- Critical Policy Ethnography in a small urban primary school during the 2010 / 2011 academic year
- School subject to a ‘Notice to Improve’
- Period in the field included inspection visit
- Access negotiated: ‘off site / off topic’
Critical Policy Ethnography / Critical Qualitative Research

- compiling the primary record through qualitative collection of data;
- preliminary reconstructive analysis;
- discovering dialogical data generation;
- Describing system relations;
- Using system relations to explain the findings
Conceptual Models

- Single parenting
- Solo parenting
- Father absence
- Contact fathers
- Resident mothers
- Biological and social fathers
- **Father-absence** affects about 27 million children in US, and it’s spreading. It’s linked to higher rates of poverty, failure in school, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, violent crime, depression, and ultimately a loss of hope.

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POLICY and LEGISLATION explicitly requiring engagement with fathers!

**e.g.**

5. The Children’s Plan (2007)
7. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools (2008)
10. UNCRC Article 7 (1)

The Coalition has committed to:

- encouraging shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy
- reducing gender inequalities at work
- achieving a better gender balance in the early years workforce,
- ensuring that both men and women use couple relationship support services


- reviewing the Family Justice System (June, 2010).
The context

**Ofsted (2000):**

there is a disturbing absence of men involved in family learning

**Every Child Matters (2003):**

– family learning programmes…engaging parents in their children’s development

– programmes for fathers as well as mothers…better communication between parents and school…and especially fathers
Why involve fathers?

Fathers’ involvement with children’s learning/in schools associated with (for children):

- Better exam results / literacy
- Better school behaviour
- Less criminal behaviour later on
- Better relationships in adult life

Independent associations to those between mothers’ involvement and same outcomes
Involvement in informal out-of-school learning

Resident fathers less likely than resident mothers to be involved in most aspects of children’s out-of-school learning

More involved than mothers in:
- building and repairing activities
- practical activities and hobbies
- ICT, maths and science
- recreation, sports, outdoor activities, family trips

Focus on play and fun together

Substantial proportions of fathers also read with their children, help with homework, and give praise and support to their children for their schoolwork.
Involvement in schools

Resident fathers less likely than resident mothers to be involved in children’s schools.

But: significant proportions of resident fathers attend parents evenings and general school meetings, and drop off and pick their children up at school.

Non-resident fathers are especially unlikely to be involved in their children’s schools.

Fathers’ educational expectations and interest in child’s education generally same as mothers’ educational expectations and interest.
More involved in child’s learning/education

- Resident fathers
- Single parent fathers - as involved as single parent mothers in schools
- Mother involved in child’s learning
- Early father involvement
- Good relations between parents
- Positive school environment - welcomes parents
- More egalitarian roles in household/childcare
Less involved in child’s learning and education

- Non-resident fathers
- Older (secondary age) children
- Father has lower qualification level
- Manual workers
- Works in evenings/ Works long hours
- Large families
- Mother has lower qualification level
- Child has behavioural problems/doing badly at school
Barriers

- Traditional gender roles
- **Attitudes** of fathers, mothers, children and practitioners
- **Work and time**- and the gender pay gap
- **Fathers’ circumstances** (e.g. geographic proximity to child; literacy level) and **confidence**
- “**Feminised environments**” (schools and family learning) with **few** male practitioners
- Lack of information about fathers
- **Inappropriate recruitment and practice** with fathers
"I've been to a Friday morning music assembly and been the only dad. Once you're there it's fine, but when you walk in it feels a bit intimidating to be honest."

(BBC News Online, 07/05/08).
Gatekeepers

MOTHERS
• Ambivalence amongst some mothers to father involvement (much literature)

PRACTITIONERS
• Say they interact more and feel more comfortable with mothers; Believe that fathers see school involvement as mother’s role; Expect fathers to be little involved
• Some fear of child abuse and aggression (UK and Australian small-scale studies in schools)

CHILDREN
• May want to keep home and school separate
Practitioner gatekeepers

Say they **interact more and feel more comfortable with mothers:**

- *The males in school aren’t as reliable as the female helpers. They’re not always sure what day they can come in they’re just there when they’re there. It’s the commitment week after week after week.*

- *the dads who come in are the ones we can rely on most, we don’t make an effort with others*

- *Dads, I don’t meet many. [Pause]. Except the ones who want to confront you.*
Believe that fathers see school involvement as mother’s role:

- I think dads are a bit frightened of coming in. We are an all female staff and they think education is a female role. The other thing is we tend to come across a bit scary. We are assertive.

- My main contact with parents? Not a lot.
Practitioner gatekeepers

Expect fathers to be little involved:

• *They’re not as interested in how they* (their child/ren) *are doing. Dad tends to be at the home visit* (prior to entry to school) *particularly if behaviour is a bit of an issue.*

• *Well, they’re at work!*
Fathers as problematic:

- Unreliable
- *Dads almost like to intimidate you and harass you. They want to stand over you.* [pause] *To intimidate you.*
- *We could have more positive relationships with men not confrontational.*
- *When children have gone to stay with their father over the weekend the behaviour can be difficult on the Monday. It can take a whole day and a half to settle down.*
- *(Child) is frightened of his dad.*
- *Dad can indulge them (his children) for two days.*
Other issues:

Sexuality - ...when dads come in they like the attention they get. I put the kettle on and make them a cup of tea.

• You do like the men coming into your room!

• Cultural relativity - I am amazed we ask the kids to make mothers day cards and not fathers day cards. I guess it is because lots of them don’t have a dad.

• It’s so PC. We think “what about kids who don’t have a dad but (child) doesn’t have a mum.

• Availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman 1974) - the tendency of people to take into account over other potentially relevant issues, those matters which are called to mind most readily within a situation.
Yes... but:

Critical policy:

National Curriculum vs Every Child Matters
(neo-liberalism vs social democracy [or is it?])

• Confusing and contradictory curricula based on competing ideologies (Robertson 2009)
• Politicalisation of professionalism (Osgood 2009)
• Disjointed policy leading to a lack of emphasis for father engagement (Page et al 2008)
• Normal chaos of [education] law (Dewar 1998)
• Discourse of dichotomy and discourse of derision (Alexander 2010)
Criticising policy

**Concern**

- Erosion of Social capital (Bagley 2011)
- Neo-liberalism, Cultural homogeneity (Hill 2009)
- Performativity (Ball 2003)
- Knowledge and knowledge relations desocialised (Lyotard 1984)

**Theoretical possibilities**

- Marxist - Bourdieu (1977, 1986) (Cultural reproduction, habitus)
- Critical pedagogy – Freire (1972, 1998)
• [T]his concept of agency highlights that actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment … the achievement of agency will always result in the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, 137)

• a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment)(Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 963)
• PAST:
  I don’t celebrate father’s day. When you’ve lost a father like I have (pause). It’s selfish I know.

• PRESENT:
  I have a few dads who work in the classroom. Well... a granddad.

  When dads come in they like the attention they get. I put the kettle on and make them a cup of tea

• FUTURE:
  We could try to make some events non academic based, there’s the Spring Fair and the bar-be-cue. It’s when it’s not about the child’s work or behaviour
Criticisms of approach

• Agency seen as an independent variable in the structure-culture-agency debate (Hollis 1994)

• *One does certainly feel the affect and is shaken and tormented by it, yet at the same time one is aware of a higher consciousness looking on which prevents one from becoming identical with the affect... which regards the affect as an object.* (Carl Jung)

• **Spatialities of Feeling** (Thrift 2008)
Thoughts and Feelings / Affect

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Euphoria
- Resignation
- Tired
- Dejected
- Confused…
Affect

- Broad tendencies and lines of force – emotion as motion
- A form of thinking
- Phenomenology – embodied practices. “formal evidence of what, in one’s relations with others, speech can not congeal” (Katz 2000, 323) – expressive armoury
- Psychoanalytical frames – an amplifier for drives / biologically differentiated
- Deleuzian – capacity of interaction akin to a natural force of emergence. One’s own vitality, sense of aliveness.
- Darwinian – Deep seated physiological change
The politics of affect

- Choice / Mixed-action repertoires – inaction
- Mediatization – stereotypes of dads (deadbeat)/immediacy/distant communication. The performative principle (McKenzie 2001) – messages with passion!
- Performance of emotion as an index of credibility. A key technology of governance (Smith 2002) The truth is grasped through feeling. (Carol Gilligan – In a Different Voice??)
- Minutiae – “through our emotion we reach back sensually to grasp the tacit, embodied foundations of ourselves” (Katz 2000, 7)
- Space and time – landscape engineering producing new forms of power.

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REFERENCES III

• [http://www.fathersstoryweek.org/](http://www.fathersstoryweek.org/)