threatened. Kelly argues that the interests of workers are ‘the fulcrum of the model’ (p. 25) and it is when interests are challenged that a sense of grievance is developed. His concern is with mobilizations of workers, and hence he sees any sense of injustice as grounded in struggles over the exploitative nature of the capitalist labour process. However, although Kelly (1998, p. 27) argues that the “*sine qua non* for collective action is a sense of injustice” the existence of injustice is not in itself a sufficient condition for collective action to emerge. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that Kelly’s focus on industrial struggles necessarily concentrates interest on struggles over labour process control (Braverman, 1974), and fails to reflect a wider set of interests that might emerge in struggles over issues relating to democratic governance of public services. Questions of interests link in turn to issues of *attribution*, whereby those aggrieved feel able to explain the cause, or identify a source, of their grievance. Attribution can have a decisive impact on framing responses because much of this will hinge on whether those with a grievance believe that the cause is remediable. In

essence, where there is a specific body, or agents, deemed responsible for the injustice, and by implication capable of correcting it, then active challenge becomes more likely.

The second component of mobilization theory refers to *organization* which Kelly describes as ‘the structure of a group, and in particular those aspects which affect its capacity for collective action’ (p.25). Central to this component is the concept of a social identity whereby individuals who share a grievance see their injustice in collective terms, that is they associate their injustice not with their individual identity, but as part of a wider group. Although the notion of identities being both individual and collective is uncontentious, what is critical here is to understand which collective identities are formed and how these are fashioned and re-fashioned. Identities are not static but are constantly being (re-) negotiated in the light of multiple context specific factors. Mobilization theory suggests that whether or not collective mobilizations materialise will depend critically on the extent to which potential participants identify themselves as social actors sharing common interests.

The third component of the theory presented here is *mobilization* itself, whereby a collective sense of injustice is translated into an active form of resistance. Key to understanding this dimension of the theory is a recognition of the importance of cost-benefit calculations when individuals make decisions about participating in different types of collective action. In research on strike action there is already work evaluating the trade-off between immediate losses (of striking) against potential future gains (in terms of a higher pay award) e.g Klandermans, 1986. This calculative, and often economic, approach to cost-benefit calculations is reflected in mobilization theory most explicitly in the work of McCarthy and Zald (1977).

Whilst such analyses are clearly important, and have been highly influential, it is crucial to avoid overly instrumental calculations of costs and benefits. Individuals may take action when potential benefits are not obviously tangible, or when cost-benefit calculations take account of wider political considerations (Tilly, 1978). These more complex calculations are likely to be more significant in campaigns that are less obviously focused around a narrow strategy such as one based on a strike.

The fourth, and final component of mobilization theory is *opportunity*, which can be further divided into three sub-elements, namely organization, opportunity and forms of collective action. Organizational factors include the formal structures through which collective action might be exercised (in trade union terms this might refer to union governance as well as membership levels and density rates), whilst opportunity factors refer to the ‘spaces’ in which collective action takes place. Such spaces are framed, crucially, by employer and state responses, and can be said to reflect the relative balance of power between the different parties. The third sub-element within this component refers to the different forms of collective action and seeks to capture the various ways, formal and informal, in which collective action is mobilized.

I draw on the core concepts of mobilization theory to help better understand a specific type of micromobilization in the form of anti-academization campaigns. I also address a recognized *lacuna* in mobilization theory literature, which emphasises collective responses, but in so doing underplays, and indeed often ignores, the contribution of individuals who take on leading roles in developing such action. As Kelly (1998, p. 34) acknowledges “the nature and effects of leadership on mobilization have rarely been theorised”, whilst Anyon (2014, p 137) contended “The development and role of leadership in social movements is not well theorised.”

This ambivalence towards notions of leadership, broadly defined, is prevalent in particular in much industrial relations research and to a lesser extent in social movement literature. An emphasis on collectives that emphasise democracy and collective participation can make a focus on individuals feel incongruous but also risks understating the specific contributions of individuals to shaping the experience and consequences of collective mobilizations.

The need for such recognition emerged clearly in the work of Patricia Fosh (1993) whose research focused on the role of the person she described as the “key local leader” in union organization and campaigning. Fosh’s work did not refer to mobilization theory *per se*, but rather the linked notion of union renewal developed by Fairbrother and Waddington (1990) and later in Fairbrother (1996; 2000). Fosh’s study of five diverse workplaces identified that union member engagement in union activity (formal and informal) cycled through a series of peaks and troughs, and that this activity was entirely consistent with ‘local events’ and their ability to generate employee dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to employees looking to their union for a collective response (consistent with mobilization theory’s focus on a sense of grievance as the catalyst for collective action). However, Fosh argued that the precise nature of the member mobilization (the height of peaks, the depths of troughs and the duration of waves) were influenced significantly by the way in which the “key local leader” (a union activist in a significant formal leadership role in the local union) mediated these events through their choice of leadership style. Fosh contended that leaders who were more collective and participatory were able to capitalise more effectively on events and therefore build mobilizations that were stronger and more long lasting. Likewise such leadership approaches resulted in shallower and shorter troughs of membership inactivity. However, key local leaders who adopted an

opposite approach (by individualising issues and adopting a “leave it to me” style of leadership) tended to generate opposite outcomes of less strong surges and deeper and longer lasting troughs.

Fosh’s study of union activity in largely well-organised workplaces more than 20 years ago can seem distant from the study presented in this article. While unionism plays a key role in this study it is by no means the center of it. In mobilization theory terms the “organization” underpinning the campaigns that are the focus of this study are much more fluid than the formal structures identified by Fosh, even in cases where they are union-led. “Leaders” in particular are not always immediately obvious, let alone in formal positions of authority. Nevertheless Fosh’s work is important because of the importance it places on the actions of key individuals as they mediate a set of local events. In a way that is seldom reflected in mobilization theory, Fosh argues that individuals matter, and that outcomes can look quite different depending on who takes on leadership roles and how that leadership is exercised. In her words “careful choices of leadership style” can make a significant difference to campaigns, often generating positive outcomes in unfavourable circumstances (p. 589).

Data Collection and Analysis

This article reports on data collected between 2013 and 2015, and reflects events in the second half of the 2010-2015 Coalition government in the UK. I locate myself within a critical tradition, and associate myself with the notion of the critical scholar and activist (Apple, 2013). I position academization within the wider tradition of the global restructuring of public services in general and education services in particular (Ball & Youdell, 2008; Ball, 2012; MacPherson et al., 2014). I have argued elsewhere (Stevenson, 2012) that academization needs to be seen as a

decisive phase in the neoliberal project in English education and I therefore associate myself with those individuals and groups who are the focus of this study, and who through their actions seek to challenge the drive towards the privatization of public education. I seek intentionally to connect theoretical insight, empirical data and practical action in order to better understand, and better develop, the type of collective mobilizations that are necessary to challenge the trajectory of welfare state privatization (Giroux, 1983, Anyon et al. 2008).

Such positioning does carry an inherent risk of bias and in particular the potential to “romanticise” the stories of “resistance” that this research presents. Whilst I acknowledge this risk, I am also alert to its dangers, and hope that by being conscious of the pitfalls, and transparent about the possibilities, I can mitigate the potential for this danger.

Data was collected from three sources – from interviews with key participants, from an analysis of media related to local campaigns, and from extended observation over a two year period of a community based group of anti-academies activists. In the section that follows I provide brief details of each of these sources.

Interviews were conducted throughout the duration of the project with 22 individuals who were identified as active participants in local campaigns challenging academization - seven organisers of parent/community-based groups, seven teacher union activists/officials and eight members of the community based group that had formed to challenge a specific academization and that had remained as a group, meeting on a regular basis throughout the period of this research. All of the parent campaigners, four of the union activists/officers and six of the community based group were female (discussed later in the article). In most cases there was a single interview, but in several cases contact continued as participants were eager to

appraise me of developments in their campaigns. In all cases interviewees were approached because of their known involvement in anti-academies campaigns with the initial approach often being direct to “the campaign” rather than a named individual (for example, via a website or Twitter account). Those involved are identified in this study as “leaders”, or more precisely as individuals taking on leadership roles. However, few had formal roles in relation to the campaigns they were involved in and many would be reluctant to self-identify as “leaders”.

Traditional media outlets, particularly local papers (often available online) were an important data source, and reflected ways in which local campaigns sought to engage local media. Of particular significance in the campaigns was the use of social media, most obviously in the form of Twitter accounts and blogsites. These were a common feature of campaigns, often being one of the first tangible actions of fledgling campaign groups, and reflect the importance of this type of media in contemporary campaigning.

The final source of data collection was an extended engagement with a local anti-academies group organised across two local authority areas. Initial contact was for the purpose of conducting interviews, but contact was maintained over a period of two years during which time the group focused its work on challenging the creation of two free schools in its locality. Data took the form of observation notes from meetings, and associated documentation that emerged from the group’s activities including minutes of meetings and related email correspondence. The approach adopted makes no claim to be a traditional ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), although the use of extended observation was based on a commitment to capture the essence of ‘real world’ experience (Robson, 2012).

All data (transcripts, media text, meeting observation notes and related documents) was analysed using a common process in which collection and analysis were not treated as discrete activities but were conducted simultaneously and iteratively. The integration of these processes meant that later stages of data collection were informed by findings from earlier stages, with the focus of data collection shifting in relation to preliminary findings. Data was analysed through a process of thematic codes and analytical memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from which the key themes presented in following sections were identified and developed.

Challenging Education Reform: The Theory and Practice of Resisting School Marketization.

In this section data relating to anti-academies campaigns is presented using the key concepts that were identified as central to mobilization theory, namely interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity. In this analysis a particular focus is on the actions of those who assume key roles in developing such campaigns.

Interests

Mobilization theory emphasises a challenge to individual or collective interests acting as a catalyst to the development of a collective reaction. In this study it was the announcement of potential academization, or the development of a free school, that often provided a moment of destabilization when individuals felt their interests challenged. However, what also emerged were the different ways in which interests were challenged. For teachers an obvious potential threat was to pay and conditions of service as a result of not being part of a wider bargaining framework. For parents concerns often focused on a change in the ethos or approach of their child's school and this was often compounded by a concern about potential and

unnecessary disruption. A feature of many of those who assumed key roles in organizing campaigns was a wider set of interests related to a public system of schooling and a perceived attack on the democratic control of local schools. Several parent campaigners referred to the need to see education as a service for the community that was about more than their child. In this sense it was possible to distinguish between individual and collective interests with individual interests reflecting very personal concerns (what Alinsky (1971, p. 53) referred to as “self interests”) and collective interests reflecting a more explicit ideological commitment to public service values?. Within the study campaigns emerged as a complex web of different interests often overlapping across different groups. Inevitably some issues appeared more meaningful to some groups than others. Within the study there was little evidence of fundamental interests being in tension, although tensions could emerge in relation to particular strategies (for example relating to the use of strike action by teachers).

To what extent these threats to interests created a sense of injustice leading to action was clearly linked to the notion of attribution and the extent to which an individual, or individuals, were perceived as responsible for threatening interests in this way. Here the distinction between ‘converter’ and ‘forced’ academizations emerged as significant given that in these cases the “target authority” (Tilly & Wood, 2013) was different. For example, where a school governing body opted to pursue academization, then it often appeared more difficult to challenge this decision as a local decision was deemed to have a measure of legitimacy. This was particularly the case where the headteacher enjoyed high levels of parental or community support. However, as a discretionary local decision it was also more challengeable. In contrast a decision to force an academization was often presented as lacking legitimacy (the

‘independence’ of the inspectorate was frequently challenged by participants during this research), but it was also seen as being less contestable (as the decision was seen to be driven by central government and its agents).

What emerged strongly from the data was how key individuals stepped forward to begin to organise campaigns and this often involved framing the issues for broader constituencies. One teacher, who became the school union representative as a direct result of the campaign, described the huge effort devoted to constantly countering the pro-academy arguments presented by the headteacher (often at the expense of making herself vulnerable to potential victimization). Another campaigner described how a small group of parents sought to reach out to the wider parent body and highlight the threat to the school:

I don't know whether I really thought that we could win but I thought that we could be doing some shaking because we were so energised and we were so angry .. furious! That this community school that we all paid for, had all invested in, and as I say . . . we knew that it [the school] was getting better . By anybody's standards, however you judged a school, it was getting better . It was under attack and so obviously we became very defensive and ... angry.

(Parent campaigner, NE London)

What was clear was that in instances where significant campaigns developed (although not always with successful outcomes) then key people took on a role in framing and re-framing the issues, developing counter-narratives reference, presenting the arguments to potential allies and directing pressure in

the direction of the “responsible authority” (Tilly & Wood, 2013). In these cases managerial discourses (whether internal to the school, or presented from outside bodies) were not left unchallenged but rather campaigns acted as a means of articulating and amplifying shared feelings of injustice and focusing this attention on those held responsible. In this way narratives of ‘there is no alternative’ were constantly challenged.

Organization

A focus on organization in mobilization theory draws attention to how a phenomenon experienced individually develops into a collective issue, and how individuals see themselves as part of a wider group responding to the same issue. This emerged as a highly complex phenomenon within the study depending largely on the extent to which social identities might be considered as pre-existing and reflective of particular contextual concerns. For example, teachers faced with the threat of academization shared a sense of social identity as their common experience as employees generated shared interests. However, even in this context important differences could emerge between, for example, senior leaders and classroom teachers or between members of different unions. A common experience did not necessarily result in shared perception of the issue or common responses.

In different ways the formation of a shared identity amongst parents was often complex and problematic, particularly in the secondary school sector where parental ties to the school (and other parents) are more detached. In these situations forming a parents’ group was more challenging, and made even more difficult if campaigners were obstructed by the school from trying to communicate with other parents (as was reported in at least two instances in the study). The point was made by one secondary school parent.

Getting together with other parents was the most difficult thing because my daughter was in year eight .. and I didn't know many other parents .. or any other parents because what happens is that in big cities like Birmingham you might know a lot of people in primary schools, but when your children go off to big secondary schools they all go off to different secondary schools and you don't then have the connections and the networks, and they make their way independently to school so you don't see people on the school gate. So I really had a problem of how to get in touch with other people who felt worried about this and felt the same way that I did.

(Parent campaigner, Birmingham)

In addition to basic problems faced when trying to make contact with parents, issues of race and class also emerged as significant factors in understanding to what extent social identities formed. Many of the participants recognised that their groups drew heavily from within the white middle class parent body and that they struggled to reflect the diversity of the school population.

I think that most of the parents that got involved, and that asked questions, that came along to the meetings were probably the more middle class and the more kind of socially mobile .. you know the more educated amongst the ... our group probably wasn't representative of the diversity .. the social mix in the school community.

(Parent campaigner, Birmingham)

Although this was a feature of several of the groups, there was also a recognition that dynamics shifted as a result of the campaigns with organisers making conscious efforts to connect with the whole parent body (producing leaflets in community languages was used by at least two groups). This had some success in achieving wider participation, although as the language in the following transcript suggests, these were not always completely comfortable alliances.

We had always been a perfectly happy school before and things had been fine. There had been some intermingling, but there are sections of the different communities that have been quite, not isolated, but a bit separate, and because we have had to make an effort, and because apart from anything else they are entitled to know what is going on, there has been more effort between the communities and I think certainly from my point of view, it brings up the fact that we probably had not made enough effort in the past. I mean I have friends though contacts in the school but maybe I haven't reached out enough to the Somali community. It is not a hard thing to pick up the onus providing it is in a good way, so yes, I think we have got to know each other better.

(Parent campaigner, NW London)

In another example a union official described how a strong community based campaign developed to challenge a potential academization, but that the campaign was strongly rooted in a closely connected Asian population and this campaign developed 'in parallel' to the one organised by the union.

There was another group that had its own ability to organise .. and it organised almost in a parallel way so there was some connections because there were some Asian members who were active in the NUT - but union members and the Asian community did not necessarily come together. They were almost organised in parallel.

(Union official, Midlands)

Such a parallel approach was not seen as inherently problematic as there were channels of communication between different groups and when teachers later took strike action there was evidence of strong community support. The challenge was to manage the parallel campaigns by ensuring there was always dialogue between them. However, in other cases making these connections proved more challenging. For example, when organised teachers tried to engage the community in a semi-rural industrial town it proved very difficult to form any alliance with parents:

Whatever we did in [town] we could not reach parents and I live in that community and have those links in that community. But you have a white working class area which would have been kind of, I suppose in a crude class system, would have been a kind of upper working class and lower middle class and we could not suck them in. I grew up around there and there was no way that I could reach that community. They don't use social media, leaflets don't work, they didn't do public meetings and there was an absence of community.

(Union official, Midlands)

What the research from this study highlights are the complex ways in which social identities were expressed and developed. Mobilization theory emphasises the ways in which individual grievances need to coalesce into expressions of collective injustice. This study highlights the complexity of these processes. Social identities are sometimes well formed, but often they are not. A parent is objectively a ‘parent’, but may not feel part of a collective body of parents with shared interests. Moreover what is also clear is that social identities need to be understood in multiple forms and that what unifies one group (‘parents’) may be divided in other ways, such as race or class.

In this study those who took on organizing roles in campaigns understood the need to build alliances and much of their work was devoted to developing shared interests within groups (amongst union members for example), but also, crucially, building coalitions across groups (between different union groups or between different groups of parents). This emerged as a key role of local leaders, but also one that was profoundly difficult. As Tattersall’s (2010) work has identified, building coalitions is a traditional and obvious tactic for social movements. However, coalitions are difficult to cohere, and they are often weak at the joint. Building and sustaining coalitions was a critical role of the local leaders, but was seldom straightforward. Whilst some campaigners referenced the way in which teacher unions and parents had formed alliances elsewhere (Gutierrez, 2013), this study demonstrated that teachers and parents are not always “natural allies” and that coalition building across unions and community groups take “time and commitment” (Weiner, 2012, p. 27).

Mobilization

The act of mobilization refers to the process whereby an injustice collectively experienced develops into active forms of opposition. Traditional mobilization theory, with its focus on organised labour, has focused centrally on a calculation of the costs and benefits of taking industrial action. Such zero-sum calculations are almost always too crude, with a wider set of considerations needing to be acknowledged, even in a labour dispute. However, such a broader approach is essential when looking at an issue such as academization as a privatization process.

This is not to argue that cost-benefit calculations are unimportant. On the contrary this study confirmed their importance, but these emerged in complex ways and were assessed differently by different groups. For example, a potential cost of academization for teachers was a possible worsening of pay and conditions. However, prior to academization this often remained a rather vague and intangible threat. Indeed in cases where headteachers indicated they had no desire to use their ‘freedoms’ to alter pay and conditions, then this threat may have appeared minimal (certainly in the short term). In some cases the arguments framed by headteachers were cast in such a way that the *status quo* was presented as no longer tenable, ie the risk for teachers was to *not* academize. This could extend as far as suggesting that a failure to academize would have negative financial consequences for the school, and therefore threaten jobs. What is clear is that the cost-benefit calculations are complex and that they can differ significantly between different cases.

For parents, and parents’ groups, any cost-benefit calculations, looked quite different. One parent campaigner argued that parents were the one group in the school community that were liberated from the cost-benefit calculations confronting others (including the potential costs of victimization) and therefore they had more

license to be active and outspoken campaigners. One parent resisting a potential forced academization made the following point:

Well this is part of the divide and rule thing. It is difficult for them [teachers] because they are frightened - they are frightened of losing their jobs and we have already lost two teachers, and to be honest, I think that they are right to be frightened. The Governors are likely to lose their posts and the Head is likely to lose his job, and the deputy is likely to lose hers. There is a real atmosphere of intimidation.

I think that there is a very deliberate policy to section off each of the stake holders and the only ones that they can't really button down, because they can't sack us, is the parents.

(Parent campaigner, NW London)

Certainly the ways in which members of parent groups felt less constrained by pressures to curb them can explain why parents groups were sometimes able to mobilize significant high profile community campaigns. In the absence of more coercive power over parents' attempts to prevent such campaigns tended to rely more on managerial manipulation of consultation processes. This included limiting the scope for public debate of issues, relying on unreasonably rapid response times to consultations and running consultations during holiday periods. However, whilst recognising that parents' groups could not be so easily intimidated as might be possible with staff, in several cases parents identified efforts to obstruct or discredit them. Making it difficult to contact other parents was one method already cited,

whilst characterising parent campaigners as unrepresentative and “political activists” was another (“we know that the school management would refer to us as ‘the three witches’.” – parent campaigner, southern England).

Opportunity

There are three elements to this final aspect of mobilization theory; organization, opportunity and forms of collective action, and all are significant in explaining how anti-academy mobilizations have occurred in different contexts.

In organizational terms it was possible to identify a number of different organizational forms that were either present or emerged as campaigns developed. Teachers were most obviously organised in their union groupings, and it was acknowledged that without pre-existing levels of union organization union-led campaigns were difficult to develop – “*It has to come from the teachers*” was the observation of one member of the community-based campaign that had a policy to only campaign in instances where there was a clear teacher or parent opposition within the school. Teachers in England are highly unionised, although membership is spread over several unions. Significantly in the English school system union organization at school level has no formal place in union governance structures and school-based industrial relations have traditionally been characterised by high levels of informality. Moreover, levels of workplace organization can vary considerably (Stevenson, 2005). This was reflected in instances where school based union groups sought to challenge academization. In such cases often informal networks seemed to develop with relationships not always fitting with traditional union governance structures. For example, the school-based nature of anti-academies campaigns meant that the school union representative often emerged as a key figure, and yet this role has no formal place in teacher union rulebooks (Carter et al., 2010). One teacher

explained how the academies issue developed in her school and how her opposition to it resulted in her becoming the school union representative and the focus of the campaign.

Because it kind of exploded .. and I still thought "Oh my gosh .. I haven't been at this school long enough .. and what am I doing?" .. I had only been there January to May .. but I just thought that I didn't really have any other choice.

(School union representative, Midlands).

Outside of union organization it was possible to discern a number of types of groups that emerged in cases where opposition to academization developed. Parent and community groups were characterised by very informal organization and were often loose networks. In at least three cases groups that emerged in response to a specific academization issue morphed into on-going networks in defence of community education. Recognising the small sample size, it is nevertheless important to note the gender of the parent interviewees in this project. Parent campaigns were by and large led by "mums". In interviews some indicated they had previous political experience, whilst others indicated no such experience. What they shared in common was a determination to act in the face of a perceived threat to their child's school. As such, the gender dimension of campaigns felt significant. It is not possible to make claims about gendered ways of working, but it may be that gender issues were significant when understanding the more lateral and flexible forms of working that were a feature of campaign groups.

Within this element of mobilization theory *opportunity* itself emerged as a decisive dimension of the theory. Opportunity refers to the “spaces” within which mobilizations occur and crucially take account of the responses and strategies of those driving the process of academization. Depending on the type of academization, this might involve the headteacher, the governing body, the local authority, an academy broker, the Department for Education or some combination of these. In this regard, the resources that different parties were able to mobilize emerged as an important consideration.

What became very clear in this study was the determination of the government to drive forward its academies policy, and the extent to which the state’s resources were to be mobilized to achieve this objective (Mansell, 2013). By no means could the playing field be described as level. As has been indicated, consultations were often seen as manipulated whilst the use of intimidation and fear to silence dissenters was evident at every level of the system. Much of this was linked to threats of job loss, in different forms. For example, in one school opting to academize, and where teachers took strike action, the headteacher repeatedly indicated that a failure to academize would threaten the school’s finances and would result in redundancies. One parental campaigner was clear that the repeated threats of job losses were implicitly aimed at those opposing the headteacher’s intentions and that teachers taking strike action were meant to feel individually vulnerable. In another school teachers were told, in relation to a proposed academization, “*We’re on this bus and if you don’t like it get off it.*”

In the case of forced academizations the threat to the headteacher’s employment was often quite explicit. Failure to agree to academize would likely result in the dismissal of the headteacher and the removal of the governing body.

One interviewee, an official from a headteachers' union, indicated this threat would be quite open and was designed to leave headteachers with no apparent room for manoeuvre. Governors could be subject to similar threats, with it being made clear that if they chose not to academize they would be removed and replaced by an Interim Executive Board (a power conferred by legislation). Whilst there is no reliable way of knowing how many governing bodies relented under this pressure, it was apparent in some of the cases that this level of intimidation of governors simply fuelled the sense of injustice and strengthened the resolve of campaigners.

This focus on opposition highlights a concern with *forms of collective action* in mobilization theory and the range of actions that were witnessed. Mobilization theory's grounding in industrial relations literature means there is often a focus on strike action as the principal form of collective action and strike action was a feature of several of the campaigns in the research. Strike action against academization has generally been limited, and some in this study questioned its effectiveness (especially if disconnected from parental support). However, strike action had appeared to have had a significant impact on two of the campaigns in the study, and in a third the campaign was unsuccessful, but the school union representative (who led to eight days of strike action) was adamant that teachers in the school went into the post-conversion period much stronger having challenged the decision to academize.

However, a feature of several of these campaigns was the diversity of campaign methods used, and in particular when parent groups were dominant. In cases of voluntary academization there was often a considerable focus on lobbying the school's governing body, although in cases of externally imposed academization such an approach was less appropriate. Social media featured prominently in virtually all campaigns, most commonly in the use of Twitter, but many campaigns

also developed websites using blogging platforms. One feature of parent-led campaigns was the use of less traditional campaign activities that were highly effective in securing publicity. For example, one group took over a local carpet sales store for a story reading activity (the carpet shop was owned by the CEO of the academy chain pressing for the school's academization), and another group drew on the services of a nationally known stand up comedian and organised a picnic with live entertainment. Members of this group also composed, produced and professionally recorded a campaign song that was then popularised via YouTube. Tactics designed to unsettle, and focused sharply on an opponent, drew, albeit unknowingly, on Alinsky's (1971) community organising strategies. That they were effective was confirmed when the press reported that the Department for Education had been asked to devise strategies which could challenge such tactics where they were deployed (Mansell, 2014b). In all of these instances the ability to mobilize and organise a diverse range of resources emerged as a critical function of those who had taken on organizing roles. One parent campaigner referred to the need to "*make use of all the talents you can*" and a feature of high profile campaigns was the ability to draw on the experiences and expertise of those in their community networks. This could look quite different for different groups, and the differential access to social capital was widely recognised, but it was clearly significant.

Mobilization Theory – Identifying the Missing Link

In this article I have sought to demonstrate how mobilization theory can provide a helpful tool for theorising the contexts in which collective campaigns that challenge academization emerge. The core concepts each contribute to helping understand the circumstances in which collective mobilizations develop. However,

the theory does not provide a checklist of campaign features which, if present, can be relied on to guarantee a collective mobilization. Indeed, what this study highlights is the need to understand the specificities of individual instances. A high profile anti-academization campaign with national media interest, such as at Downhills school (BBC, 2012), was ultimately unsuccessful, but it may well have altered the balance of power for future campaigners in other contexts. Mobilization theory provides a number of core concepts that can help understand the circumstances in which mobilizations do, or do not, occur. However, each case's unique context needs to be analysed and understood, in order to fully appreciate why particular mobilizations play out in the way that they do. What this study demonstrates is that contexts are important, but are also constantly in flux, shaped by a much wider set of factors. This recognition of the specificity of particular contexts highlights also the need to take account of the role played by individuals in campaigns. This factor is largely absent from mobilization theory, As Anyon (2014, P 131) argued "classical social movement theory left individual actors out of the equation – and did not ask the question of how individuals actually get drawn into contentious politics. The role of personal agency remained unexplored".

Personal agency emerged in this study as highly significant ("paramount" according to Anyon (2014, p. 132) and if an excessively deterministic approach is to be avoided in mobilization theory then it is essential to acknowledge the way that individuals shape campaigns in specific contexts.

The importance of "key local leaders" in a trade union context has been recognised by Patricia Fosh. This study confirms many of the general arguments about "key local leaders" presented by Fosh, but in this study highlights the need to understand leaders and leadership in much more flexible terms. Fosh's study focused

on those in senior union positions in largely well organised workplaces, and her argument was that “choices” in relation to “leadership styles” made an appreciable difference to membership mobilizations. An important conclusion from this study was that those who emerged as leaders often did not identify themselves as such. Even those in formal leadership positions, such as local union officers, felt uncomfortable thinking of themselves as “leaders” – “*I’ve never thought about myself as a leader*” (union branch secretary). In other instances, and especially in parent-led campaigns, the concept of leadership in a formal sense felt inappropriate. These individuals might best be described as ‘accidental leaders’ (Alexandrou, 2015 p 122) – individuals who had responded to a set of events with no intention of taking on leadership position only to find themselves assuming a significant campaign role – “they emerged out of participation in the struggle” (Anyon, 2014, p. 137). However, rather than “key local leaders” making “choices” about “leadership styles” (Fosh, 1993) it can be more fruitful to think about groups of individuals performing leadership functions within collective mobilizations. In conclusion, I want to argue that leadership in community campaigns can be best considered in relation to three interdependent leadership functions:

Leadership as resource mobilization – a key function of those who took on leading roles in campaigns was to mobilize available resources in support of their campaign. At a very practical level what distinguished many of those involved in campaigns was a clear focus on a goal, and a corresponding focus on organizing activities around which collective action could be developed. This practical (and often urgent) focus on action meant that formality, status and bureaucracy were easily dispensed with. Groups operated largely without hierarchy and were driven by the imperatives of the moment. Even in cases where campaigns were predominantly

union-led, structures were very fluid and formal bureaucracies were often by-passed. Decision-making structures within groups focused on building consensus and identifying practical actions. There were few examples of formal vote-taking with an emphasis placed on democratic engagement, but shorn of proceduralism. Rather the focus was agreeing actions that would demonstrate collective strength, and then organizing the practical steps required to realise this.

Leadership as coalition building – those who emerged with leadership roles in campaigns showed themselves to be adept at knitting together diverse constituencies and different interests. Building coalitions was not, and could not, be a process of melding different groups into a homogenous bloc, but rather there was a process of seeking to cohere a group with some shared interests. In some cases the approach was not to form a single group, but to connect groups. Several examples emerged of what participants called “parallel” campaigns in which different groups maintained a “tactical independence” (for example a parent group that did not want to be seen as too closely associated with the teachers in order to preserve their distinctive voice). In these cases leadership involved connecting campaigns so that there was on-going communication and coordination of activities. “Leaders” were able work across different groups and navigate tensions where these emerged. For example, parent campaigners often connected with political activist groupings, and made use of their resources, but they were also careful about maintaining a distance and being seen to be “independent”.

Leadership as the organizing of ideas – mobilization theory emphasises the need for those taking action to feel an injustice, to connect it with the experience of others, and to believe that collective action is capable of addressing their grievance. There can be a danger of seeing these processes in deterministic ways, and beyond

the control of actors. However what emerged powerfully in this study was the role of key individuals in “re-framing” the reality for others. Anyon (2014, p131) described this as “a collective process of interpretation, [that] links opportunity and action”. In many cases the drive to academization was presented by proponents as inevitable. Balanced argument was seldom encouraged and the arguments for academization were frequently cast in terms of an imperative that was beyond challenge. A narrative of “there is no alternative” was commonplace.

Those who emerged with leadership roles in these campaigns were able to “re-frame” such discourses, and challenge the claim that there was no alternative. They were similarly able to challenge the discourse of defeatism whereby potential campaigners were encouraged to believe that resistance was futile. Anyon (2014, p131) identifies a process whereby “Movements frame grievances within collective action frames that lend dignity to claims, connect them with other struggles, and help to produce a collective identity among participants.” In this way the dominant discourses of inevitable and unstoppable marketization were challenged (Apple, 2009). Central to this process was the rearticulating of public service values as an alternative to the messages of individualism (“*my child*”) and privatization (“public bad, private good”) that was often articulated by opponents. Such an approach reflects the role of the key local leader described by Fosh as one that was able to “reframe” local events in ways that privileged a collective response over an individual one. Such leadership roles resonate with Gramsci’s (1971) concept of the ‘organic intellectual’ describing those embedded in workplaces and the community whose actions challenge the prevailing hegemony and who act as “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1988) or “organisers of ideas” (Stevenson, 2008). In these cases what is presented as inevitable becomes contestable and what is cast as

impossible becomes possible. In such ways these micromobilizations offer the possibility of developing into broader and more substantial counter-hegemonic movements (Gutstein and Lipman, 2013). As such this recognition of leadership can challenge the tendency to an overly structural and deterministic tendency within mobilization theory that places insufficient emphasis on how the contribution of individuals can shape outcomes by actively connecting opportunities, ideas and actions.

In conclusion, not all the campaigns in this research can be considered successful in terms of the objectives they set for themselves. Indeed, the reverse is more likely the case with many campaigns unable to halt the academization they opposed. Moreover, not all the individuals involved were transformed into lifelong community activists – no doubt far from it. However, what this research does highlight is the courageous ways that teachers, parents and community campaigners have sought to challenge the drive to the privatisation of public education and mobilization theory continues to provide a useful framework for understanding how an individual event, such as an academization, can generate a collective act of resistance. Whether such collective responses emerge, and grow, depends on many factors, unique in space and time. However, what is clear is that a failure to adequately recognise the contribution of human agency in these processes risks neglecting what emerged as a key feature in the campaigns featured in this research – that when collective power is mobilised individuals make a difference and leadership matters.

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