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**The constitution and implementation of the English Baccalaureate: implications for educational equality.**

**Doctorate of Education (EdD)**

**K. Hobbs**

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**Department of Education**

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## Abstract

The English Baccalaureate (EBac), a performance measure for English secondary schools, was introduced by the British Coalition government in 2010. As a narrow range of traditional academic subjects, the EBac contrasted with the previous broader, more flexible curriculum. The stated policy purpose was to ensure that all students had access and encouragement to study EBac subjects.

The research aims are to investigate why the EBac policy was introduced at this time, to examine the potential and actual impact on the school curriculum from the perspectives of teachers and to identify the potential winners and losers of this policy. This study provides critical reflection around the implementation of the EBac policy within a poststructural approach, making recommendations for socially just refinements. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is deployed within Scheurich’s policy archaeology framework to explore policy implementation via semi-structured interviews with school leaders in four contrasting secondary schools. CDA highlights a set of socially constituted issues, which in turn lead to the identification of the problem of low educational standards, (particularly among disadvantaged students) and hence to the construction of a politically acceptable policy solution, namely the EBac.

Five key themes arose from the interviews: the nature of knowledge; differentiation and hierarchy; choice and resistance; control and accountability, and equality. Teachers’ discourse centred on notions of student ‘ability’ in contrast to the anticipated focus on student characteristics of social class, gender and ethnicity. Teachers’ pre-occupation with outcomes of high-stake educational tests created self-governance and restricted access to EBac subjects for students deemed ‘not capable’ of achieving the pass grade of A\*-C. The study concludes that the EBac in its present form might exacerbate educational achievement inequalities rather than resolve them. The neoliberal drive for outcomes and performance measures has resulted in some students continuing to be diverted away from EBac subjects.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The election of a Conservative/ Liberal-Democratic Coalition government in Britain in 2010 after 13 years of a Labour government heralded a number of changes, particularly within education policy. The EBac policy, a new performance measure[[1]](#footnote-2) of curricular achievements in schools, was announced via *The Schools White Paper, The Importance of Teaching* (DfE), in October 2010. The EBac is a collection of five subjects examined via the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)[[2]](#footnote-3), studied in combination and achieved at grade C or above (graded from A\*-G).

As a teacher and school leader of 22 years, this school curriculum policy and performance measure intrigued me. Why this curriculum, why now, who will potentially benefit and who might be disadvantaged? I am keen to research the policy production process, but also interested in how the policy is translated and implemented within a variety of schools and the social justice issues surrounding this performance measure. I believe this policy will impact on the structure and content of school curricula, students’ educational choices, and educational opportunities and outcomes for students from different social and cultural groups. I propose to carry out a policy analysis of the EBac using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Scheurich’s policy archaeology (PA) framework, before investigating the impact of this policy on the educational practices in four different schools via semi-structured interviews with curriculum leaders.

This chapter provides the initial overview for my thesis, which focuses on researching the constitution and implementation of the EBac policy by the British Coalition government in 2010. It is divided into seven sections. Firstly, I outline the context of my research, providing the rationale, justification and background, before moving on to consider the specific focus of the study. In the third section, I state and justify my research aims and questions, while section four explores my own positionality. I then discuss the significance of my research and its contribution to the field. Section six outlines the structure of my thesis before moving on to my conclusion.

## 1.2 Context

The EBac performance measure is achieved by a student if a defined combination of GCSE subjects is studied and all are passed at grade C or above. The subjects within the EBac include: Mathematics, English language, Science (of which two subjects must be studied, including Computer Science since 2013), a foreign language, and either History or Geography. To discuss the context of the EBac, it is necessary to consider the recent history of education policy, from Labour’s policies 1997-2010, to the change of policy direction outlined in the Coalition government’s Education White Paper (2010).

From 1997-2010 Britain had a Labour government. Ball (2008) argues that during this period “education policy [was] increasingly subordinated to and articulated in terms of economic policy and the necessities of international competition” (p.53). Economic policy and international competition have continued to be important focus areas for the Coalition government (DfE, 2010). Steer et al (2007) comment that education policy under the Labour government became more centralised and interventionist, drawing on policy levers of funding, targets, and performance measures; inspection, planning, and national initiatives to drive and direct policies. The Labour administration took ‘low achieving schools’[[3]](#footnote-4) out of Local Authority[[4]](#footnote-5) (LA) control and allowed business leaders, charities and religious groups to run these schools as ‘academies’[[5]](#footnote-6) (DfE, 2000). In addition, the Labour government expanded the range of qualifications taught and accredited by state schools (DfES, 2001) and increased focus on the age 14-19 phase of education (DfES 2002). Such moves were reinforced by the Personalised Learning Agenda (DfES 2004)[[6]](#footnote-7), which emphasised bespoke learning pathways for individual students with the aim of promoting achievement and progression onto future stages of education.

During the Labour years, school standards in England, as measured by examination results at age 16, increased, as a wide range of additional vocational qualifications were included as part of school performance (DfE 1999). Previously, only GCSE grades counted towards a school’s achievement, but from 1997 to 2004, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) could be taught in secondary schools and were awarded equivalent performance points[[7]](#footnote-8) to GCSE subjects. From 2004, a greater range of qualifications and subjects were recognised and allocated performance points. As schools realised the potential of such qualifications to boost student achievement and the number of performance points, a rapid uptake of such qualifications occurred, particularly among schools categorised as low-achieving (Wolf, 2011).

A new coalition government came to power in 2010, made up of a Conservative majority and a Liberal Democrat minority. The Department for Education (DfE) headed by Secretary of State Michael Gove (2010 to 2014), a Conservative Minister, adopted a different position on education to the previous government. The broadening of the curriculum to encompass a wide range of vocational and alternative qualifications was no longer seen as a strength, but as a cause for confusion amongst students, parents and employers, as well as a cause of declining standards and a lack of transparency in terms of educational progression (DfE, 2010a, p.8). The 2010 White Paper (DfE) suggested that certain students should be classified as ‘disadvantaged’; in other words, those on Free School Meals (FSM),[[8]](#footnote-9) were being further disadvantaged by being prevented or discouraged from taking a range of traditional academic subjects such as those in the EBac. This, it was argued, prevented access to higher education and elite universities for those students (DfE, 2010a, p.17). A fall in the British position in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Survey in 2006 in Science, Literacy and Mathematics (PISA, 2006)[[9]](#footnote-10) paved the way for a wider discussion about educational standards.

*The Importance of Teaching*, Schools’ White Paper (DfE 2010a) stated the belief that “radical reform of our schools” was necessary (p.4). It can be argued that whilst the tone and aspirations were not dissimilar to previous government policies, the mechanism for achieving these aims was different and the announcement of the EBac indicated a refocus of the curriculum. The bold nature of this policy was not in the subjects or the qualification, but the specific subject combinations and the traditional range of subjects included. Previously there were no prescribed combinations of subjects for study aged 14-16; all subjects were measured individually as part of the school performance tables (with the exception of English and Mathematics, which had been measured together from 2009). Schools were judged primarily on whether a student achieved five GCSEs or equivalent qualifications at grade C or above[[10]](#footnote-11). In reality, a student could study GCSE Mathematics and English and then achieve three GCSE equivalents using qualifications such as Business and Technology Education Council qualifications (BTECs)[[11]](#footnote-12). Some BTEC qualifications carried points equivalent to four GCSEs, so a student could study three subjects but still achieve the equivalent performance points of six GCSEs.

While the EBac was not described in detail in the White Paper, the government stated that its introduction would “encourage schools to offer a broad set of academic subjects to age 16” (DfE, 2010a, p.11). It was clear from this statement that academic subjects were to be given priority over vocational ones. The *Schools White Paper* *Statement of Intent 2010 addendum* (DfE, 2010d) later confirmed the combination of subjects, which would represent a traditional, academic diet. The EBac is not strictly a qualification, as there is no certificate for having achieved a grade C or above in this combination of subjects. It exists only as a school performance measure; a measure that has the power to dictate what schools can offer to students in many and possibly all English schools. [[12]](#footnote-13)

All English schools are concerned by the performance tables, as this the information is annually made public in order to demonstrate schools’ ‘effectiveness’. The DfE website encourages parents to use the tables to select and directly compare the performance of schools on a range of measures. Yet the power of performance tables is not equally felt amongst schools. Those schools which are deemed to be ‘successful’ may have greater ability to counteract to or explain a low performance on any one measure. For example, many independent schools do not offer English and Mathematics qualifications that ‘count’ in the performance tables, preferring to use iGCSE[[13]](#footnote-14) qualifications (DfE, 2014a) yet their high educational standing may mean they are able to ‘explain’ their apparent low ranking in the tables to a parental clientele who are willing to look beyond the headline figures and take the time to inquire about the reasons behind them. On the other hand, those schools deemed to be ‘failing’ or ‘low achieving’ may find that they are placed under even greater pressure by a low or falling performance measure, which generates close scrutiny from the LA or the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)[[14]](#footnote-15) and indeed the press. Such scrutiny may then result in fewer students applying to attend these schools, which then results in them receiving less funding. Ironically, the EBac range of GCSE subjects is ideally suited to the traditional curriculum of the independent and selective state school (grammar school[[15]](#footnote-16)) sector. Such schools perform well on the EBac measure without any alteration to their curriculum. For an academy with a much more diverse curriculum spanning vocational as well as academic subjects, success as measured by EBac is likely to incur a high cost in terms of curriculum and cultural change if their pre EBac curriculum was predominately structured towards vocational qualifications or non-traditional GCSE subjects such as Sociology, Media Studies or Physical Education (PE). Many of these concerns were explored by a Select Committee Review into the EBac, published 19th July 2011 (Education Committee, 2011). The findings and recommendations of this committee will be critically considered in Chapter 2.

The EBac, with its focus on a narrow, traditional, academic set of subjects and assessment methods, ideally matches the curriculum on offer in a certain sector of schools within the English system. The range of subjects corresponds to the educational ambitions of middle class[[16]](#footnote-17) parents, for whom this curriculum often resonates with their own educational experiences and is seen as a route to university (Reay et al., 2005). I suspect that using the EBac as a performance measure will enhance the educational chances and opportunities of some schools and students and conversely disadvantage others. I therefore argue that the EBac presents a number of social justice issues which warrant identification, discussion and evaluation.

After considering the complex educational and political context in which the EBac policy is situated, I now consider the particular focus of my study.

## 1.3 Focus of the study

O’Leary argues that “moving from a problem suitable to research to a research question is an essential starting point” (2005, p.32). While this may seem self-evident, the process of moving from one position to the other is not straightforward. The EBac is a collection of five GCSE subjects, all of which must be achieved at grade C or above. Achieving success in any one of these subjects individually is not necessarily a problem for either students or schools, as the majority of schools allow students to select these subjects: “98% of schools offered the choice of subjects that enable their pupils to study towards the EBac” (Greevy et al 2012, p.24). It is the combination of what, for some students, is an arbitrary collection of GCSE subjects that potentially proves problematic.

The move by the Labour administration to classify all qualifications studied at age 16 as GCSE equivalents ensured the equal treatment of different qualifications by the performance tables. All qualifications were allocated a set number of points and could therefore be equated and compared. The EBac has, however, changed the value placed on particular subjects and type of qualification in the sense that EBac subjects are of greater value within the performance tables than non-EBac subjects or vocational qualifications. Furthermore, the EBac introduces the possibility that alternative options to GCSEs will be removed altogether from school curricula as schools move towards a more EBac-orientated curriculum model for the majority of their students. My study aims to investigate who will benefit from the EBac policy and who will be disadvantaged. My specific research aims and questions are considered in the following section.

## 1.4 Research aims and questions

My research aims are to investigate how and why the EBac was introduced in England in 2010 as part of the inaugural education policy of the Coalition government and to identify the potential winners and losers of this policy. O’Leary (2005, p.34) suggests five elements to consider when formulating research questions:

* What is your topic?
* What is the context?
* What do you want to achieve?
* What is the nature of your question?
* Are there any potential relationships you want to explore?

Rudestam et al (1992, p.17), however pose the following three questions to consider:

* Is the question clear and researchable?
* Is the question located within the context of previous study?
* Is the proposed method suitable?

O’Leary argues that it is important to “narrow and clarify until your question is as concise and well-articulated as possible” (ibid, p.34). As a result, I am clear that my research is exploratory and my intention is to examine one aspect of education policy and practice within the Coalition government era. The White Paper (2010a) contained a range of policy initiatives and reforms, of which the EBac was only one. Others included the creation of a wider range of academies, the introduction of the Pupil Premium,[[17]](#footnote-18) and the reduction of vocational qualifications available in secondary schools.

These aims have led to the construction of the following specific research questions:

#### 1) What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?

The EBac policy was one of the first major policy statements by the incoming Coalition government in 2010 and the first major educational policy implemented by Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education. Using CDA (see Chapter 3) I analyse the text of the White Paper and related documents to research the EBac policy introduction and presentation.

#### 2) What are teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac?

The EBac policy exists within the official text of the White Paper. An understanding of the perspectives of a sample of educational practitioners within case-study schools regarding the policy is also required, however, as these professionals are expected to translate policy into practice.

#### 3) Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?

However well-intentioned or informed a policy might be, any major shift in thinking after 13 years of a Labour administration will be perceived by some as having the potential to create or compound other problems, as well as generate possible solutions to issues such as the underachievement of some students. The implementation of the policy may also create further equality issues and/or additional hierarchies for different schools, different subjects and groups of students with different social classes, ethnicity, gender and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)[[18]](#footnote-19) characteristics. It is unlikely that the EBac will impact on all groups of students in an identical way. Policy research, including Reay (2006); Reay et al. (2005); Gillborn (2011b), and DfE (2013), has suggested that the impact of policies such as the EBac will be unequally distributed. These studies will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 2. Schools also continue to be driven by the accountability system and the importance attached to different measures within this system, irrespective of new policy inclusions such as the EBac. All decisions and actions relating to the research are influenced by my positionality as a researcher, which I now address.

## 1.5 Researcher positionality

All researchers approach research with their own particular world view and opinions. In this section, I discuss the issues surrounding positionality, why it is considered important and the place it has within research, as well as the possible difficulties it creates, before reflecting on my own positionality in relation to this research topic. ‘Positionality’ is derived from experiences and events which impact upon an individual and it is difficult to consider one’s ‘position’ outside of this lived experience. Takacs (2002) challenges researchers to consider their own positionality, as well as to develop empathy for the position of others. He argues that the quest for social justice within research requires the opening of minds to the perspectives of others and to an understanding of how we are positioned in relation to others.

Historically, the quest for objective ‘value-free’ research was considered to be the role of the scientific researcher (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Wellington states that it is now generally accepted that the researcher in educational research is the key “instrument” (2000, p.41). A researcher impacts on the social world and the position that the researcher adopts affects all aspects of the research process. It is vital that researchers consider and acknowledge their own positionality, reflecting before, during, and after research, on the possible impact on their work. Such a reflexive position, if not contained, however, runs the risk of becoming a self-indulgent confession (Wellington, 2000, p.43). I intend to consider my positionality throughout my research, presenting the elements I believe the reader requires to consider my standpoint. Mine will be a critically self-reflexive stance, with the aim of ensuring that the research is trustworthy.

My research background is in Sociology. My early introduction to the subject was filled with the classic works of Illich, such as *Deschooling Society* (1971) and Bowles and Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976). Illich (1971) argues that children are taught in school to conform to societal expectations, led by predetermined social inequalities, thus ultimately denying children the opportunity to develop as free thinkers. Bowles and Gintis (1976) claim that school teaches children how to operate in a market-driven economy, with middle class children taught leadership skills to equip them for managerial positions and working class children prepared for manual labour, all within the false premise of a meritocratic system which supposedly rewards talent and ability. These works excited me. After years within the education system as a student, it was refreshing to consider what I had taken at face value; that ‘school’ and ‘education’ may actually have been devices to achieve completely different ends to those I had believed. In more recent times, however, as I have adopted school leadership roles and (possibly) become part of the educational establishment machinery, I have not had cause to consider these works as much, so their messages have declined in importance in my thinking. I am keen to re-acquaint myself with these and other theories and to apply them to my research on the EBac.

I started my teaching career in 1994 as an A-Level Sociology teacher in an independent, selective girls’ school. I then followed a curriculum career route within the state sector before moving to an educational charity as Head of Curriculum Research for 27 schools spanning the independent and academy sectors. The move out of a single school allowed me a unique opportunity to visit, consider, evaluate and reflect on the nature of differing curricula and the impact that curriculum policy decisions have on students, teachers and schools, ranging from the most academically selective[[19]](#footnote-20) to those deemed to be ‘failing’. The curricular approach of each school was different and subjected to contrasting pressures and encouragements. Many academies were, in my opinion, quick to play the ‘performance table game’[[20]](#footnote-21). These schools would introduce a wide range of vocational qualifications for students which ensured performance table success for the school, but not always providing clear progression routes to the next stage of education for students (Wolf 2011). In contrast, many independent and academically successful schools offered a traditional academic GCSE curriculum, for example the EBac subjects with additional languages, often including Latin, whilst excluding subjects such as Media, Design Technology, Drama and vocational subjects. While this traditional curriculum now fits well with the EBac, it may not have allowed all students to flourish or explore alternative routes which may have been more interesting or more directed towards their career ambitions (Education Committee, July 2011).

In 2010, I returned to a school position as Deputy Head in charge of Curriculum, where I faced many curricular decisions and pressures, including responding to the EBac policy as a performance measure by which my school would be judged. In undertaking this research study, I wish to pursue my academic interests by reflecting on and questioning education policy and generating knowledge and further questions that will contribute to educational and academic debate. Next, I explore the significance of the EBac as a key component of the Coalition government’s first education policy.

## 1.6 Significance

My research is a contemporary study of the education policy of the Coalition government. The 2010 White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching,* allowed the new government to articulate its position and future direction for education in England. This would extend beyond the life of the Parliament by introducing changes in the legal status of schools (such as the new academy status), which would be very difficult for future governments to overturn.[[21]](#footnote-22) Within this lengthy policy was the official announcement of the EBac, which stated that the government would “encourage schools to offer a broad set of academic subjects to age 16, by introducing the English Baccalaureate” (p.41). This was stated to be a way of ensuring “breadth” within the curriculum and a “properly rounded academic education” as well as ensuring that schools prioritised languages, History and Geography, subjects that were declining in popularity (p.44). It was also stated that the EBac was only one performance measure and that it should “not be the limit of the schools’ ambitions for their students” (p.45). Despite such claims, a number of schools made immediate and sometimes quite radical changes to their curriculum as a result of the EBac policy being implemented immediately and retrospectively as a measure of school performance for the summer 2010 examination results (Taylor, 2011). I believe that my research is important for four key reasons, which I now explore.

### 1.6.1 The Coalition government’s first education policy

My study provides a contemporary analysis of the constitution of the EBac policy and its implementation within case-study schools. The opportunity to study the immediate context and impact of this policy is one that will only be available for a short period of time. Whilst later studies will yield important findings, the accounts of respondents will be retrospective. Having been part of these changes and been able to elicit the thoughts and actions of respondents at the time of implementation, my research provides an important reflection on contemporary reactions to the introduction of this policy. Applying Scheurich’s policy analysis framework and using CDA techniques, as well as considering the implementation at school level, my study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of this aspect of the 2010 education policy.

### 1.6.2 Anti-democratic political tool

My research is important also because this is an opportunity to investigate whether the EBac will make education more or less democratic. Taken at face value, the EBac is just a collection of rather traditional GCSE subjects already on offer in the majority of schools. It may also be interpreted, however, as an anti-democratic political tool, enhancing the educational chances and prospects of those with appropriate cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and disadvantaging others. By selecting GCSE qualifications and excluding vocational ones as the only method of achieving the EBac, little freedom is granted to students to select other courses of personal interest. My research considers why these subjects have been selected and the impact of the EBac on the educational decisions, outcomes and possible future educational choices for different groups of children.

The government argues that the EBac ensures all children are encouraged to study the same subjects up to age 16, which creates ‘equality of opportunity’. A greater number of children will have the option to pursue these ‘core’ or ‘high status’ subjects, which then allows them access to prestigious universities and careers. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that the possession of ‘cultural capital’, i.e. knowledge of the components of society that are considered to be more important and valuable than others, means that some students, usually middle and upper class, are able to take better advantage of the educational opportunities on offer at any given time. This appears to be borne out by the fact that independent and selective schools, which traditionally attract middle class students, already provide the EBac curriculum. Even if the same subjects are offered to all students, this does not necessarily ensure equality of outcome or of opportunity. Carr and Hartnett argue that due to the many divisions in society, children are not able to take identical advantage or achieve identical outcomes from the curriculum presented to them:

To select a subject-based traditional curriculum and to argue that it is appropriate to everybody is bound to disadvantage those children who do not share its explicit and implicit cultural assumptions (1996, p.173).

This statement was written about the 1988 National Curriculum, but I argue that it can be applied to the EBac. It may be politically convenient to attempt to teach, assess and compare everyone according to the same range of qualifications and subjects, but this does not necessarily ensure equality, rather it continues to replicate, reinforce and legitimise inequalities. Reay (2006) argues that while social mobility is declining in Britain, consideration of the inequalities associated with social class are missing from the discourse of teacher training, leaving new teachers ill-informed and ill-equipped to address social class inequalities facing children in their classrooms. Whilst the White Paper appears to be concerned about social class inequalities in education, it does not address any of the wider social and school-based issues which lead to and perpetuate such inequalities.

It would be easy to frame this study solely within an analysis and evaluation of social class inequalities. It is also important to consider the impact of the EBac on different ethnic groups of students. Gillborn (2011a) states that black Caribbean students are less likely to be entered for the EBac than white students. In 2010, 6.8% of black Caribbean students achieved the EBac compared to 15.8% of white British students. This is an extension of Gillborn’s earlier findings; “the imperative to raise ‘standards’ in this crude form has led to the increased use of internal selection between different teaching groups and the impact has been particularly negative for black students, who find themselves disproportionality placed in the lowest groups, facing a restricted curriculum and lower teacher expectations” (2006, p.6). *The Statistical First Release* (DfE, 2014d)[[22]](#footnote-23) demonstrates that girls are taking the EBac in larger numbers than boys. This gap grew from a 4.9% gap in 2009-10 to an 8.6% gap in 2012-13. My study aims to identify which social groups may face inequalities arising from the EBac implementation.

### 1.6.3 Governance and Neoliberalism

The third reason I believe that my study is important is that it reflects on the current debate about accountability systems in education, which act as surveillance and control devices over teachers and children, through the use of data, testing and reporting. Apple (1996) discusses the recent link in the USA and Britain between neoconservativism and neoliberalism, which aims to increase international competitiveness using fixed knowledge and rigorous testing systems combined with a return to notions of a past “golden age”. Lingard et al. (2013) highlight that this move is a global trend and comment that a “global panopticism” of testing is now in operation (p.540) in an attempt to drive up standards. The concern expressed by countries such as England over the PISA test results appearing to show a decline in standards in comparison to other countries highlights the importance that politicians and others attach to such global monitoring and surveillance.

Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ demonstrates how control is exercised not merely through external control such as performance tables and inspectorate, but through self-surveillance and internalised behaviour, in this case relating both to students and teachers. My study aims to consider the impact of such accountability measures and the resulting internalised behaviours on the curricula options provided by schools and teachers to different children.

### 1.6.4 Critical educational research

Finally, my research continues the tradition of critical educational research with the intention of encouraging change and rectifying identified inequalities in educational access (Taylor et al., 1997). The pace of educational change during the Coalition government was rapid and sustained. The seeming desire of the government to change the educational landscape irrevocably enhanced the need for contemporary educational research, analysis, commentary and critical evaluation, as Hodgson and Spours observe:

There is currently little national research that evaluates the changes in this [14-19 policy] area of education and training because events are happening so fast that they are outstripping the capacity to assess their impact (2012, p.5)

My study will become part of the body of current educational research, providing additional input to the evaluation and assessment of the impact of the EBac policy.

## 1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In the second chapter, I critically review the literature relating to six areas: educational equality and democracy; social and cultural reproduction; the concept of curriculum; curriculum knowledge; educational policy and PA; and the EBac. This leads to a discussion of my theoretical framework, arising from my engagement with previous research and theoretical positions. My theoretical framework is based on a poststructuralist approach using the work of Carlson (2006). I demonstrate how Carlson combines the structuralist approach of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Apple (1982, 1990) and the poststructural approach of Foucault.

In the third chapter, focusing on methodology and methods, I consider my ontological and epistemological position as a researcher in order to explain my methodological stance. I draw on Scheurich’s PA (1994) as a framework through which the key policy documents can be evaluated and reflected upon. Scheurich’s approach to policy analysis and the subsequent application of his framework (Gale 2001; Walton 2010; Winter 2011) are discussed and critically considered in relation to the key EBac policy documents. I also carry out CDA using the critical literacy framework put forward by Hyatt (2010). I focus on policy implementation issues at school level through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with Deputy Heads in charge of curriculum, Heads of EBac subjects, and Heads of non-EBac subjects in four contrasting English secondary schools within one local authority (LA). Using the concept of Bassey’s “fuzzy generalisation” (1998), I identify key findings which may resonate with teachers in other schools.

In chapter four, I combine the CDA and themes from the semi-structured interviews to analyse my data and identify key findings. The research data consists of CDA on key policy texts and a thematic analysis of transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. My analysis is informed by Scheurich’s PA. A process of “continuous refinement” is employed, using initial analysis to inform later data collection and analysis (Wellington, 2000, p.136).

My research findings are discussed in Chapter 5, in which the key themes and arguments are presented, critically analysed and evaluated, then related back to the research questions and key literature to draw out elements of comparison. In the concluding chapter, the key themes and arguments are presented. Following on from the critical line of enquiry in this research, the conclusion offers responses to the research questions on the basis of my data analysis and the critical review of the literature. I make recommendations for policy and practice as well as suggesting avenues for future research. The limitations of the study are discussed, as well as ways in which the completion of this study has influenced me as a researcher and teacher, ending with my presentation of the original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis.

## 1.8 Conclusion

The EBac policy was and remains a key element of curriculum planning within English schools in 2016. The policy purports to address legitimate concerns over curriculum equality and equality of access. I suggest, however, that it is a device for the continuation of social and cultural reproduction, which acts as a barrier to educational progression for certain groups within society. How different schools choose to respond to and shape the EBac policy for their students has a fundamental bearing on the impact and consequences of the policy for the students in their care. This research provides a vehicle for research and exploration of an unfolding situation, as well as providing a critical reflection and evaluation with the potential to influence future policy and its implementation (Lingard, 2010).

# Chapter 2 – Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

My study is located within the tradition of critical curriculum research. This chapter considers the role and purpose of a literature review, followed by addressing my research aims and questions through a critical analysis of the key literature. I begin by considering the purpose a critical literature review serves and justifying my selection of research in this area.

The “literature review” is the part of the thesis where there is extensive reference to related research and theory in your field; it is where connections are made between the source texts that you draw on and where you position yourself and your research among these sources… you identify the theories and previous research which have influenced your choice of topic and the methodology you are choosing to adopt. (Ridley, 2008, p.2).

Taking this advice, the literature review is “the driving force” behind my research aims and questions. Ridley comments that the literature review is a product, a finished article, but also a process; the method of conducting the literature review structures and supports the development of the research and thesis. Texts must be selected with the clear purpose of providing insight into the topic and the main or counter arguments, rather than simply recounting the work of others (Wellington et al., 2005; Ridley, 2008; Burgess et al., 2006). Wellington refers to this as an “inquiry trail” (2005, p.73) which is personal and individual to the study and the author. I reviewed the relevant literature as a way of setting the scene and understanding the issues and debates. I then returned to the literature to reflect critically on the connections made during my analysis of the policy documents and interview transcripts, repeating this process during my final write-up to ensure the inclusion of contemporary sources.

My critical review is divided into eight sections, each exploring key elements of the literature, in order to illuminate my study’s aims, research questions and theoretical framework. First, I draw on the literature concerning educational equality and democracy, aiming to address the equality implications of the EBac. Secondly, I consider aspects of social and cultural reproduction within the education system and the EBac policy by evaluating work on Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) ‘correspondence principle’ and the concept of ‘cultural capital’ by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). I then review the contested concept of curriculum, identifying an appropriate definition for the purpose of this enquiry, before focusing on the application and use of curriculum knowledge, a concept which underpins the EBac policy and its stated desired outcomes. In the fifth section I reflect on the purpose and role of policy analysis, evaluating Scheurich’s (1994) PA framework in order to analyse key sections of the EBac policy. The concepts of governmentality and surveillance are explored in Section 6. Following this, key findings from EBac research and reports are reviewed. I conclude with a consideration of the literature that informed my theoretical position, amalgamating Marxist and structuralist concepts within a poststructuralist approach. The selection and exclusion of texts has been guided by the aims of my study and my research questions.

## 2.2 Educational equality and democracy

This section considers definitions of educational equality and democracy before outlining the impact of the 1988 National Curriculum in England on the equality and democracy debate, drawing comparisons and similarities with the introduction of the EBac within the 2010 White Paper. The potential impact of the EBac on the educational achievements of children of different social classes, ethnicity, gender and SEND is also discussed.

### 2.2.1 Definitions of educational equality and democracy

Education is a powerful political tool… it can be used to support and promote democratic forms of society; and it can be used with equal… effectiveness to undermine and destroy them (Kelly, 1995, p. xiv).

Kelly argues that democracy is a moral concept determining decisions that can and cannot be made. It is not just the ability of people to exercise their right to elect leaders, but their effective contribution to the ongoing dialogue of society. The history of education in England is an unequal one, with polarised provision continuing to exist. Wealthy parents can purchase an independent education for their children, a different social experience than that found in the majority of state schools. Discrepancies remain between the educational achievement of children from different social classes, genders and ethnicities (DfE, 2015). While gender inequalities in education appear to have been reversed, with girls now achieving more highly than boys at GCSE and A Level (though gender differences remain in subject choices) in terms of the numbers entering university, class and ethnic inequalities in educational achievement remain*.* Reay et al. (2005) comment that despite a 150% growth in university places between 1970 and 1989, class inequalities in access to university remain relatively untouched. Though the overall number of ethnic minority applications to university have increased, there appears to be a stark divide between universities as to which different ethnic groups apply (Reay et al., 2005, p.9).

The stated aim of the White Paper (2010) and the EBac policy is to allow all children “equal access to educational opportunities” (p.6) and for schools to “be engines of social mobility” (p.6). The use of a school performance measure to encourage schools to prepare children for a set of uniform qualifications in specified subjects is presented as a democratic act. The previous Labour administration encouraged schools to enter students for varying educational pathways[[23]](#footnote-24). The EBac could create a level playing field, ensuring that children study and are assessed on a similar range of subjects and types of qualifications. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, providing the same subject requirements for a performance measure does not equate to equity (the same outcomes) or even equality of opportunity (access to the same options). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) discuss the impact of cultural capital on educational outcomes for different groups of children, arguing that any structure or system within education will create “unequal section and unequal selectedness” (p.72) for children from different backgrounds. A child’s upbringing impacts on their ability; their desire to engage with and the importance attached to the curriculum. These concepts are considered in light of the introduction of the 1988 National Curriculum in England and Wales and the EBac (2010 White Paper).

### 2.2.2 1988 National Curriculum and links to the EBac

The New Right Conservative government was responsible for the implementation of the National Curriculum in 1988 in England. This approach to the curriculum imposed a strict set of content which had to be learnt. Ball (1994) claims this to be part of a New Right ‘cultural restorationism’ where traditional forms of education, including curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and teacher training, were prioritised. This ‘cultural restorationist’ movement emphasised traditional forms of education and ‘real knowledge’, a form of knowledge that was configured in the form of irrefutable ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ as opposed to “progressive, ideological knowledge” (p.33) which placed an emphasis on varying perspectives and relevance to the learner’s experiences. Ball referred to this traditional ‘restorationist’ curriculum as “The curriculum of the dead” (1994, p.46) in that it froze in time a body of knowledge, to be presented as the fixed knowledge children had to understand for them to be successful in education. While the National Curriculum has undergone many revisions in terms of content and requirements (DfES, 1988; DfES, 2001; DfE, 2014) it is still intact in the sense that following it is a compulsory requirement for all state schools[[24]](#footnote-25), though not of independent schools, academies or free schools[[25]](#footnote-26). Ball (1994) argues that, along with the curriculum, it is also the structure of the school that can remain frozen in its approach.

In the restorationists’ education system value and worth are generated not by the complexities of teaching and learning but by the iconography of the school uniform, the examination hall and the authoritarian teacher. Signifier and signified are rent asunder. The past, present and future of schooling coalesce so that change and progress are achieved by a return to a fantasy past; individual freedom is partnered by patriarchal sternness; economic regeneration is to be based on forms of teaching and learning quite unrelated to the flexible specialization required by post-Fordist production techniques (1994, p.47).

I believe that the Coalition’s Education White Paper (2010) and the EBac are a continuation of this “fantasy past”. Michael Gove, then the Secretary of State for Education, appears to have a traditional subject-based curriculum in mind for the EBac, most familiar to those educated in an English independent or grammar school. Vocational and skill-based qualifications may be more relevant to the current economic climate, where few people have a job for life and flexibility in jobs and skills are a necessity (Winter, 2011, p.9). The EBac emphasis on just five traditional academic subjects could lead to a reduction in the range of available subjects. Along with EBac curriculum and performance measure changes, fewer performance points were allocated to vocational subjects in league tables. The decline in vocational subjects offered in secondary schools accelerated after the publication of and recommendations within *The Wolf Review* (2011). The focus on a traditional education, knowledge and subjects in the EBac have the potential to create inequality of outcome within the education system. This inequality will manifest through the ability of some students, in particular from middle class backgrounds, to work successfully within the EBac curriculum and to progress to traditional high-status universities and courses.

Carr and Hartnett (1996) argue that the 1988 National Curriculum in England was a “case study of the elitist conception of democracy” (p.171). Created with limited public consultation, by ‘experts’ with a ‘consultation window open over the summer when most teachers were on holiday, it was imposed by a large majority in the House of Commons. In a similar fashion, the EBac was a stated intention within the 2010 White Paper. The selection of EBac subjects, announced in December 2010, involved little consultation or debate with educational professionals. Carr and Hartnett suggest that:

The National Curriculum was an effective operation in statecraft and political manipulation rather than a serious attempt to develop a well founded view about a curriculum appropriate for a modern democratic society (1996, p.170).

The implementation of the EBac echoes this. The retrospective introduction of the performance measure, whereby the percentage of students passing the EBac in 2010 was calculated for the August GCSE results following the October announcement, could have been a deliberate ploy to destabilise public trust in the educational improvements claimed to have been achieved through Labour’s policies. In 2010, the national average percentage of students passing the EBac was only 15.6%, compared with 53.4% achieving five GCSEs graded A\*-C, including English and Mathematics (DfE 2011). The Coalition government was quick to highlight the fact that the curricula of some academies did not allow any of their students to gain the EBac, calling into question Labour’s claims that academies were improving educational outcomes for children.

Another stated aim of the 1988 National Curriculum relevant to the EBac and disputed by Carr and Hartnett is that it afforded all children a common curriculum and an equal entitlement and opportunities for future educational progression. They argued that such a curriculum would not afford equal opportunities; I in turn argue that the EBac will not enhance equality. Gove is clear in his intent that the EBac will allow equality of opportunity and can be regarded as:

…a driver of real social justice. The very best means of helping all realise their potential – of making opportunity more equal – is guaranteeing the best possible education for as many as possible (2009a, p.3).

His belief is based on the concept that a stated limited set of subjects and qualifications prevents certain students from opting out of this curriculum. The argument proposes that all students are presented with the same progression opportunities for attainment, further academic study and choice of university, ignoring the fact that not all students will succeed (or wish to succeed) at the EBac.

Rather than providing equality of opportunity and social justice, I argue that the EBac perpetuates education as a site of social and cultural reproduction, ensuring the continuation of social and cultural hierarchies of power in society (Bowles and Gintis 1976). In this way, the EBac exacerbates differences between students of differing social class, ethnicity, gender and SEND. Apple states that:

The “same treatment” by sex, race and ethnicity, or class is not the same at all. A democratic curriculum and pedagogy must begin with a recognition of “the different social positionings and cultural repertoires in the classrooms, and the power relations between them” (1996, p.33).

There are differences in educational achievement in England across a range of social groups and the literature relating to these inequalities is now critically reviewed.

### 2.2.3 Social class

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds in England are much less likely to achieve 5 A\*-C GCSEs than those from more privileged backgrounds. The White Paper 2010 forewords by both the Prime Minister (PM) and the Secretary of State for Education (Gove) make reference to the fact that more students go to Oxbridge[[26]](#footnote-27) each year from particular independent schools than from the whole cohort of students in receipt of FSM. Perry and Francis comment that:

Social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement in the UK, where the social class gap for educational achievement is one of the most significant in the developed world (2010, p.2).

Gove claims that the EBac provides greater equality of opportunity for all children, though as will be discussed later, the imposition of a common, prescribed single curriculum does not ensure that divisions in attainment reduce (Carr and Hartnett, 1996). Taylor (2011) used the 2010 DfE performance data to show that selective grammar schools achieved more highly on the EBac (67.5%) than comprehensive schools (13.3%).

Despite evidence that social class is still a major division within English education, Reay (2006) argues that social class, as experienced within school, is ignored within initial teacher training so that teachers no longer consider it to be an issue. Amongst the myriad statistical data on which annual school performance is judged, the only measure that can be considered to relate to social class is that of performance by children receiving FSM. It is notable that this group is not designed to be a social class categorisation, but represents those children and families living in the most extreme poverty in England and therefore could be regarded as lower working class. While FSM may be a proxy indicator for deprivation, it is not a proxy indicator of being working class (Gillborn and Safia Mirza, 2000). It is unwise to ignore the social class implications of the design and outcomes of the EBac policy given the enduring ability of the middle class (see section 1.3) to ensure maximum benefit from educational changes, even those which have a stated intention of reducing inequality of educational attainment and progression.

### 2.2.4 Ethnicity

While social class is an important issue when researching the impact of the EBac, Gillborn (2011b) argues that it is also important to consider ethnicity. Echoing Reay, he suggests that the continuing educational underachievement of black and Asian students is becoming a largely ignored issue. In his Guardian article: *There’s no black in the baccalaureate* (2011b), he argued that “the [EBac] measure introduces a clear race bias into any selection system that adopts it” (p.1). As Gillborn (2006) highlights, black boys are disproportionality located in ‘low ability’ sets and are thus denied access to higher level qualifications, now including the EBac. He provides evidence for the existence of a race issue in terms of uptake of the EBac, since fewer black Caribbean students can be successful in the EBac if fewer of them have the opportunity or choose to study this combination of subjects. The result is that while 15.8% of all students achieved the EBac in 2011, only 6.8% of black Caribbean students did so. If employers or universities use the EBac as a candidate selection tool, there will be an automatic race bias. When evaluating Gillborn’s work, it is important to consider his use of statistics, particularly when he combines race and gender within one set, which are then compared to another which only contains boys. This can distort the information presented, as girls currently perform better at GCSE level than boys.

### 2.2.5 Gender

As shown by the Statistical First Release (DfE Oct 2014d), a greater percentage of girls enter the EBac than boys. This gap is growing, from 4.9% in 2009-10 to 8.9% in 2013-14, with 29.1% of girls achieving the EBac compared to 19.5% of boys. Girls now make up the majority university applicants and in 2015 were 35% more likely to go to university than men (UCAS 2015). Gillborn and Kirton (2000) suggest that there is a national ‘moral panic’ regarding the achievement and progression of white boys. The ‘underachievement’ of white working class boys may however be a misplaced concern, possibly masking a more fundamental issue. The concern over the lack of ‘achievement’ by some groups, in this case white working class boys, obscures the debate over equality of opportunity and fairness for all and negates the progress made by girls to overcome previous disadvantages in the education system (Buchmann et al., 2008).

### 2.2.6 Special Educational Needs and Disability

SEND students are the final group requiring consideration. Often these students will experience a range of barriers when trying to achieve academic success, particularly if assessment occurs in the form of a final summative terminal examination. Vocational courses and coursework-based assessment have the potential to allow some SEND students to display what they can achieve rather than to reinforce what they cannot (Taylor, 2011). Performance data used by Taylor (2011) highlights that in 2010, the schools with the highest number of SEND students achieved only 5.5% in the EBac, while the schools with the lowest SEND numbers achieved 32.9%. SEND students are often withdrawn from modern language courses in Key Stage Three (KS3)[[27]](#footnote-28) to allow them to focus on either additional English or alternative support that they may require. It is far less likely that these students would study a modern foreign language at GCSE, or indeed the full range of EBac subjects. The EBac gap between SEND and non-SEND has widened, expanding by 6.2% in 2012-2013 (DfE, 2014a).

The EBac appears to have the potential to exacerbate inequalities in educational achievement between different social groups. The next section critically considers the arguments relating to social and cultural reproduction.

## 2.3 Social and cultural reproduction

The works of Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) provide important background to my research questions as they consider education as a site of cultural and social reproduction. They argue that children are taught and exposed to the dominant norms and values of their society through the overt and hidden curriculum in school, which acts as a form of secondary socialisation. The EBac contributes to social and cultural reproduction in transparent ways through the notions of educational ‘success’ or ‘failure’ on this performance measure. Social and cultural reproduction may also transpire in more covert ways such as through pressure and influence from teachers or parents, which may encourage some children to study EBac subjects and others to reject or be diverted, dissuaded or refused access to this specific combination of subjects and qualifications. In relation to my third research question, regarding the implications of the EBac for educational equality, I consider the work of Illich (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Feinberg (1983), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new (Illich 1971, p.9).

Illich (1971) argues that institutions like schools operate not to serve the needs of all individuals, but rather to serve the needs of wider society, legitimise ‘social rank’ and reproduce societal divisions. The powerful preserve their position and the status quo of unequal social relations is maintained.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), Bowles and Gintis argue that schools foster inequality, creating and perpetuating the myth of meritocracy as a device to reproduce the unequal nature of the capitalist system. Capitalism creates a situation where a minority control the wealth and power in society and the majority provide their labour services to this group. The myth of meritocracy is the misguided belief that individuals earn their position in education and society through their own ability and efforts, therefore those at the top of capitalist society who receive the highest rewards are believed by all to have ‘earned’ this position. Bowles and Gintis argue that education is portrayed as an “open, objective, and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions” (p.103) and that failure is due to individual inadequacy. Such a belief provides legitimacy to ideas difference and inequality, as some people are understood and identified to be more ‘talented’ or ‘hard-working’ than others and therefore more deserving of the rewards of capitalism, such as high status roles and income.

Bowles and Gintis further argue that “a major element in the integrative function of education is the legitimation of pre-existing economic disparities” (p.102), so that economic inequalities are reproduced and legitimised by the education system. This is achieved via the correspondence principle, whereby the structural and hierarchical relations of the workplace are replicated within the school. The EBac, as a culmination of educational achievement in the form of examination grades, becomes part of the selection process for future educational progression in England. If some students are prevented from accessing EBac subjects or are unable to achieve the required grades, inequalities will result. This is in contrast to the stated aim of the EBac policy, to allow the maximum number of students access to subjects considered essential for elite university entrance.

There are many criticisms of Bowles and Gintis’ approach. The description of the education system as a ‘black box’ which children enter and leave ready for their role in society ignores the experiences that occur in schools on a day-to-day basis (Apple, 1982). Apple argues that both the curriculum and the culture of the school can affect a student’s life chances, but neither are discussed in detail by Bowles and Gintis. Apple suggests that students are portrayed as passive recipients of cultural reproduction:

It [the argument of Bowles and Gintis] tends to assume that students are fully “determined”, that they passively accept what the school teaches them – hegemonic teaching that prepares them ideologically for life in an unequal labor [sic] market (1986 p.8).

Apple suggests that this is an untenable position that cannot clearly be proven. A visit to a typical secondary school in England would demonstrate that many teenagers are anything but passive; a substantial minority resist being taught or engaged in the learning process. This theme was taken up by Willis (1977) in his work “Learning to Labour” in which he followed a group of working class boys (“the lads”) through their last year at school and into the workplace. Willis argues that “the lads” were not passive recipients of the ideology of social and cultural reproduction, but were willing accomplices in the design and creation of their future position in the marketplace. “The lads” actively worked to disrupt the social system of the school and were not the obedient learners portrayed by the correspondence principle. Their deliberate disobedience led to educational failure and ultimately unskilled manual employment. The boys’ home culture actively promoted manual labour and dislike of academic learning, making them willing entrants to low-paid factory employment. Willis suggests that on some level, the boys realised that the system was rigged against them and therefore they chose to resist; this resistance then created the cultural and social reproduction desired by the capitalist system.

Feinberg’s (1983) criticism of Bowles and Gintis is twofold. First, he queries their use of statistical techniques in the theory, pointing out that the social class variables are of less significance in terms of educational outcome than they suggest (1983, p.152). The second criticism builds on Apple’s point that the concept of ‘correspondence theory’ does not explain how such inequality is created, or indeed how some children resist ideological conditioning: “it does not explain what happens within “education” to produce this correspondence” (1983, p.154). Feinberg presents a detailed argument regarding the social reproduction function of education, which, as with Bowles and Gintis, he sees as having a “primary role in maintaining intergenerational continuity and in maintaining the identity of a society across generations even in the context of many significant changes” (1983, p.155). In this way, the required skills of society are passed on along with the shared understanding required for the continuation of social life. Feinberg alludes to the idea that students from certain social class backgrounds will desire and be able to access higher status knowledge codes without explicitly linking them to social class. In contrast, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explicitly link the continuation and legitimatisation of the structures of social class, production and power to the reproduction of culture within education. If these arguments are accepted, then the EBac could be seen to be a perpetuation of these dominant ideologies.

Bourdieu and Passeron adopt a Marxist approach to identify how cultural capital operates, allowing some children to flourish within the structures and requirements of school and others to fail. If a child enters school with the skills, knowledge and dispositions that align with those of the school, they are more likely to succeed in the system. These dispositions are more likely to be developed in middle class children via primary socialisation within the family. They then make rapid progress within education due to accepted notions of ‘ability’, and ‘intelligence’ dictated by the meritocratic system. According to Bourdieu:

Cultural capital … always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value (1986, p.1).

Middle class children therefore have a head start when it comes to education, possessing the ability to translate cultural capital into economic capital. Changing the subjects students study will not overcome disparities in possession of cultural capital and may even exacerbate them. Using these arguments, the EBac is an educational device which facilitates progression those with the required dispositions, not a way of ensuring equality of access or equity of outcome in particular subjects. It is too simplistic to expect that the EBac will ensure that all children are capable of achieving (or want to) within this tightly prescribed and culturally restrictive structure. In the next section, I consider the definition, nature and role of curriculum in relation to the EBac policy.

## 2.4 Curriculum

My study provides a critical analysis of the EBac policy in England, which has powerful implications for curriculum content and access. I therefore turn next to key curriculum perspectives, briefly touching on the practical and technical aspects before considering critical and postmodern theories in more detail, linking these to the EBac curriculum and issues. I evaluate various definitions of ‘curriculum’ throughout the section before outlining the postmodern approach I adopt within this research.

The concept of ‘curriculum’ is contested. Ross states that the curriculum includes “any socially constructed or prescribed activities, selected in some way from the culture of that society, that result in the transformation of the individual” (2000, p.8). Whilst this is a broad definition, it does highlight the fact that the activities are ‘selected’; that someone does the selecting and decides which features of society ‘deserve’ selection, which is inevitably a political action.

Stenhouse (1975), drawing on the practical perspective of Schwab (1969), suggests that the curriculum is a proposal that puts into practice a set of actions with an underlying set of values and principles which teachers can interpret, critique and apply in their classrooms. This definition gives scope for teachers to contribute to their students’ curriculum experience though their own critical engagement and scrutiny, rather than teachers being told what and how to teach through prescribed and statutory subjects, knowledge content and activities. Despite Stenhouse’s desire for active contribution to the curriculum process, in reality, teachers have very little opportunity to interpret, be creative or be critical in any aspect of the EBac curriculum. The only aspects of the EBac that allow for teacher input are recommendation, encouragement or restriction of student access to EBac subjects and qualifications.

The technical curriculum (Tyler, 1949) presented a very structured, instrumental and rational approach to curriculum with an emphasis on effective delivery. In many ways the EBac is a form of technical curriculum; it has specific linear and technical goals that are externally imposed and teachers are required to produce the best ‘product’ in terms of EBac success.

In contrast, the critical perspective aims to challenge a ‘top down’ notion of curriculum designed and controlled by the state. Carr (1996) states that:

This [critical] paradigm seeks to transcend the achievements and limitations of “technical” and “practical” curriculum thinking by undertaking historical and social analysis to reveal how the principles and practices of the contemporary curriculum may operate as ideological mechanisms to legitimate certain irrational and unjust educational outcomes (p.17).

In this way, the concept, delivery method, practice and outcome of the curriculum are questioned and reflected upon and social justice is seen as a vital component. The ideological components of the curriculum, for example, were considered when previously discussing issues of social and cultural reproduction (see Section 2.3). The aim of the critical perspective is to allow teachers to reflect on the nature of curriculum rather than to accept it as a fixed, neutral given and to consider the ideologies inherent within it that may be replicated within their teaching. Apple states that:

Differential power intrudes into the very heart of curriculum, teaching, and evaluation. What *counts* as knowledge, the ways in which it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it, and – just as critically – who is allowed to ask and answer all these questions, are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society (1996, p.22).

Apple thus encourages consideration of the impact of curriculum, particularly curriculum content, to actively encourage dialogue exposing power relations within it, rather than a passive acceptance of a supposedly ‘neutral’ curriculum. This curriculum perspective allows for a critical analysis of the EBac in terms of its ideological mechanisms and consideration of implications for social justice, but I wish to move beyond the confines of such a structural approach. I believe that the postmodern perspective facilitates this.

The postmodern curriculum perspective rejects all of the certainties on which previous theories were founded. In rejecting metanarratives, postmodernism questions what knowledge is and whether any configuration of knowledge is more worthwhile and valuable than any other (Parkes, 2012). If all knowledge is of equal worth, then notions of ‘high-status’ traditional knowledge, a curriculum organised into hierarchical levels of subjects or even the notion of a compulsory curriculum or subjects at all, are irrelevant. Kelly argues that postmodernism:

…places everything in a cauldron of uncertainty and insists that that is where everything must stay. It thus adds great strength to the case for viewing what appears to count as knowledge, at any given time or in any given socio-political context, with continuing scepticism and without dogmatic confidence (2009, p.42).

Such a position highlights the problems inherent within a structured curriculum design and particularly for the EBac with prescriptive notions of ‘powerful’, ‘high-status’ knowledge and subjects. The postmodern perspective encourages consideration and debate about what knowledge is legitimised, by whom and for what purpose, as well as questioning the link between knowledge and politics. This link that is visible with the EBac as a politically designed and imposed curriculum policy. Consideration of why the EBac was introduced and why at this particular point in time, can be incorporated within this perspective. Kelly suggests that:

We live in a world in which there is no “knowledge”, no “ultimate truths”, in which all perception is subjective, so that we are the products of the discourse, the ideologies, we are exposed to, (1995, p.71).

If this is the case, it is those with the political power to dictate and perpetuate the ideologies that trigger consumer demand require further study. The EBac was introduced as a curriculum reminiscent of a previous traditional version, but with the explicit desire to ensure that all students could progress and complete in a global economy (DfE, 2010a, p.44). The nature of curriculum knowledge is considered in the next section.

Developing the postmodern perspective, Doll (1993) is highly critical of the ‘closed system’ model of curriculum. He believes that the current curriculum, with the setting of goals, planning and driven by results represents such a system (p.14). Doll argues for an open system of curriculum which is “teacher-dependent not teacher proof, and its defining characteristics is a sense of movement or process” (p.15), in which teachers and students select from a curriculum matrix to develop deeper meanings. Doll states that “curriculum can no longer be considered in only one form, as a noun describing a set course of study. Curriculum has, as it were, a need to develop multiple personalities” (2002, p.54). This concept of curriculum as fluid, changing and encompassing multiple aspects simultaneously provides an appropriate approach for my critical research into the EBac policy.

The criticism of this perspective is that without an anchor of defined knowledge or a benchmark of ‘standards’ each teacher or school is free to cover anything, which ultimately may benefit some students and disadvantage others. Doll (1993) counters this by arguing for a curriculum matrix, comprised of what he describes as the “four R’s of richness, recursion, relations and rigor” (p.161). The EBac or EBac-type curriculum could thus be incorporated into a postmodern definition of curriculum by providing a more flexible and responsive approach rather than a rigid, fixed system.

In contrast to Doll’s perspective, the current EBac, with its heavily prescribed knowledge content, can be seen as a political controlling device designed to ensure that fixed subjects and potentially fixed concepts and knowledge are delivered by teachers irrespective of their professional experiences, skills and personal interests, or the interests and learning needs of the students and their cultural communities or topical events occurring in the world. The Coalition government has, on the other hand, emphasised freedom from centralised control for headteachers and teachers (DfE, 2010a, p.3). My research aims to build on critical and postmodern curriculum perspectives to consider the political implications of the EBac policy.

Following on from discussion of the curriculum a key aspect of my literature review is a critical consideration of the concept of knowledge, what ‘appropriate’ educational knowledge is, and who has the power to define it. The postmodern perspective on knowledge presents difficulties. If knowledge is relative, then how can any rational decisions be taken as to the value and worth of any one configuration of curriculum knowledge to be engaged in and assessed by schools? A number of researchers, including Young (2008) and Hirsch (1996), claim that a postmodern take on knowledge is untenable. I evaluate these views in the following section.

## 2.5 Curriculum knowledge

The debate about what constitutes knowledge, particularly educationally desirable knowledge, is complex. Moore and Young comment that:

The outcomes of disputes about knowledge are not mere academic issues. They directly affect learning opportunities for pupils in schools and have wider consequences through the principles by which knowledge is distributed in society, (2001, p.446).

In relation to my first research question: “What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?” I argue that the EBac identifies so-called ‘important’ knowledge associated with particular academic subjects. The Coalition government wishes to promote a specific kind of knowledge as a key component of the curriculum, believing that knowledge to be ‘valuable’ in terms of students’ social mobility and progression opportunities. This has implications for my third research question in terms of whether this government-specified EBac knowledge is appropriate and accessible for all, and if not, what the consequences may be for those students who cannot access this knowledge.

This section critically considers the work of Young (2008) on ‘powerful knowledge’ and the social realist perspective, contrasting with the work of Hirsch (1996; 2002) on the concept of ‘core knowledge’. I also reflect on the work of Apple (1996) into the political nature of curriculum knowledge as well as reviewing the work of Bernstein (1971; 1999) on ‘knowledge codes’.

### 2.5.1 Powerful knowledge

I turn now to Young’s (1971-2008) developing arguments and position regarding educational knowledge. His ideas evolved from a social constructivist position in the 1970s to his current social realist perspective. He argues that “powerful knowledge” (abstract knowledge which allows access to a range of thought and a deep understanding of the world, can be universally applied, and allows access to educational progression) must be made available to all students in order to ensure social justice.

In 1971, Young adopted a different, social constructivist position on knowledge, arguing that knowledge is “neither absolute, nor arbitrary but as available sets of meanings” (p.3). This idea of knowledge as being socially constructed is now argued by Young to have prevented coherent discussion and policy contribution by education researchers about what knowledge is important and should be taught in schools. Young argues that this omission has led to a situation where the knowledge available in schools, as seen by the expansion of qualifications, particularly vocational ones, has been extended such that qualification values have been eroded and some students have been misdirected towards courses that do not adequately prepare them for future educational or career progression.

Moore and Young (2001) comment that theory of knowledge is missing from the current curriculum debate, claiming that the relativist approach to knowledge makes it impossible to argue that any one configuration of knowledge is any more important than another. In his 2008 work, Young states that:

Without a theory of what knowledge is important and its role in the curriculum, curriculum specialists are left with little more than a sense of unease about the likely consequences of premature vocationalism, and a reluctance to appear elitist by defending the subject-based curriculum – but no viable alternative (p.84).

He goes onto present his arguments for a curriculum knowledge theory based on social realism. This theory accepts that while knowledge is socially and historically created and situated, it also contains emergent properties that mean that some knowledge sits beyond the preserve of any one interest group. Young argues for a distinction between theoretical knowledge and everyday knowledge.

The EBac is built on the notion that the stipulated knowledge within subjects is essential theoretical knowledge, allowing future educational progression. The act of studying and being immersed in the prescribed subject disciplines and associated core knowledge is seen as being of value in its own right (see discussion of Feinberg, 1983, in Sections 2.2 and 2.5.2).

### 2.5.2 Core Knowledge

One area of importance in the thinking of the Coalition government with the EBac has been the work of Hirsch (1996, 2002). He produced extensive literature criticising the US system of education and curriculum. He argues that a de-centralised, progressive, liberal education denies students, especially those from poorer backgrounds, the opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge for future progression. He utilises the concept of “cultural literacy” – the taken-for-granted knowledge and concepts that exist in any society, which Hirsch believes are required to allow full access to society. He remarks:

People who already know a lot tend to learn new things faster and more easily than people who do not know very much… they already know many of the key elements in the new concept, (2002, p.xiii).

Some students are believed to have this cultural knowledge embedded via their families, therefore starting school with advantages over those who do not. Hirsch (1996) therefore proposes that a National Curriculum be put in place, that schools teach prescribed core content and test student knowledge each year to ensure that they acquire standardised skill sets, thereby reducing inequalities. He believes that 50% of curriculum content should be nationally prescribed and tested. As Feinberg (1999) highlights, however, this statement is made without embarking on any research to discover what percentage is currently fixed and implies that testing does not already occur. Feinberg also criticises Hirsch for underestimating the role of pedagogy and focusing solely on ‘teacher-proofing’ the curriculum, as the technical perspective illustrates.

Regarding the EBac, Gove comments:

Every child should have the chance to be introduced to the best that has been thought, and written. To deny children the opportunity to extend their knowledge so they can appreciate, enjoy, and become familiar with the best of our civilization is to perpetuate a very specific, and tragic, sort of deprivation (2009a, p.3).

This has clear links with the concepts of core knowledge and cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1996) and theoretical knowledge (Young, 2008). While Gove believes that the EBac will allow greater access to what he assumes to be essential and liberating core knowledge, he neglects to consider whether the EBac will be a realistic or even possible choice for all.

Despite the recent discussions about “core knowledge” and “powerful knowledge”, Apple (1996) remains concerned that debates over what knowledge is valued and taught in school remain a political tool that perpetuates the privilege of some social groups at the expense of others. He points out apparent contradictions in education policy in recent times, such as the desire to free teachers to run schools while simultaneously demanding more accountability. He attributes such contradictory positions to links between neoconservativism and neoliberalism. He claims that this alliance:

…aims at providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the “ideal” home, family and school, (p.28).

This view corresponds closely to the ideas contained within the EBac policy, in which reference is made to the past whilst creating a curriculum to ensure future growth and development.

While many of Apple’s points are well argued and persuasive, he does acknowledge that he paints an overly negative picture (p.38). He makes many references to the English National Curriculum, but such a curriculum does still leave room for negotiation and opposition by schools, teachers and students. The National Curriculum in England is not a fixed and frozen structure; rather it is in constant flux, often driven by the changing ideologies of governments. Winter (2011) highlights key official documents that charted changes in the English national approach between 1995 and 2007, including a move to cross-curricular themes and skill development over subject-specific knowledge.

Bernstein’s work on knowledge codes (1971; 1999; 2003) runs alongside discussions about educational knowledge. Bernstein (1971) identified a typology of educational codes: “educational knowledge code… refers to the underlying principles which shape curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation” (p.47). The two codes were those of “school(ed) knowledge” (abstract, universalistic knowledge) and “everyday common-sense knowledge” (concrete, particularistic knowledge) (1999, p. 158). The linking of the identified hierarchical codes to social class allowed Bernstein to identify how different social classes access, make sense of and process information relating to students’ success or failure within the school and particularly within formal examinations. This view is criticised for linking educational inequality within a deficit model of language rather than social factors. Halliday (1979) states that “educational failure is really a social problem, not a linguistic one; but it has a linguistic aspect” (p.24). While the breakdown of formal language hierarchies is evident on English national television, with more local accents and language codes now in use, this change is not evident within the education system, which continues to focus on “the teaching of proper English by restoring the recognition of spelling, punctuation and grammar” (Gove, 2010. p.2). Feinberg (1983) provides a link between knowledge that is deemed appropriate at any given time and the cultural and social reproduction function of education (Section 2.3). Feinberg states that:

…the body of research in education should attempt to understand the transmission process in the context of an examination of the knowledge code of a given society and the relationship of different individuals and group frameworks to that code (1983, p.170).

He describes a ‘knowledge code’ as the overarching structure identifying legitimate knowledge and the value and authority that is afforded to people with different “modes of knowledge” (p.164). The code brings together a coherent structure of skills and consciousness which are then supported by social institutions. High-status codes are perpetuated and maintained by the general acceptance of the idea that acquisition of this knowledge is a natural process with universal functional benefit. Cultural and social reproduction within education is tied to the particular knowledge code of the time. The EBac as an embodiment of a knowledge code, valued and promoted by the government, will hold a different relationship with varying social classes and groups within society. If one social class, namely the middle class, is able to work within this code, then there is a greater chance that they will choose this combination of subjects and be successful in them.

The postmodern view of curriculum knowledge disputes Young’s (2008) current belief that there is underlying “powerful” knowledge independent of any political or power group. Bartlett and Burton (2007) comment that “in the postmodern world, knowledge is at the centre and controlling it is a means to exercise power. Knowledge in this view is always contested …” (p.80). As knowledge becomes a commodity, schools and universities compete to ensure they engage in the high-status knowledge hierarchy. These institutions can confer social authority upon those who study there, providing a continuous cycle of reinforcement.

After considering the role of knowledge from a variety of theoretical positions, I return to articulate my theoretical position in Section 2.9. Before doing so, however, I consider next the concept of educational policy, focusing on the framework of Scheurich’s PA (1994) and reviewing recent literature relating directly to the EBac and its implementation and effects.

## 2.6 Educational policy and policy archaeology

I consider in this section the purpose and role of policy analysis, focusing on Scheurich’s PA (1994) as a framework to analyse the EBac policy. To illuminate the advantages and possible disadvantages of this approach, the work of Dale (2001), Pillow (2004), Walton (2010), and Winter (2011) are also reviewed.

Policy has both simple and complex definitions. Simply defined, a policy is a response to a problem. Faced with problems, governments generate a range of policies to try to rectify perceived concerns. Dye states that policies are “whatever governments choose to do, or not to do” (1992 p.2). This seemingly simple definition of policy hides a wide range of complexities. Rizvi and Lingard (2010), for example, suggest that “a policy expresses patterns of decisions in the context of other decisions taken by political actors on behalf of state institutions from positions of authority” (p.4). Policy is not a neutral governmental or ‘other’ response to a problem, but a socially constructed set of guidelines to attempt to structure action. This concept of policy as a complex, evolving social situation is developed by Taylor et al:

We would also emphasise that policy processes are ongoing and dynamic. When we describe policy we are thus attempting to capture and pin down something that is continually in process (1997, p.24).

Deciding which problem will be selected for attention is a time and context-bound decision and action. The decision is determined, interpreted and implemented by a range of factors, not least the values of those in positions of power and authority. Ball (2008) goes further in his definition of policy:

…policies are contested, interpreted and enacted in a variety of arenas of practice and the rhetoric, texts and meanings of policy makers do not always translate directly and obviously into institutional practices. They are inflected, mediated, resisted and misunderstood, or in some cases simply prove unworkable. It is also important not to over estimate the logical rationality of policy. Policy strategies, Acts, guidelines and initiatives are often messy, contradictory, confused and unclear (p.7).

This definition of policy links my first and second research questions. During construction, the EBac policy is mediated by the interpretations, actions and beliefs of educationalists before being implemented and ultimately impacting on children. Critical policy researchers regard policy as a political discourse and I approach my analysis and consideration of the EBac policy in this manner. The White Paper (2010) highlights that even in its inception, policy may be influenced by competing interests and values, in this case, the first major joint education policy amalgamated from the beliefs of two political parties.

### 2.6.1 Policy analysis

Policy analysis takes many forms. Maguire and Ball (1994) focus on qualitative policy analysis, identifying three types: elite studies, whereby major policy initiators are identified and interviewed to gain an understanding of the policy creation and the politics within and behind the policy text; trajectory studies, focusing on the wider policy life cycle from inception, creation, implementation and impact; and implementation studies, which focus on the context of policy practice, researching how the policy is interpreted and applied. In order to consider my second research question, I take the implementation approach.

CDA, advocated by Fairclough (1989), is based on Foucault’s theory of the relationship between power and knowledge. The analysis of discourse allows critical consideration of the text, the overt and covert power relations, and power disputes within the policy. Ball adopts such a critical approach to policy analysis:

Policies are the operational statements of values…but values do not float free of their social context. We need to ask whose values are validated in policy and whose are not (1990, p.3).

Ball’s approach is relevant to my research, as his analysis is based within critical policy sociology using qualitative methods and techniques to identify the historical and current processes in operation within any policy. This critical stance is important to my study, as I believe it is vital to question identified policy problems and their perceived solutions to address educational equality issues. Taylor et al (1997) summarise this approach as:

Our stance is that in critical policy analysis there must be a concern with reform and change, recognising of course that these are value-laden terms…we have an interest in exploring the values and assumptions which underlie policies and the related issues of power, leading to questions such as, “In whose interests?” and “Who are the winners and losers?” in any particular policy initiative (p.37).

My research contributes to the academic and professional dialogue surrounding the EBac policy and implementation. When carrying out an analysis of the policy text, I am keen to consider other statements of policy, along with sections of the actual policy itself. For example, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) and Ozga (2000) comment that political speeches by government ministers operate as policy and have real policy effects. When addressing my first research question, I consider excerpts from both the EBac policy and the speech to Parliament introducing the EBac policy.

### 2.6.2 Policy archaeology

To conduct CDA, I use Scheurich’s PA approach (1994), building on ideas presented by Foucault (see Ball, 2013). Scheurich argues that:

Rather than concluding that social and education problems, policy solutions and policy studies are created by the conscious interplay of the free agents of history, policy archaeology proposes that a grid of social regularities constitutes what is seen as a problem, what is socially legitimized as a policy solution, and what policy studies itself is (p.297).

He suggests that the identified policy problems are themselves social constructs followed by supposedly logical policy solutions. These policy solutions may actually be a range of limited socially constructed solutions, which are then believed to be inevitable. Scheurich suggests that policies become symbolic solutions, which were never designed to solve the problems themselves, but to encourage people to think that they will solve the problem. He presents four required arenas of study or focus to carry out his policy study methodology. Gale (2001) turns each arena into a question, which I have applied to my research.

Arena 1, the education/social problem arena, is the investigation of the social construction behind and of the problem. Scheurich states that the acceptance or public identification of a social problem is not a natural occurrence but rather a social construction that requires investigation. Gale (2001) asks “what are the conditions that make the emergence of a particular policy agenda possible?” (p.387).

Regarding the EBac, I suggest that the desire for the new government to establish itself, along with growing concern over perceived declining academic standards and alarm over the Britain’s fall in the PISA rankings (2006) all combined to make educational standards in England an identified problem.

Arena 2, the social regularities arena, focuses on grids of social regularities which exist across and between social problems. This intersection of grids determines what issues will be considered as problematic at any given time. The aim of PA is to uncover these networks. Scheurich claims that these regularities are not intentional and do not pre-determine any particular policy solution, rather they create a set of conditions for solutions to be applied, which are historical, change over time and occur within the context of human activity rather than at a deep structural level. Gale (2001) asks “what are the rules or regularities that determine what is (and is not) a policy problem?” (p.387). Pillow (2004) argues that these regularities become totalising discourses “creating or limiting educational policy options”, (p.9). Through my CDA I aim to uncover the grid of social regularities that led to the creation of the EBac policy.

Arena 3 is the policy solution arena, where possible legitimate policy solutions occurring within the social regularities are uncovered. Scheurich argues that social regularities lead to a range of possible and impossible policy solutions for any identified social problem. Gale (2001) asks, “how do these rules and regulations shape policy choices?” (p. 387). The EBac policy privileges some actions over others, which may solve some of the problems identified, such as the underperformance of disadvantaged students, but may generate unintended consequences.

Arena 4, the policy studies arena, looks at the wider social function of traditional policy studies, considering the effects of such policy analysis and discourses. Scheurich emphasises that the four arenas are permeable and that issues do not need to be considered in a linear fashion, they can be examined in any order.

Policy archaeology … takes a radically different approach to policy studies in virtually all its aspects, including definitions of problems and problem groups, discussions of policies and policy alternatives, and presumptions about the functions of policy studies within the larger social order (p.299).

This approach provides a framework for carrying out my policy analysis of the EBac within a poststructuralist approach, as well as encouraging me to investigate aspects I may not have considered. PA provides questions for considering the construction and definition of particular situations as potential problems, as well as considering the interlinking grid of social regularities which combine to construct and articulate a defined problem and corresponding acceptable policy solutions.

Winter (2011) uses PA in conjunction with Lingard’s (2000) concept of “vernacular globalization” to analyse the effects of globalisation on National Curriculum policy reform in England. She argues that PA is:

…a methodology for investigating the conditions pertaining to the identification of a particular educational problem in order to understand why and how that problem emerged as amenable to policy solution (p.2).

This approach allows a detailed exploration of the initial framing of the problem with an attempt to understand the decision making processes of key participants ultimately leading to the defining of the problem. This generates a rich and critical understanding of the actual policy as well as investigation of how the policy is translated in practice.

Despite my enthusiasm for this approach, Olssen et al. (2004) are critical of Scheurich’s stance. They do not find his four arenas of focus to be useful or necessary due to overlap; they consider that Arenas 2 and 3 are not distinct enough to be considered separately. Scheurich comments that he has “left loose ends and confusing contradictions” (p.313). I feel that the four arenas may lead to greater complexity and require careful definition, but I believe that the concepts that underpin each arena are distinct enough to allow separate consideration within an analysis of the EBac policy. Scheurich himself comments that the grid of social regularities is “based upon complex and difficult concepts” (p.313). In contrast, Winter (2011), when applying PA in her work on school curriculum and globalisation, argues that even if two or more grids are employed, this cannot “do justice to complex networks of discursive interactions between configuring curriculum problems and their solutions” (p.16). Such ideas are considered to ensure that I can identify relevant social regularity grids.

Walton (2010) employs PA when exploring anti-bullying policies in schools in British Columbia, arguing that this approach allowed him to explore how the problem of bullying came to be understood. This provides a basis on which the social construction of policy solutions can be investigated, considered, understood and evaluated. Walton argues that PA provides a way of accounting for the complexity of situations compared to conventional policy analysis approaches. He explores the numerous and competing ways in which the initial problem is framed and articulated, considering whose voice is listened to and heard at any one point in time. PA, he argues, provides a permeable and non-linear framework in which to locate and position such an analysis. Walton provides a detailed description of the work of Scheurich and carefully applies PA to the policy on bullying, but he appears to accept Scheurich’s work uncritically. He does not consider any potential difficulties with using PA and does not offer any evaluation of his application to this topic. In contrast, Winter (2011) comments that PA neglects the role and influence of global institutions in policy creation.

Scheurich’s policy archaeology provides a framework to structure my policy analysis of the EBac in terms of the initial conception of problem/s, but also in reflecting on the continuing negotiation and disputes that arise as policy is created and applied. Alternative perspectives or frameworks for policy analysis, such as the materialist Foucauldian analysis suggested by Olssen et al. (2004), do not appear to offer such a clear, structured way of considering the social construction of meaning at all stages of policy analysis.

One theme that has become apparent in my study has been the increased control exerted over schools, particularly in relation to the EBac, performance measures, and their impact on decision making. The performance tables and the rank conferred upon schools by their position within them appear to drive much, if not all of schools’ curriculum decision making. I argue that this surveillance and control has now become internalised and is part of self-surveillance and control of schools, which links to Foucault’s concept of governmentality. In the next section, I discuss this concept and consider how surveillance and control impact on the curriculum decisions of a school and on individual children.

## 2.7 Governmentality and surveillance

Foucault’s concept of governmentality relates to control that is exerted over a population by those in power, but also extends to the self-surveillance and control that individuals exert over themselves. Foucault suggests that the power and influence of the state becomes less visible as the population becomes more self-regulating (Burchell et al., 1991). Rose (1999) argues that this process can be described as “an enabling state that will govern without governing ‘society’ – governing by acting on the choices and self-steering properties of individuals, families, communities, organizations” (p. xxiii). In this way control is exercised not by threat, law or control; rather through self-surveillance and internalised behaviours. This is described as the contradictory position of freedom of choice within “new forms of control” (p. xxiii). Rose goes onto comment that the self is “intensively governed” (p.1) to the extent that aspects that an individual may regard as personal, such as thoughts, feelings and beliefs, are in fact socially organised objects of power which are managed to the extent that “the ‘soul’ of the citizen has entered directly into political discourse and the practice of government” (p.2). This concept of governmentality stems from a poststructuralist approach, which regards power as being created within discourse and social relations, not within any underlying social structures.

Rose (ibid) presents a compelling argument about the governance of children in terms of the quantity and unrelenting amount of surveillance that they experience from the health, social care and education sectors. Every aspect of life is captured, recorded and increasingly anticipated by predictive statistical means, especially within contemporary schools. School procedures influence and control not only children but also teachers (Hope, 2013). Hope goes onto use the concept, created by Clarke (1988), of “dataveillance”. This refers to the large amount of data that is collected on children, combined with the increasing capability of computers to handle, analyse and integrate with previous data to provide predictions and surveillance of future behaviour and outcomes. Computers do not control actions or forms of discipline, but the everyday use of and reliance upon school data supports the arguments of Hope and Clarke. Teachers are provided with predictive data about the likely achievements of children and their outcomes judged via high-stakes testing[[28]](#footnote-29) against these predictions. It is therefore unsurprising that teachers may begin to use such data not only to inform knowledge and expectations of children, but that such data may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The data can not only be used to identify those children who are predicted to be most likely to succeed at the EBac, but also those who are less likely to do so.

Extending this approach, Billington (2000) draws on the work of Rose in his research on the “pathologizing of children”. He comments that such governance requires the role of the teacher and other such professionals as the “expert” (p.29). Experts are encouraged to make judgements, which can have serious consequences for children and their experience of education. Billington focuses on the labelling and treatment of students diagnosed with SEND; however, his analysis could be applied to the labelling and classification of all children. The theory of poststructuralism can provide a way of considering and applying Billington’s arguments. The discourse of prediction and outcomes is now central to the judgements made about schools’ effectiveness. Such a discourse may prove to be more powerful than the EBac discourse, predetermining which students will be put onto the EBac irrespective of the stated policy intention that all students should have access to it. In relation to my research questions, I consider to what extent the EBac policy is yet another form of control and governmentality over both children and teachers.

Since the announcement of the EBac in 2010, there have been a number of official reports into the impact of the EBac on subject uptake and the associated statistical trends. A number of professional/subject associations, particularly those representing subjects outside of the EBac, have also reported their concerns with the EBac policy.

## 2.8 Impact of the EBac policy

Initially, a number of negative articles and commentaries regarding the EBac were generated by the subject associations of those subjects excluded from the EBac, for example, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (May 2011) and Adams (2013), writing on behalf of Art and Design education. The British Government Education Select Committee[[29]](#footnote-30) produced a report in July 2011 on the retrospective introduction of the EBac, which was followed in 2012 by a DfE-commissioned research report on the effects of the EBac. In November 2011, the government published a response to issues raised by the Education Select Committee. Whilst reviewing the key arguments put forward by these reports, I also critically evaluate the *Shift Learning Report* (Powell, 2011) *The effects of the English Baccalaureate* (Greevy et al., 2012) and *The English Baccalaureate: how not to measure school performance (*Taylor, 2011*)*, a highly critical early report.

Taylor (2011) criticises the EBac policy on four counts. He states that it favours specialist language schools and those schools with academically able cohorts whilst disadvantaging schools with high proportions of SEND students and children from low-income families. Taylor goes onto comment that the EBac figure for a school does not provide information about the progress that a child has made within the school or indeed the performance of the school, rather focusing on the prior attainment of the child and their family background. In criticising this view, Taylor is a strong supporter of Contextual Value Added (CVA) a measure of progress, which takes into account factors such as deprivation, English as an additional language, gender and ethnicity[[30]](#footnote-31). The Coalition government moved away from CVA to a more straightforward Value Added (VA) measure, which only takes into account outcome data with no external factors included in the calculations[[31]](#footnote-32). The government argued that CVA was being used as an excuse for underperformance by groups such as disadvantaged and ethnic minority students; while accepting that external factors do have an impact on performance, good schools should be encouraged to overcome these rather than accept them. The DfE *Equalities Impact assessment* (2010c) states that: “it is morally wrong to have an attainment measure which entrenches low aspiration for children because of their background” (p.13). While it is difficult to argue with this statement, children enter schools with a range of external issues such as SEND or difficult home circumstances, which do have a bearing on their progress. It is unfair to label a school as ‘failing’ if they are unable to address all of these structural issues within the short time a child is at school (Ball et al., 2012).

The speed of introduction of the EBac and the retrospective nature of the first performance tables led to a cross-party Select Committee Report in July 2011 which considered 640 submissions. The report cited three government reasons for the introduction of the EBac: to narrow the attainment gap between children from different income backgrounds; to give access to an academic curriculum whilst increasing the uptake of targeted subjects; and to ensure greater school accountability. The committee expressed concern over eight main areas (see table below). Though these concerns were expressed early in the life of the EBac, no changes were made to the policy. In November, 2011 the government responded to the concerns raised and rebutted or justified their position on each point (see table below).

**Table 1 – Government responses to Select Committee concerns**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Select Committee concerns** | **Government response** |
| 1 | Retrospective measure of EBac performance with no consultation | Justified - Agreed to consult on future accountability measure changes |
| 2 | Launch of EBac before National Curriculum review | Rebutted – EBac is not part of or determined by the National Curriculum |
| 3 | Inappropriate use of the term ‘Baccalaureate’ | Rebutted - concept of EBac is understood by parents |
| 4 | Equality of opportunity for all with improved attainment of FSM students | Justified - EBac one measure of FSM progress. No expectation that all students take the EBac |
| 5 | Subjects excluded from the EBac | Rebutted – EBac focus on key academic subjects. Students remain able to take other subjects alongside |
| 6 | International evidence for creation of EBac | Justified – no international parallel but most high performing countries insist on key academic subjects until aged 16 |
| 7 | Confusion on status of EBac with regard to Higher Education and Universities | Rebutted – EBac is not a qualification |
| 8 | EBac as a device to reduce ‘perverse incentives’ in existing performance tables | Justified – EBac is one performance measure amongst many |

Six of the eight concerns were reflected in my interviews with school leaders in 2013. Not mentioned were the use of the term ‘Baccalaureate’ and the International evidence for the creation of the EBac.

In contrast to this negative evaluation by the Select Committee, the DfE commissioned a report by Ipsos MORI into the effects of the EBac, which was conducted by Greevy et al. (2012) and had more positive conclusions. This report stated the contradictory finding that little change had taken place in uptake of EBac subjects in 2012, yet 50% of schools had made changes to the curriculum. Some schools had withdrawn courses and introduced staffing changes to increase EBac provision and some schools were targeting the high achievers for the EBac, often making EBac subject combinations compulsory for specific students. The report also found confusion over the immediate and future value of the EBac. These findings were reflected in the *Shift Learning Report* (Powell, 2011) which highlighted differing effects on different types of school, for example, only 15% of selective schools were undergoing curriculum changes in response to the EBac compared to 44% of comprehensive schools. This report drew additional attention to the fact that many schools previously designated as specialist schools were now making their specialist subjects optional; for example, Technology Colleges were now allowing GCSE Technology to be an option, a move that may not have been anticipated when designing the EBac policy. The *Shift Learning Report* aimed only to document the changes that schools claimed to be making and did not provide any qualitative commentary or reflection on these changes, but nonetheless provides an interesting comparison to the DfE-commissioned research.

The reviews and evaluations of the EBac undertaken so far provide a starting point for my research questions investigating the composition and construction of the EBac policy; teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac policy, and the consideration and evaluation of quality issues arising within four different types of secondary schools. To conclude my literature review, I now discuss my theoretical approach.

## 2.9 Theoretical approach

My research interest has arisen from a range of work which at first sight appeared disjointed, spanning a range of theorists and political perspectives. The perspective that makes the connections across a range of studies and illuminates my research aims and questions is the poststructuralist perspective. Poststructuralism arose from the work of structuralists in response to some of the perceived weaknesses and areas felt to be inadequate (Peters and Wain, 2003). Neither set of theorists identified themselves in clear terms, instead highlighting the contested nature of them. Peters and Wain (2003) indeed state that poststructuralism “is best referred to as a movement of thought – a complex skein of thought – embodying different forms of cultural practice” (p.61) rather than a theory or perspective. It is impossible to separate the two entirely when explaining poststructuralism.

Structuralism is based on the belief that human life, individual behaviour, and conscience are determined by various underlying structures and that a metanarrative acts as the overarching base for all social life and actions. Thinking and actions can change and develop, but only within the structure, which for most people will remain hidden or at least obscured. In contrast, poststructuralists do not believe that such an underlying structure exists and that there is a plurality of meaning with no ‘universal truths’.

Both structuralists and poststructuralists see language and political discourse as the key to understanding the social world, as social life is conducted through and shaped by language. Their conceptions of language differ, however. Structuralism has its roots in semiotics as a linguistic study in order to attempt to uncover and understand relationships between the phenomena of human life as a reflection of its underlying structures. Poststructuralism, meanwhile, does not regard meaning as existing outside of the text and that meaning is not fixed, but rather contingent and unstable.

Poststructuralism developed out of a rejection of the concept of underlying structures determining social reality. Foucault, with his focus on power and power relations, regards power as created within discourse and social relations, creating reality at any given time rather than merely reflecting it. Foucault’s work “falls between determinism and freedom. We are historically conditioned, but take our place in an open and contingent system” (Williams, 2005, p.106,). In this way, history provides “a network of constraints” (p.110) in which individuals have to operate. Poststructuralism does not accept that a final or definitive position or answer about any given issue can ever be reached. Any research, theory or definition can only ever be a partial reflection of a specific individual, local issue or struggle.

Parkes (2012) describes poststructuralism as adopting three key positions. First, a distrust of totalising discourses, in that there is no single history to study or document that an understanding of will allow progress to an ultimate goal. Rather, the role of the researcher is to uncover partial and often competing histories and to resist ‘universal truths’. Second, a rejection of any fundamental truth from which to make authoritative statements to encompass all people and third, a rejection of the idea of a universal human subject and nature. Human subjectivity is instead regarded as a fluid process.

During the course of my research, my personal position has moved from the intellectual tradition of structuralism to a more poststructuralist position, yet I have struggled to completely abandon the concept of underlying structures. This has been particularly pertinent when considering the nature of knowledge and whether some knowledge is more inherently valuable and powerful, therefore deserving to be a key part of any school curriculum. Young (2008; 2013) put forward a strong argument for a structural position regarding knowledge, which was discussed in Section 2.5. He describes this as a ‘social realist’ position. This position states that knowledge exists external to any socially created power groups who may work to impose their beliefs about what constitutes valuable knowledge on others, whilst still recognising that people have a role in the production of knowledge and therefore any knowledge is socially produced (Wheelahan, 2007). In this way, the social realist position attempts to balance a socially constructed position with an underlying, if sometimes obscure or hidden, structure. Young now argues that the knowledge he describes as ‘powerful knowledge’, should be recognised by all and therefore provided for all children; to deny some children access to this knowledge is, in his view, to condemn them to a low social position.

I am attracted to the concept of social realism with its focus on powerful knowledge, and while Wheelahan (2007) and Young (2008; 2009; 2013) provide a useful perspective from which to view my research, I find I disagree with their position or feel that they overstate their conclusions on many points presented from their initial premise. For example, the social realist position argues that there is a set of underlying principles or epistemic standards to any knowledge, albeit ones mediated by a range of factors including power and privilege (Wheelahan, 2007). Accepting that these principles exist, however, may again reflect the power of some groups at a given time to determine and present these standards as inherent rather than structural. Social realists are trying to combine two opposing positions which ultimately may be incompatible.

Wheelahan (2007) provides a robust argument as to how competency-based training, with its lack of theoretical content, may operate to exclude learners (usually working class) from abstract, powerful knowledge. This in turn excludes such learners from access to higher learning or positions. A similar argument was put forward in Britain by The Wolf Report (2011) into vocational education and qualifications, which has led to the reduction in the availability of such courses within schools. I agree with this position for some vocational or competency based programmes, though this maybe an issue about specific course construction and course presentation by teachers, rather than a fundamental weakness of all vocational courses. Teachers of vocational courses, as with more academic courses, are free to embed context-bound knowledge within a wider theoretical framework and to encourage interests and ambition within their students. I do not believe that such arguments provide a compelling explanation for the social realist position. Furthermore, if taken to its logical conclusion of insisting that all students are exposed to powerful abstract knowledge, student dissatisfaction and disillusionment with education may result. Subsequently, this may narrow rather than widen progression choices. I therefore do not subscribe to the social realism perspective as presented as theory or in application.

I have also struggled to reconcile the structuralist position (and therefore relevance) of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Apple (1982) when looking at social and cultural reproduction with the emerging poststructural approach of my research. Carlson (2006) has, however, provided one possible resolution to these dilemmas:

One answer is that a structural theory of schooling in advanced capitalist society is still very useful, in fact essential, in developing a comprehensive theory of how schools work to produce and reproduce class, as well as race, gender, sexual, and other inequalities. There are real material structures, including economic, political and educational structures that need to be accounted for in understanding how schools work and the forces that block transformative change. Sometimes, as Apple has pointed out, poststructuralists sound as if the only thing that matters is discourse and subjectivity, or that discourse and subjectivity are freer and more open than they really are. Furthermore, for all the limitations of structuralist theories of schooling, because of their deterministic tendencies and the fact that they overfix, overunify, and overgeneralize about the schooling process, these theories do provide a useful “big picture” of how the system works to reproduce itself. The important thing to remember is that we have created this picture; and that the picture is not reality, not the thing it claims to represent. If this picture proves useful in understanding how schools work and how they might be transformed, then it is worth studying. But when we turn to intervention in public schools and engage in battles over the meaning of a democratic public education in our times, then I believe a poststructuralist theory better serves us and opens up more democratic possibilities (p.93, 2006)

Carlson reconciles the two perspectives in his wider writing using the notion of a continuum of approach, highlighting the poststructural aspects of Apple’s thinking. Carlson focuses on meaning of language and the uses this has when discussing educational progress and democracy. He argues that poststructural perspectives can be useful when attempting to address “the current reform discourse on progress” (2006, p.110), which he feels has become a totalising discourse. On the basis of Carlson’s argument, I feel I can not only legitimately consider issues of social and cultural reproduction as they relate to the EBac, but also take these ideas forward within a poststructuralist approach, considering the wider origins and impact of these changes outside a totalising discourse of Marxism or indeed socialism.

Ball also provided a solution for a way to combine these two positions into a logical approach when stating that “theory for me is not a perceptual straightjacket but a set of possibilities for thinking with. Theory should not bear down upon us and stultify our thinking” (2006, p.2). Ball describes how he successfully used and combined the work of both Bourdieu and Foucault to “enable me to think about how I think” (2006, p.3) by incorporating an ethnographic approach using interview data within his research.

My theoretical approach aims to encapsulate the key works of influential social and cultural reproduction theorists, at the same time drawing on a poststructuralist approach in order to illuminate educational policy discourse and its interpretation, implementation and impact on four secondary schools and their respective departments. My research does not seek to find a single truth, nor do I believe that I have found such a truth. Rather, I discuss the generated findings relating to specific educational contexts, policy and equality at this given moment in time.

## 2.10 Conclusion

My literature review has provided the background and the context for my study. The next chapter discusses the methodology and methods selected to address my three research questions.

# Chapter 3 - Methodology and Methods

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces, describes and justifies my chosen methodology, research assumptions, methods and research tools. The chapter is divided into seven sections, commencing with a consideration of my research assumptions, exploring the ontology and epistemology underpinning my research methodology in addition to outlining and justifying my research methods, namely CDA and semi-structured interviews. My positionality as a researcher is critically considered in relation to my methods and approach. The third section focuses on the rationale for my research questions followed by a discussion and evaluation of the two methods fundamental to this research. Subsequent to this, my pilot studies and the resulting amendments are presented. Justification for the selected sample of policy texts, schools and their respective teachers is outlined alongside my chosen methods of data analysis for the selected policy text and semi-structured interviews. In Section 5, I consider the ethical review process and ethical issues in terms of the trustworthiness of my research study. Section 6 explores practical issues surrounding my methodological approach, alongside the issues that arose during the data collection stages and the impact and potential consequences for the research and findings. In the final section, I discuss my reflections on the planning and execution of the methodology, methods and data collection, considering the strengths in light of these. In conclusion, I reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my chosen methodological approach and methods and outline the impact such decisions had on the study.

## 3.2 Methodology

Methodology is the underlying theory and understanding through which researchers believe that they can best access and acquire knowledge about their research area, influenced by their beliefs about the organisation of the social world. Clough and Nutbrown argue that methodology involves justification (2002, p.30) based on the underlying values and assumptions of the researcher, which provide the reasons and rationale for the research including the research design, research questions, methods selected, field questions, type and style of analysis undertaken and the resulting conclusions. They argue that the whole process of research is methodological. In contrast, methods are the particular research tools that a researcher uses to collect the data that will best illuminate the issue under investigation. Data collection methods are selected on the basis of the researcher’s underlying methodological beliefs, encapsulated in his/her ontological and epistemological beliefs. An exploration of these concepts leads onto a discussion about my own methodological positionality.

### 3.2.1. Ontology and epistemology

Ontology is the beliefs held about social reality, “the nature or essence of things” (Sikes, 2004, p.19). If social reality is seen as independent and external to individuals, set and real in an objective sense, a researcher holds a positivist view of the world and prefers to study observable, quantifiable data. In contrast, if social reality is seen as a subjective, socially constructed experience, expressed through language, a researcher holds an interpretivist position and prefers personal accounts of thoughts and perceptions using qualitative techniques. In reality, however such a binary distinction is never as clear as this and indeed “the two approaches can complement each other” (Wellington, 2000, p.17).

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and what it is possible to know. Sikes comments that:

Central to such concern is the notion of “truth”: truth in terms of how the data/evidence that research procedures obtain, corresponds to and reflects the knowledge it is claimed that it does; and truth in terms of how the researcher communicates and re-presents the knowledge they get from their research (2004, p.21).

Sikes suggests that the understanding and value a researcher places on different types of data directly affect the choice of method and generation of different types of knowledge. A positivist researcher who values objective, quantifiable data as a reflection of the truth collects and presents knowledge that is measurable and observable. They may conduct a large scale social survey using methods such as a questionnaire in order to collect ‘reliable’ statistical data from which comparisons can be drawn in order to produce trends and key statements presented as testable ‘facts’. In contrast, an interpretivist/social constructivist researcher seeks respondents’ personal construction of reality by asking questions to probe how they subjectively interpret the topic under examination in order to gain insights into a wide range of perspectives. They may carry out a case study using interviews or participant observation. The ontological and epistemological position held influences not only the topics of study, but also the theoretical position; methodological beliefs, and choice of methods. These beliefs underpin and structure all research. Verma and Mallick comment that:

Investigators need to reflect on their own understanding and thinking when using any systematic research method for obtaining reliable knowledge or for getting at what some writers describe as the “truth” (1999, p.2).

They draw attention to the importance of considering and acknowledging underlying beliefs. The ontological and epistemological approach and beliefs of the researcher influence the totality of the research. If the reader is provided with sufficient information, they can be the ultimate judge of the “truth” of the research. In the following section, I discuss my ontological and epistemological position.

## 3.3 The researcher’s positionality in relation to the methodology and methods

My background, current role in education and interests directly influenced the way that I conceived and conducted this study. My desire to make a difference to the lives of the children and adults I work with and to challenge unfairness wherever I come across it means that I have to be careful that my own prejudices and beliefs regarding the EBac do not go unchallenged. My belief is that social reality is constructed through individual thoughts, actions and discourse and therefore I draw on research methods which attempt to uncover issues which lie behind the ‘official’ representation of the ‘reality’ of a situation. I wish to question and where appropriate, challenge, the assumptions presented by those in positions of power by adopting a critical research approach that seeks out and exposes educational inequalities.

Being a Sociology graduate has a large bearing on my methodology and fundamental beliefs about the how the world is structured and organised and the most appropriate methods to attempt to capture and explain it. As argued by Sikes:

The way in which researchers are biographically situated, the consequent perspectives they hold and the assumptions which inform the sense they make of the world, inevitably have implications for their research related understandings, beliefs and values, for the research paradigms they feel most comfortable with, and thereby for their research practice (2004, p.18).

I approach educational research from a sociological position. I believe that sociological perspectives provide effective frameworks for insightful and critical discussion, exploration and challenge of key issues, and have the potential to provide answers and stimulate additional questions. I place a higher value on qualitative over quantitative research methods, believing that qualitative approaches can uncover and illuminate the social construction of situations and roles adopted by participants. I endeavour to reflect systematically and critically to produce a trustworthy and insightful exploration of the EBac policy and suggestions for future policy and practice.

## 3.4 Research aims and questions:

My research investigates how and why the EBac has been introduced in England as part of the inaugural education policy of the Coalition government. I also examine the potential and actual impact of the EBac on the school curriculum from the perspective of teachers, followed by identifying potential winners and losers of this policy. I now introduce my three research questions, together with their rationales.

### 3.4.1 What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?

This research question allows for a detailed understanding of the EBac policy set within a wider policy framework. It is important to research and understand the proposed purpose of the policy and consider the problems it claimed to address in order to understand why this policy was regarded as necessary at this time. The EBac policy is one part of a complex ensemble of policies contained in the Education White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (2010). A detailed understanding of the premise of the EBac policy is required to explore what problems and issues the policy aims to solve and how these are to be addressed, along with the justifications for the EBac as a solution to these stated problems.

Taylor et al. wish to research and understand issues which lie behind policy so that “we are able to assess how the policy is likely to work in relation to the problems it is addressing” (1997, p.39). I investigate the claim that the EBac is a logical solution to the belief that some students are put at a disadvantage by the subject choices offered by the system and their individual school, or if there are other issues underlying the policy. Scheurich’s PA (1994) provides a framework for considering the construction and understanding of the initial problems, the interlinking grid of social regularities in operation to construct acceptable policy solutions at the time, and the social construction of the policy solutions contained with the EBac.

### 3.4.2. What are teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac?

I explore how teachers understand and experience the policy in terms of the practical application within their schools and how it impacts on them as school and subject leaders. The inclusion and exclusion of certain subjects in the EBac creates the potential for hierarchical divisions of value and worth within schools and between subject specialists. Educational professionals, including teachers and professional associations of subjects excluded from the EBac, are concerned that their subjects will be marginalised as schools encourage students to study EBac subjects. Teachers of Design and Technology, Music and Religious Studies, for example, campaigned for the inclusion of their subjects into the EBac (Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2011; Adams, 2013). Immediate changes in school curricula occurred after the EBac was first announced. For example, The *Shift Learning Report* comments that “for around a third of the schools in our eSurvey, the EBac was felt to represent a great deal of change” (Powell, 2011, p. 3). The Statistical First Release 2012/2013 from the Department for Educationstates that entries in EBac subjects have increased since 2009-10 by 12.4 percentage points (p.4). If the EBac subject entries are going up, it follows that entries in other subjects will be declining. It is important to investigate the pressures experienced in different types of schools concerning the EBac performance measure, as well as looking at local interpretations of the policy. Hodgson and Spours (2008) and Pring et al. (2009) are concerned that the EBac is not an appropriate curriculum model for many young people and that it neglects the skill and knowledge requirements of the 21st century. I wish to research teachers’ views about the value, necessity and impact of the EBac.

### 3.4.3 Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?

I investigate the potential impact of the EBac, firstly on outcomes for different types of students, including social class, ethnicity, gender and SEND; secondly, different subjects and thirdly, different types of schools.

#### 3.4.31 Equality implications for impact on students

Ball (2006), Gillborn (2011b), Rassool (2009) and government statistics (DfE, 2012) show inequalities in educational outcomes in England with particular regard to social class and ethnicity. Hierarchies are in operation at all levels of education, from the classification of a ‘good’ school or university to the division of subjects into ‘high’ and ‘low’ status. My hypothesis is that the EBac will introduce additional hierarchies and inequalities into the education system for students, teachers and schools.

I aim to investigate whether this curriculum allows a greater number of children to achieve academic success and move onto Higher Education, or acts as a further filtering device, ensuring that only some students are able to progress. The concept of meritocracy, i.e. the belief that all can achieve on the basis of their talents and abilities, is supported by the EBac in that that all children are meant to have access to a range of academic subjects up to age 16. I explore whether the EBac can deliver this aim for all children. It may be that children with SEND or those on FSM, and in particular black and minority ethnic students, are largely excluded from the EBac (Gillborn, 2011b) as teachers direct students towards or away from EBac subjects.

#### 3.4.32 Equality implications for impact on subjects

The creation of a hierarchy of EBac and non-EBac subjects leads to inequalities between subjects. Since 2009, Mathematics and English have been regarded as the most important subjects, closely followed by sciences, then other GCSE subjects and finally vocational subjects. Before 2009, the key school performance measure was the percentage of students achieving five or more GCSE grades at A\*-C. Until 2009, all GCSE subjects were regarded as having equal value in performance tables. From 2004, the performance tables were expanded to include GCSE equivalents[[32]](#footnote-33) for vocational and alternative qualifications. The introduction to the 2004 performance tables stated that “all qualifications have value in their own right as part of a fully-rounded educational experience and as a pathway towards further learning and employment” (DfE, 2004, p.1). This allowed schools to offer a wider range of qualifications and courses. 2009 saw Mathematics and English GCSEs being valued more highly than other subjects within the performance tables, as the main measure of a school’s achievement became five or more A\*-C GCSE grades which had to include English and Mathematics. By 2011, the range of courses that attracted points and could be included in the performance tables had been reduced in order to prevent vocational subjects dominating the performance tables. The DfE commented that equivalences were “not designed to allow judgements to be made about the value of different qualifications” (DfE, 2010d). The EBac will further divide subjects into hierarchies of value and worth as this becomes a performance measure within the tables. This in turn will impact on the status and value afforded to certain subject teachers.

#### 3.4.33 Equality implications for impact on schools

As discussed in Chapter 1, schools already offering a traditional curriculum with the majority of their cohorts taking the EBac face no difficulty in adapting to its requirements. If the ethos and structure of the school curriculum is already in line with the EBac, these schools are at an advantage over those that need to radically change their curriculum to accommodate EBac requirements. For many schools, such a restricted, academic diet of EBac subjects does not correspond to their ethos or beliefs about what constitutes a rounded, balanced and appropriate curriculum for their students. A school specialising in Business and Enterprise, for example, may offer a range of vocational business courses which do not form part of the EBac and these courses may not be considered in the performance tables. The EBac as a performance measure has different emphasis and impact within varying schools, rendering some school curricula as inferior and requiring enhancement and others as superior and requiring preservation.

## 3.5 Methods

My chosen methods of CDA and semi-structured interviews have arisen from my positionality, the aims of my study, my research questions, the previous research into this area, and my theoretical approach. Miller et al. (2005) comment that whilst structuralism is a ‘secret’ already in place waiting to be discovered or uncovered, in contrast, poststructuralism has “the other eye … on what is not said, what discourses make it impossible to say, what practical or theoretical logics hide away from sight” (p.313). I believe that by combining two methods within a poststructural approach I can broaden the scope of my enquiry. CDA allowed me to explore the construction and ordering of the policy text in detail and to identify underlying issues within selected parts. Themes identified from my policy analysis were then used to inform the structure and content of my semi-structured interviews. I investigated and explored, with practitioners in four different types of schools, the issues arising from the implementation of the EBac policy, considering the approaches and attitudes adopted towards the policy and exploring teachers’ views on the implications of EBac policy for educational equality. I considered each method separately: firstly, discussing the method and my reasons for selecting it; secondly, piloting the method; thirdly, sample selection, and finally, data analysis of the material gathered.

### 3.5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Policy analysis literature, for example, Rogers, (2011), Titscher et al. (2000), Bloor and Bloor (2007), Fairclough, 2003, Wodak and Meyer (2009), and Hyatt (2010) highlight that CDA allows a detailed analysis and exploration of multiple dimensions of a text. CDA is not a blueprint for analysis, however; rather it is described by Taylor (2004) as a framework for analysing the text by looking at its organisation, including clause combination, grammatical and semantic features and lexis choice. Hyatt (2010) presents three levels of CDA: “engaging with the text, the discursive practices (processes of production/ reception/ interpretation); and the wider social-political and socio-historic context” (p.1), which provide a multi-layered approach to the text analysis. I adopt Hyatt’s CDA approach together with *The Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Frame* (Hyatt, 2013) because it provides a structured, logical and detailed way to analyse policy texts across a range of areas which I as a novice CDA researcher can apply.

CDA can be approached as both theory and method, allowing for description and interpretation but also explanation. Discourse analysis regards language and social reality as interrelated; language is not just a reflection of social reality but plays an active role in classifying the way individuals construct that reality. The ‘critical’ aspect of CDA denotes the focus on power relations in order to try to uncover the hidden power relations within a text. Taylor states that:

CDA is of particular value in documenting multiple and competing discourses in policy texts, in highlighting marginalized and hybrid discourses, and in documenting discursive shifts in policy implementation processes (2004, p.434).

Using this detailed textual analysis approach, key discourses within the EBac policy can be identified. CDA allows for the possibility of change: “if language is constructed, it can therefore be deconstructed and reconstructed. It offers a discourse of possibility” (Hyatt, 2010, p.2). In this way, I use CDA to uncover underlying discourses and linguistic devices within the texts, identify potential areas of change to the EBac and to offer alternatives to the EBac discourse. Other textual analysis approaches, such as conversational analysis, did not appear to allow for this critical stance or the “possibility of change” as an outcome of the analysis (Wooffitt, 2005).

CDA has faced the criticism as a method of analysis, because it may be biased due to the areas within and of the text that the researcher chooses to focus on or to ignore. CDA researchers do not see this point as criticism, rather as an area to be critically considered and ultimately celebrated. Hyatt (2010) comments, “Indeed CDA advocates are not embarrassed by charges of partiality – they revel in it!” (p.1).

### 3.5.2 CDA in my research

I use Hyatt’s CDA framework (2010) to analyse my selection of texts through a detailed consideration of the overall text, particularly discursive practices and wider social political and social historic contexts, beginning with an analysis of the whole text and moving to an individual word-level analysis. Hyatt provides a set of nine orientation questions, which allow for an overview of the text and an initial reading and analysis (see Appendix 2). This is followed by a framework of 11 criteria, progressing from micro elements of grammar such as the use of pronouns (criterion 1) to use of metaphor (criterion 5) through to more macro elements such as audience (criterion 8) and reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals (criterion 11). The full Critical Literacy Frame Criteria (see Appendix 3) includes:

1. Pronouns – Participant Choices
2. Passive/Active forms – Transivity Choices
3. Time – Tense and Aspect
4. Adjectives, Adverbs, Nouns, Verbal Processes – Evaluation and Semantic Prosody
5. Metaphor
6. Presupposition/ Implication
7. Medium
8. Audience
9. Visual Images
10. Age, Class, Disability, Gender, Race – Equity, Ethnicity and Sexuality Issues
11. Reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals

I completed my CDA using all 11 criteria to provide a full and detailed analysis of all identified areas. CDA enables a close focus on the language used within the policy, as well as the historical and social context of the text and highlighting the power relations involved, “CDA provides a framework for a systematic analysis – researchers can go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work” (Taylor, 2004, p.436). It is important to move beyond speculation, particularly when politicians are frequently accused of ‘spinning’ (presenting in the best light possible) their messages and when information is reduced by the media to ‘soundbites’. Hyatt (2010) argues that language plays an active role in how an individual makes sense and perceives reality and has an ideological role representing and constructing meaning, in that language frames the discussion and opens up or constrains consideration of an issue. CDA is an appropriate method for my analysis of the EBac policy, locating the policy within an historical moment in time as well as closely considering the actual language used within the text, as well as what has been omitted (Hyatt 2010).

CDA presents a number of disadvantages, however. My reading and analysis of the text, no matter how closely I follow Hyatt’s advice, will inevitably be influenced by my own positionality. Bloor and Bloor comment that researchers “need to be highly critical of their own roles in the social structure and be prepared to make clear their own position with respect to the topic of research,” (2007, p.4). My analysis and interpretation is as explicit and critically self-reflexive as possible so that others can judge my findings. As a relatively new discipline, the boundaries of the method are open for negotiation and dispute and a variety of approaches to CDA exist. I feel it is important, as a newcomer to CDA, to adopt a structured framework such as that advocated by Hyatt (2010) so that I am confident in the analysis. It was important for my skill and confidence development to conduct a pilot study.

### 3.5.3 CDA Pilot study

I selected the first part of each of the selected texts for my pilot and worked through the levels presented within Hyatt’s framework. I sought the feedback of my supervisor and other colleagues on the EdD, as well as reading other published theses using this method in order to compare my CDA with others. I realised I needed further assistance with the linguistic side of the analysis and sought help and guidance from a teacher of linguistics. This ensured that I had greater understanding of the linguistic elements of Hyatt’s framework and that I could confidently apply this method to the selected sections of policy text.

### 3.5.4 Policy text selection

There are a number of government documents I could have selected, including the full Schools White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010). At 91 pages, however, this was not a realistic proposition. As the EBac constitutes only a small part of this whole policy document, key parts were selected for focused analysis and consideration. Alongside the White Paper is *The Importance of Teaching White Paper: Economic Impact Assessment* (Nov. 2010) and *The Importance of Teaching White Paper: Equalities Impact Assessment* (Nov. 2010). While these are important background documents, I focused my CDA instead on those documents that I felt would be utilised more by teachers when making implementation decisions.

I selected three policy texts for analysis:

##### 1) *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper* (DfE, 2010)

This is the first formal outline of the EBac policy and is an important starting point for any policy analysis. The Forewords by the PM and Deputy PM (p.3-5) and the Secretary of State for Education, Gove (p.6-7) provide the political justification and scene-setting for the overall policy and for the identified sections specifically on the EBac. I selected sections 4.20–4.24 (p.44-45) as these sections refer directly to the EBac and offer direction and justification.

##### 2) Schools White Paper *Statement of Intent 2010 addendum* (DfE, Dec 2010).

This document provides the first elaboration of the subjects to be included in the EBac. Until this publication, the subjects or examination board courses to be included had not been explicitly stated. For teachers, this technical information is of vital importance when making curriculum and accreditation decisions. Opting for a course not included results in a loss of school performance points. Furthermore, individual students may be impacted if the qualifications and subjects do not allow access to educational progression (see Sections 1.2; 2.2.1; 2.7).

##### 3) Schools White Paper: Speech – Gove’s speech to the House of Commons on the launch of the Schools White Paper (Nov 2010).

This speech acts as a summary of the key areas of the policy that Gove wished to highlight.

Conducting the CDA analysis across the selected texts enabled me to acquire a detailed understanding of the EBac texts and the linguistic devices used within the texts. This understanding, as well as focusing on my first research question: “What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?”then formed the background to my semi-structured interviews, in which I focused on teachers’ perspectives and the implementation of the EBac within four different types of schools.

### 3.5.5 Semi-structured interviews

Empirical research within four different types of schools permits exploration of my policy analysis findings as well as allowing me to explore the impact of EBac policy implementation in different settings. At its basic level, an interview is a series of questions and corresponding answers allowing the interviewer can investigate and prompt (Wellington, 2000, p.71), attempting to illuminate some social situation, experience or knowledge. The interview could be a straightforward method for gaining information at a basic quantitative level, but also allows for asking more in-depth questions demanding a more qualitative response. Verma and Mallick comment that far from being straightforward, the interview:

Represents an interaction between three elements: the interviewer, the interviewee and the context of the interview including the issues/ questions raised in the interview. Thus the role of the interviewers is a demanding one (1999, p.122).

It is essential that interviews are not entered into lightly, but are conducted with careful pre-planning and consideration along with a flexible attitude which responds to the specific context of each individual interview in order to gather valid data. I used interviews rather than a questionnaire as a method of data collection to allow individuals to express their opinions and to elaborate verbally on their experiences of the EBac. Wellington states:

The research interview’s function is to give a person, or group of people, a “voice”. It should provide them with a “platform”, a chance to make their viewpoints heard and eventually read… In this sense an interview empowers people (2000, p.72).

My interviews allow the voices of school leaders who interpret, apply and implement the EBac policy, to be heard, as well as gathering their views about the potential winners and losers of the EBac policy and associated social justice issues.

Interviews can be divided along a continuum into three recognisable types. Structured interviews usually consist of pre-set questions, while unstructured interviews begin with broadly set objectives but are led and developed by the interests of the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews sit in the middle, using a pre-set interview schedule from which both the interviewer and interviewee can develop the conversation. The aim of a semi-structured interview is to encourage the interviewees to speak freely around the topic under the guidance of key questions. Cousin supports this approach, stating that interviews allow “rich empirical data about the lives and perspectives of individuals,” (2009, p.71). Such an approach fits my desire to use qualitative methods to give opportunities for individuals to speak for themselves in order to uncover how they construct their understanding of the EBac policy. Cousin states that the line between unstructured and semi-structured interviews is ‘fuzzy’, in that the schedule is pre-designed, but completely flexible. How structured an interview becomes depends on a range of factors including the expertise and confidence of the interviewer, the circumstances of the interview, the perceived power relationships within the interview, and the perspective and engagement of the interviewee (Verma and Mallick 1999).

### 3.5.6 Semi-structured interviews in my research

Semi-structured interviews provide a range of advantages for my research. I incorporated into my questions issues arising from my CDA of the EBac policy and could respond reflexively to the issues impacting on individuals and their schools, rather than following a pre-scripted formula which may not be appropriate in each case. A pre-planned interview schedule with key questions allows for comparability across the discussions and identification of similarities and differences between approaches and attitudes of schools in different circumstances. The aim of my interviews is to focus on the actual policy implementation and to explore teachers’ perspectives on the policy, as well as their identification of any implications for educational equality. Key questions (see Appendix 6) focus on:

1. how the teachers perceive the EBac policy to have been interpreted and applied within their school
2. the school and teacher approach and response to the EBac
3. the pressures that the EBac has generated - both internal and external to the school
4. the perceived and actual impact of the EBac on the curriculum;
5. the EBac effect on student subject choice and progression routes
6. views on the potential winners and losers from EBac policy, drawing out thoughts on any equality issues that they feel have arisen

I addressed my second and third research questions in the interviews, as well as allowing space for my interviewees to expand on points and to highlight areas of personal importance.

There are a number of potential problems with semi-structured interviews, including the skill and confidence of the interviewer (Verma and Mallick, 1999), the possibility that researcher bias enters the interview, particularly with the more fluid nature of the interview schedule (Opie, 2004), and the issue of how to record and how much content to transcribe (Wellington 2000). My approach was to tape record each interview (with full permission) and take brief notes at the time. Wellington provides a list of strengths and weaknesses of tape recording (p.86). This approach allowed me to “concentrate, to maintain eye contact” and to give my attention to the conversation along with preserving the “natural language”, outweighing the potential issues of the amount of data generated and the possibility of the machine causing “anxiety” (p.86). Cousin discusses the vital role that listening plays in any interview, arguing that the “best kind of interviewer is said to know how to listen”, (2009, p.75). This is a skill I have developed through my professional role and previous interviewing experience. The interview schedule allows the discussion to be planned and considered in advance and ensures that I cover a similar range of points within each interview.

Wellington (2000) provides a list of stages for preparing and carrying out interviews, which includes guidance in preparing the schedule, piloting, selecting the sample and the actual interview itself (p.78). This guidance was incorporated into my pilot interviews and research interviews. Verma and Mallick (1999) suggest using a flow chart format for the interview schedule so that potential issues are considered and anticipated before the interviews take place, accepting that reflection after each interview may also lead to amendments of this schedule. I wrote my questions under key headings and found that I was able to move between sections and questions easily. My respondents did not always address the same questions at the same point in each interview, but this approach did allow for the conversation to flow more naturally. I now discuss my pilot study in more detail.

### 3.5.7 Pilot study of semi-structured interviews

A full pilot study of the semi-structured interview schedule and recording equipment was carried out with one secondary school deputy before the main interviews. This allowed for reflection and feedback on the interview process itself, as well as providing pilot data for analysis before refining my procedure, process, questions, and analysis. I reflected on and sought feedback on my approach, confidence and listening skills to ensure that I conducted the interviews in a professional and successful manner (Wellington, 2000, p.78). The pilot allowed me to develop my questions and to consider the most appropriate ways to contact schools and the relevant staff while succinctly articulating my aims. The Deputy Head suggested, for example, that schools would be less likely to allow me to interview a random selection of department heads and that I would need to use and navigate the deputy as a gate keeper. This ran the risk of only being allowed to speak to “approved” members of staff, but as the alternative was not to have any access I incorporated this advice into my approach to my other sample schools. Due to the richness of the data gained during the pilot, after consideration and reflection, the pilot school transcript ultimately formed part of my sample. The disadvantage of incorporating my pilot into my main research is that this interview was of a more exploratory nature, but the breadth and quality of the conversation meant that we covered the whole range of topic areas linked to my aims and research questions.

### 3.5.8 School Sample

I used the schools within one LA, Coloursville, in order to have a comparison within an area. I carried out a small-scale quota sample to identify four contrasting schools and encompass a range of features that have resonance with other schools, using 2012 DfE-published performance table data. I included both academies and non-academies and schools which achieve very strong examination results at GCSE (compared to national average), those achieving weaker examination results and those who can be described as ‘rapidly improving’ as evidenced by performance data over the last three years. My sample consisted of a high achieving academy, a low achieving non-academy, and two rapidly improving schools: one academy and one a non-academy.

My interviews took place in four schools between April and July 2013. The LA has a large number of schools within its boundary, with an achievement rate for all state schools slightly above the national average for five GCSEs at A\*-C including English, Mathematics, and EBac. I identified within the LA all possible high performing academies; low performing non-academies; rapidly improving academies and non-academies, and independent schools. I defined the term ‘high performing’ as any school achieving over 70% of five A\*-C grades including English and Mathematics. This was above the LA average for all schools and 10.6% above national average for all schools. I also took into consideration the EBac figure and only included schools as ‘high performing’ if they had an EBac figure which was 50% and above of their 2012 five A\*-Cs including English and Mathematics figure. ‘Rapidly improving’ schools were taken to be those that had undergone at least a 15% rise in students achieving five A\*-Cs including English and Mathematics as a performance measure over the previous three years. Low achieving schools were defined to be those that achieved below 55% of five A\*-Cs including English and Mathematics.

### 3.5.9 Negotiating access

I obtained contact details for either the Headteacher or the Curriculum Deputy[[33]](#footnote-34) for each school identified by my sampling frame and contacted the schools in each category in turn, stopping when I located a school in each of the four categories that was happy to take part in my research. Full details of my study were then provided. My intention was to interview the Deputy, one Head of Department of an EBac subject and one Head of Department from a non-EBac subject to ensure a spread of opinions from different subject areas covering my research questions. Such school leaders are those with the power and authority to direct and influence policy implementation with the schools. I asked for verbal and written consent from each member of staff that I interviewed, following ethical guidance requirements (see Section 3.5). The semi-structured interviews generated a large amount of data, which I transcribed before analysing. My data analysis approach is considered, reflecting on advantages and the possible disadvantages.

### 3.5.10 Semi-structured interview analysis

I analysed my interview data using a thematic approach (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke 2006). By reading and re-reading the transcripts, I gained an overall understanding of the data before dividing it into sections and then categorising and coding using the key themes and issues that had arisen. As subsequent data was collected and analysed, my themes and key issues were accumulated, adapted and reformulated. This process is described by Wellington one of “continuous refinement” (2000, p.136). The ultimate aim of my data analysis was to draw conclusions which could then be related back to the previous body of literature in this area.

Wellington identifies six stages in the process of data analysis, consisting of: immersion, taking the data holistically and in full; reflecting, taking time to consider the data; analysing data; dividing the data into sections; choosing the sections to then use; coding the elements and incorporating further data into these categories; synthesising data; looking for patterns; relating and locating the data in relation to previous work and theory; and finally, presenting the data “as fairly, clearly, coherently and attractively as possible” (2000, p.139). In coding my transcripts, I followed the guidance by Miles and Huberman (1994) for preparing, coding and identifying themes within qualitative data.

My initial immersion in the collected data consisted of listening to the tapes as soon as I had completed each interview. This allowed me to check the tapes; note any initial aspects I wished to incorporate into future interviews; identify key points, and reflect on each interview. I intended to produce only partial transcripts of the interviews. Bathmaker supports this approach, arguing that full transcripts may not always be necessary (2004, p.166). As I carried out the interviews, it became apparent that a full transcript was necessary, both for my own understanding of the interview and also to enable a careful analysis and coding of the key issues following the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994). Completing full transcripts took up a large amount of time, but ultimately allowed a full understanding of the data and identification of key aspects and quotes. I came to realise, as Miles and Huberman (1994) state, self-transcription was my first step in analysis of the data.

After initially considering the possible use of computer programmes such as NViVO to conduct my analysis, I decided not to take this approach. The small number of interviews and selected policy texts enabled a full understanding and comparison of each text without the use of a computer programme and the process of learning the technology may have detracted attention away from analysis and interpretation. Pomerantz (2004) comments on the large investment in time required to be able to use such software, in his case ATLAS.ti. Bathmaker (2004) using NUD.IST to analyse full transcripts of 47 interviews discusses the issue of researchers adopting a particular approach to data analysis just because the computer programme is designed in this way rather than because it is the most appropriate way of understanding the data. In light of this, I wanted to invest my time in the actual policy texts and interview recordings. I started to identify recurring points and issues across my interviews and continued to refine these as I completed each transcript.

Initially I identified 29 codes, but after working through each transcript several times to identify each occurrence, I realised that I had missed out some other important concepts particularly relating to parent and student ‘choice’, which took the total to 31 codes. I then recoded all transcripts using the 31 codes and was reassured to find that my initial analysis remained the same with the now addition of the new codes. This process acted as an internal check on my analysis. After producing a table of codes cross-referenced to each school and each interviewee (see Appendix 7), I then identified the key themes. Referring back to the literature, my aims, and research questions, I grouped my codes together into similar areas and by a process of realignment and reduction identified five overarching themes. These themes were: the nature of knowledge; differentiation and hierarchy; choice and resistance; control and accountability, and equality.

## 3.6 Ethics

For my research to be rigorous and credible, I needed to demonstrate that I had carried it out in an ethical and trustworthy manner. This section considers the ethical considerations within my research process; the ethical review process, and my defence of the trustworthiness of my research.

### 3.6.1 Ethical considerations

Wellington (2000) states that there are five ways a research project could be unethical. These are: the design or planning; the methods used; the analysis and interpretation of the data; the presentation of the research, or the presentation of conclusions and recommendations. The area that I concentrated on most from an ethical perspective was my semi-structured interview data. People generously gave me their time, therefore I needed to guard their anonymity and trust with care and ensure that I represented their voices as accurately as possible. I also needed to ensure the anonymity of both the LA area and the specific schools. My intention in carrying out a CDA was to contribute to the on-going debate about the EBac and its implementation as well as to affect change, however small. It was vital that I considered the ethical implications at all stages. Pring makes a distinction between:

…those (moral) considerations which relate to general “principles of action” and those which relate to the dispositions and character of the researcher, (2000, p.141).

Utilising my analysis of the original policy with the policy implementation as experienced by practitioners within schools, my intention was to reveal teachers’ perspectives and experiences of the impact of the policy. I used semi-structured interviews so that the voices and experiences of the teachers would be at the forefront of my analysis. This creates an ethical issue in terms of individuals trusting me to interpret and analyse their words appropriately. All participants received and agreed a full transcript of their interview, so in this way I checked back that they were in agreement with what they said and how they said it. I felt that there was a strong ethical component in terms of how I would then present this data within the final thesis. Burgess et al. stress the high level of trust that participants place in the researcher, as well as the academic and professional integrity required to “sustain that trust through conducting your research appropriately”, (2006, p.39). Pring (2000) comments on the fact that the decisions and choices a researcher makes will be greatly determined by the personal disposition of the researcher.

Such intellectual virtues therefore would include openness to criticism and co-operation since it is truth which matters more than one’s own personal recognition by others. The virtuous researcher would be horrified at any attempt to “cook the books” or to stifle criticism or to destroy data or to act partially, (2000 p.151).

I have attempted to explain my decision-making processes in sufficient detail to allow full consideration of my approach. I am aware of my responsibilities as a researcher and aim to reflect accurately the views of the teachers who generously gave their time to me.

### 3.6.2 Ethical review process

All ethical review procedures and guidance from the University of Sheffield –School of Education (2011), University Research Ethics Committee (U-REC, 2007) and the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research from BERA (2011) were followed at each stage of the research. In this section, I discuss each of the components of the ethical review process; first, considering the participants within my research, then discussing the information provided to allow them to make informed decisions about being involved in the research; third, to consider issues relating to the anonymity of the data, and finally evaluating the trustworthiness of my research.

### 3.6.3 Participants

I gained ethical approval for my interviews by successfully completing the *University of Sheffield Education Department Research Ethics Application* (see Appendix 1). I did not share the identity of the schools with other schools taking part. Schools were identified as meeting my required sample criteria using only publicly available data. Bassey (1999) argues that it is the moral responsibility of the researcher to respect the privacy and dignity of research participants. My ethical review application stated that I would keep all tapes and transcripts anonymous and secure and that participants would be asked to check the transcripts. My actions have upheld these aims. Burgess et al. (2006) highlight an ethical concern that it is sometimes difficult to maintain the anonymity of respondents from their own colleagues (p.33). My attendance in the four schools was not widely broadcast and the reasons for my visit were not discussed beyond the participants who had agreed to meet with me. The duration of time between carrying out the interviews to submitting the completed thesis acts as additional protection of the anonymity of my participants from their colleagues.

My role as a research practitioner was the one that I adopted as my research relationship (Burgess et al., 2006) and appeared to fit best with the participants’ understanding of the interviews. My participant information sheet (Appendix 4) and introduction highlighted my role as a Deputy in a particular school and therefore as a current practitioner, but also stressed my primary role in this circumstance as an EdD student. An ethical issue that could have arisen here relates to the implicit power relations between a Head of Department speaking to a Deputy from a different school. I believe that the exploratory non-judgemental nature of the interview, along with my repeated assurances that all information was to be treated in the strictest confidence, prevented this from becoming a barrier.

### 3.6.4 Information provided to participants

I have worked within the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical guidelines (2011) in terms of my responsibilities to participants. Full information about my study was provided initially to the schools and then to the participants to ensure that they were able to give informed consent (see Appendix 5). A detailed email covered all aspects identified within the ethics guidance provided by the University of Sheffield and included full details of the research process and requirements. This information was followed by a more detailed dialogue when I met with the participants. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form were sent in advance with copies given directly to the participants when I met them. All participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any point from the research. I agreed a date by which I would return the full transcript and asked for them to confirm that they were happy with the content as an accurate record of our conversation. All participants replied and no requests for changes or sections to be omitted were made.

### 3.6.5 Anonymity of data

As the research involved tape recording the interviews, permission for this was gained and a full explanation provided of the use of the tapes, safe storage and appropriate disposal. The participants’ anonymity and that of the relevant school was assured, as was the confidentiality of their responses. This was achieved through the careful handling, labelling and storage of the tapes and transcripts along with the use of pseudonyms throughout the analysis stage and final write-up. The description of the four schools is deliberately vague to allow sufficient information for the reader, but without providing identifying features. I anticipated and found that I had to approach a number of schools to find those which were willing and had the capacity to take part. I justified and explained my procedures and plans, though no participants or schools requested adjustments or expressed concerns.

### 3.6.7 Trustworthiness of my research

I sought comments and feedback at all stages of my research from my supervisor and EdD colleagues in order to question and test out my assumptions, as well as to ensure that I provide sufficient but not excessive detail (Troyna, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four categories of trustworthiness that research should comply with: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility of my research is based on the confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings, i.e. to what extent my findings reflect the reality of the situation. I adopted the methods of CDA and semi-structured interviews, which are consistent with my research aims and questions and my theoretical perspective. I justified the choice of these methods in Section 3.4. The use of two methods allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the topic in order to triangulate the findings and to uncover additional evidence to support any assertions and thereby strengthen the credibility of the research.

Demonstrating that the findings have applicability in other contexts refers to the transferability. My findings are a small-scale piece of research capturing key issues relating to the implementation of the EBac in four differing schools at a given moment in time. I have used the concept of Bassey’s (1998) “fuzzy generalisation” in order to highlight key aspects from my sample which may have wider resonance with other schools in similar positions. I believe that such resonance allows my findings to have transferability across a range of school settings.

Dependability relates to how reliable and therefore repeatable my work may be considered to be. I have provided detail of my research planning, process and reflection to allow others to understand and potentially replicate my actions and research. Shenton (2004) argues that researchers need to discuss the design and the implementation of their research, the detail of the data collection, along with an evaluative reflection of the work (p.71-72). My study includes references to all of these, and offers suggestions for future research and improvements to my methodology and methods.

The concept of confirmability refers to the neutrality of the research; the extent to which the findings are determined by the respondents rather than due to researcher bias. CDA has potential for researcher bias as it is a product of my analysis, which is open to influence by my approach and beliefs. To address this concern, I adopted and applied Hyatt’s framework in order to provide an external framework, structure and set of guidelines for my work. I discussed my emerging analysis with my supervisor and other colleagues with linguistic knowledge to test out the quality of my analysis and my interpretations. The discussion of my approach and analysis is intended to provide the reader with ongoing information about how I approached and conducted my analysis for them to be able to draw their own conclusions about the confirmability of my work. The use of quotes from the policy, for example, was followed by my interpretation and analysis using the relevant section from Hyatt’s framework. With the semi-structured interviews, the codes and themes arising from my analysis were influenced by my positionality, research questions, study aims and my review of the literature. I have attempted to provide a clear ‘audit trail’ for the readers, as suggested by Shenton (2004). I now consider the data collection phase of my research.

## 3.7 Issues arising during the data collection phase

While I had planned and prepared for the interviews, it was not possible to anticipate all eventualities. I have reflected and commented on issues that arose with my sample of schools, sample of teachers, and negotiating access to the schools.

### 3.7.1 School sample

My sample evolved during my research planning and data collection. I planned to include an independent school within my sample. It became apparent that the EBac appeared to have little impact on the curriculum planning or thinking of independent schools. This could reflect a genuine lack of focus on the EBac, possibly as their curriculum was orientated towards this combination of subjects anyway, or an unwillingness to take part in the research. I believe that my sample of four state schools allows a comparison across different types of state school and highlights issues that resonate with other schools in similar positions. (Bassey, 1985).

### 3.7.2 Negotiating access to school leaders

Accessing school leaders was hard to achieve, mainly due to the timing of my interviews in the summer term, when teachers focus on examination classes and planning for the following year. I also found it difficult to get agreement to interview subject heads of both an EBac and a non-EBac subject. I interviewed a non-EBac subject head in only two of the four case study schools, resulting in a potential imbalance in my sample and the findings of my research. Three of the EBac Heads of Department had non-EBac subjects within their departments and I asked the participants to consider the impact on all subjects for which they were responsible. Nonetheless, the 10 school leaders that I did interview provided in-depth, rich and wide-ranging accounts of their perspectives of the EBac.

### 3.7.3 Interview arrangements

Organising the interviews took time in order to fit around teachers’ timetables and school activities. My technique was to persevere using email, but to try to be as accommodating as possible when booking interviews. After three follow-up emails I felt that I could not ask again and consequently did not secure appointments with those individuals.

My questions evolved throughout my 10 interviews, though I followed a similar format so comparisons could be made. Despite my careful planning with the technology for recording the interviews, I had one failure when my digital recorder did not work due to insufficient battery power. I dealt with this by taking detailed handwritten notes throughout the interview and transcribing immediately after the interview. The transcript was immediately returned to the interviewee and they were asked to provide any comments on the accuracy of the write-up. This event did act as motivation to ensure that I had even more contingencies in place for the remaining interviews by replacing the batteries before each interview and taking a spare set with me. To conclude my methodology chapter, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of my methodology and methods.

## 3.8 Strengths and limitations of the methodology and methods used in the study

### 3.8.1 Strengths of the methodology and methods

My methods of CDA and semi-structured interviews allowed me to investigate the social construction of meaning both within policy texts and in the interpretation and implementation of the EBac policy at school level, as perceived by a number of school leaders. Hyatt’s CDA framework guided me through a range of linguistic devices and procedures and ensured that I applied each one to the texts and then reflected on how the analysis related to my study aims and research questions.

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain critical insight into teachers’ experiences and the impact of the EBac in schools and at subject department level. Rich and detailed information was generated, allowing me to immerse myself in the voices of participants, ultimately coding for 31 different aspects. The flexible semi-structured approach facilitated conversations in which I was able to respond to and follow up points that I would not have been able to do in a structured interview or questionnaire. The process of meeting people within their own environments provided a useful context for the EBac conversation, in that they were discussing events impacting on their own school in an environment in which they were familiar. I heard from the teachers involved how the EBac had been received and responded to within their schools and the impact that it had upon them and their roles. These conversations allowed space and time for the participants to reflect on decisions that they had made or were part of in relation to the EBac, which may lead to subsequent changes in approach and practice. In a busy role, such reflection time can often be lacking, and protecting time to discuss issues relating to the EBac appeared to be important to my participants, shifting the method from data collection to data ‘creation’ and hopefully, empowerment (Wellington, 2000, p.72).

### 3.8.2 Limitations of the methodology and methods

CDA is a method I found challenging but illuminating. Linguistic analysis is not a method that I would naturally have gravitated towards. It provided a clear and practical structure through which to investigate the EBac policy, but there was a risk of focusing on the framework and losing sight of my aims and research questions. A detailed framework spanning 11 criteria generated a large amount of data, which is both a strength and a limitation. I had a very detailed understanding of the texts and the linguistic devices in operation, which was a strength, but having such a broad range covering 11 areas was a weakness. The generated data has therefore been interpreted to address the research questions.

The semi-structured interviews generated far more data than I imagined, providing a wide range of opinions and experiences on which to draw when considering my research questions. Once the four schools were identified, the quality of the interview data was down to my interviewing skills (Verma and Mallick, 1999). I believe that I was able to put the participants at ease and was able to draw out a number of points for detailed discussion. My Deputy role did not appear to create any power inequalities during the interviews; if anything, my role provided me with the credibility to encourage people to provide detailed information. An artificial, structured, time bound, one-off interview situation cannot provide access to a full understanding of the whole school context, ethos and relationships. My position as a school leader, while providing me with knowledge, understanding and empathy with the decisions of participants, may have denied me the external perspective necessary to challenge or probe the educational discourse of student ‘ability’ evident within all of the interviews. The interpretation of inequality linked to notions of ‘ability’ became an area of particular interest within my analysis, which is addressed in the discussion chapter.

### 3.8.3 Conclusion

My methodology and methods of data collection ensured that I collected detailed information regarding EBac policy, practice and implications within schools. The presentation of findings necessary included a reduction and interpretation of the data, though I ensured that my participants’ words drove my underlying analysis, interpretation and presentation. The next section provides the analysis of the findings of the CDA and semi-structured interviews.

# Chapter 4 – Analysis

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the analysis of my data and identify the key findings. To analyse the data, I have used Scheurich’s PA framework to investigate my research aims of how and why the EBac was introduced in England, to look at the potential and actual impact in the school curriculum from the perspective of teachers, and to identify potential winners and losers of this policy. Throughout the analysis I address my three research questions:

1. What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced in 2010 as part of a wider policy framework?
2. What are teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac?
3. Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?

Scheurich’s framework structures my analysis around three arenas. The first is the social constitution of the problem of perceived declining educational standards in England. Secondly, the grid of social regularities, which intersects to determine a particular phenomenon as a problem at any given moment in time and lastly, the legitimate policy solutions that have arisen from this grid of social regularities, resulting eventually in the EBac policy.

The first part of the chapter (4.2) is a policy analysis applying Hyatt’s (2010) CDA framework on my three selected policy texts (see 3.5.2 for the Critical Literacy Frame and 11 criteria). The section is structured around analysis of all 11 criteria outlined in the framework. CDA allows for a detailed analysis and exploration of the multiple dimensions of the text. The second part of the chapter (4.3) is an analysis of the semi-structured interview data, introducing the four sample schools and the 10 school leaders interviewed. The approach to the EBac policy by each school is placed within a four-fold typology of acceptance, resistance, compliance or confusion (see Appendix 8). The five key themes identified from my interview analysis are then presented: the nature of knowledge; differentiation and hierarchy; choice and resistance; control and accountability, and equality (4.4). The CDA-generated background detail for my interview questions provides a detailed understanding of the policy the practitioners were implementing.

## 4.2 Policy analysis

In order to research my first question: “What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of the wider policy framework”, I have analysed the following sections of key documents (see Section 3.5.4 for discussion about the criteria for selection):

Policy document No 1: *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* (DfE, 2010):

1. Foreword by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister p.3-5 (PM/DPM)
2. Foreword by the Secretary of State for Education p.6-7 (Gove)
3. Section 4.20-4.24 *The English Baccalaureate will encourage schools to offer a broad set of academic subjects to age 16* p.44-45 (EBac)

Policy document No 2: *Statement of Intent Addendum – English Baccalaureate 2010 December 2010*, Re-issued 12 January 2011. (Pages 1-3) (Addendum) (DfE, Dec 2010d).

Policy document No 3: Schools White Paper: Speech to the House of Commons on the launch of the Schools White Paper – Gove, 24.11.2010 (Pages 1-3) (Speech) (Gove, Nov 2010).

A text is not a neutral artefact but is created for a reason. In the case of policy texts, the aim is to outline and present a case for the policy in question, in Scheurich’s terms to frame the social construction of the problem (Arena 1). Hyatt comments that:

Language, instead of drawing meanings passively from pre-existing knowledge of the world plays an active role in classifying the phenomena and experiences through which individuals construct, understand and represent reality. (2010, p.1).

I explore the active use of language within key EBac policy texts using Scheurich’s concept of PA to guide my analysis, aiming to uncover the way that these texts allow teachers to construct, understand and represent the reality of the EBac for themselves and their students. Within any text, a range of overt and covert discourses may be included. CDA allows a framework for uncovering and identifying multiple discourses within a text (Taylor, 2004). My analysis examines each of the 11 aspects within Hyatt’s Critical Literacy Framework (2010) in turn.

### 4.2.1 Pronouns – Participant Choices

When looking at the use of pronouns in a text, the Critical Literacy Frame considers how they are used; in other words, what purpose/s they serve in the text. Pronouns can be used in an inclusive way, such as: “we”, “us”, “our”, or, in an exclusive way, such as: “he”, “she”, “you”. The White Paper uses inclusive pronouns throughout, involving the reader as an in-group. For example, “our”, and “we”, are used in the PM /DPM foreword (p.3); the foreword by Gove (p.6), and within the EBac text section 4.20 (p.44). It is not made clear who “we” consists of; it could be all readers, all English citizens[[34]](#footnote-35), the government or indeed merely a reference to the three writers. This ambiguity leads the reader to be inextricably included with the tone, direction and assertions put forward in the policy. The White Paper demonstrates these inter-relating social networks identified by Scheurich (1994) (Arena 2, see Section 2.6.2), including the reader as one of the networks and presents a non-negotiable stance as its logical conclusion on why this policy is the ‘right’ one at this time and why it is necessary. The text works on the explicit assumption that all readers are in agreement with the given rationale and arguments.

The reader is assumed to be part of the ‘in-group’ and is not presented with the opportunity to digress from this position. The document states: “The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past” (p.3). Shared knowledge, beliefs and values are presented throughout, for example: “Reforms on this scale are absolutely essential if our children are to get the education they deserve” (p.5). The reader is positioned as an ally with the government’s aims through statements designed to appeal to the public’s views about the family and needs of children. In contrast, the White Paper speech continues the use of inclusive pronouns seen within the forewords, in particular “we”, referring to “we” the government, as opposed to “we” all of us, and therefore the ‘in-group’ emphasis is not as strong within this text. The Addendum begins with reference to “The Government” in the third person but then moves to an inclusive pronoun “we” for the remainder of the document. Such a shift, however, is still explicit in terms of “we” being representative of the government, not the reader.

In terms of my first research question, the use of pronouns within the texts set an inclusive tone to the policy. Using Scheurich’s PA, it is important to consider the basis on which the set of policy problems and premises were founded and the policy solutions which are then presented as logical solutions. This policy could be argued to be more about a change in political direction rather than identification of a new set of problems.

### 4.2.3 Activisation/Passivisation

All three texts under examination actively use “we will” as a command. In the White Paper speech, such a device injects pace and a feeling of rigour into Gove’s statements. The reader is left in no doubt that the Coalition is responsible for enhancing educational progress for all children, in contrast to the previous Labour administration. “Social mobility went backwards under Labour, and it is the mission of this coalition Government to reverse that unhappy trend and to make opportunity more equal” (p.1). This statement is not to be questioned, only to be acted upon by the government, who are presented as having the drive and determination and the policy solution to the identified problems. This links to Scheurich’s discussion regarding the presentation of a limited range of socially constructed policy solutions to address an identified problem.

The stated policy solutions are presented as already being in motion; this policy merely draws them altogether, as stated in the White Paper speech:

Schools spending is rising, with more money for the poorest through the pupil premium; education reform is accelerating with one new academy created every working day; and standards are being driven up, with teachers now supported to excel as never before” (p.2).

The implication is that these changes, activated by the government, are happening, whereas under Labour they were not.

The White Paper and the Forewords highlight the depth of the stated policy problems and the pace and energy that will now, it is claimed, be injected via the White Paper proposals in order to resolve such problems. Gove in his speech states that “the need for thoroughgoing reform is urgent” (p.2), leaving no doubt about his proposed pace of change. This linguistic ‘activisation’device therefore links to my first research question about why the policy was introduced, stating that the scope and nature of the problems identified within the education system require immediate and wide ranging attention. According to Scheurich’s PA, the White Paper outlines a set of problems and policy choices (Arena 2) in order to then present and justify the only ‘logical’ policy solutions to these problems (Arena 3), all of which justify the educational goals of the new government in relation to the constituted policy problems (Arena 1).

The speech summarises the 91-page White Paper. Both the policy problems and solutions are presented as universal, obvious and applicable to all. This device becomes more important when considering that this policy is a union of Conservative and Liberal Democrat approaches.

### 4.2.4 Time – tense and aspect

The two White Paper forewords and the White Paper speech leave the reader and listener with no doubt that the time for action is now. Gove’s foreword begins with a summary of the past, presenting social mobility in a negative, deterministic manner: “Throughout history, most individuals have been the victims of forces beyond their control” (p.6). The use of the present perfect tense “have been” is used for discussion about things in the past which are relevant in the present. This sentence therefore suggests a certainty about the past which continues to have an impact on the current situation. The section concludes by stating current beliefs and future plans to address the identified problems “the importance of teaching cannot be over-stated. And that is why there is a fierce urgency to our plans for reform” (p.7). The use of the present simple tense creates the impression that this is a straightforward fact. Again, the reader is left in no doubt that this is the case, with no need for debate, only gratitude that the plans about to be outlined in the White Paper will resolve the highlighted problems. This highlights Scheurich’s Arena 1, in which the policy problem is constituted.

In contrast, the EBac section on “promotion of achievement” (p.44) is written in future tense, stressing plans that will be enacted to improve education for all.

In order to encourage and facilitate a more rounded educational experience for all students we will create a new way of recognising those students, and schools who succeed in achieving real breadth, (DfE, 2010).

The use of this tense suggests that most students are currently subjected to a narrow curriculum, which these policy solutions overcome.

The foreword by the PM/DPM begins with a present perfect simple statement: “So much of the education debate in this country is backward looking: have standards fallen?” (p.3), the text is framed in an unquestionable, universal manner and the assumptions are based on this definitive starting premise. Likewise, in 4.20, the section begins with a general action that is presented as a truth: “In order to encourage and facilitate a more rounded educational experience for all students” (p.44). This section then presents the solution: “so we will introduce a new award – the English Baccalaureate” (p.44). The remainder of this section gives future actions and benefits based on the initial premise.

There is limited use of the past simple tense in both forewords. This tense is often used in order to represent a past event that is no longer important or relevant. Any reference to past events in these texts is used to demonstrate how this policy overcomes a previous problem, usually with the implication that the Labour government either contributed to or created it. For example, in the White Paper Speech:

In the last three years of the previous Government, reform went into reverse. Schools lost freedoms, the curriculum lost rigour and Labour lost its way (p2).

The addendum also begins with a present simple tense statement presented as an unquestionable “truth”; however, in this case, the agent is explicitly the government. “The Government believes that schools should offer pupils a broad range of academic subjects to age 16, and the English Baccalaureate … promotes that aspiration” (p.2). The belief is as described, but the bold statement is that the EBac, without debate or evidence, allows a broad range of academic subjects to be studied. The idea that this policy may lead to additional problems is not considered. PA highlights that recommended policy solutions privilege some choices, in this case the promotion of set GCSE academic subjects for all, over other choices such as individualised programmes of study.

Relating this to my first research question, the tenses and aspects used highlight the policy imperatives in a directive manner. The social networks, in PA terms, can be identified within the White Paper. These are evident in the ideological and practical changes from the previous government, along with the concern over the perceived declining educational standards using international measures and the continuing attainment gap between disadvantaged (FSM) students and all others, culminating with the White Paper categorically stating the policy solution arena and the legitimate policy solutions of the Coalition government.

### 4.2.5 Adjectives/ Adverbs/ Nouns/ Verbal Processes

The texts contain a large number of “loaded, dramatic, and stereotypical adjectives, adverbs and nouns” (Hyatt, 2010, p.2) which serve to reinforce: the “truth” of the situation; the authors’ knowledge, and solutions to the problems (Arena 3). Fairclough (2003) refers to this as the TINA (there is no alternative) discourse, a common neoliberal theme. The PM/DPM foreword begins in the first paragraph with the phrase “The truth is”. This is stated as irrefutable and sets the tone. This is followed by generalised statements such as: “The only way”, “There is no question” and “no choice” (p.3), which again leave the reader reassured that everyone agrees with these suggestions. “For far too long we have tolerated the moral outrage of an accepted correlation between wealth and achievement at school; the soft bigotry of low expectations” (p.4). No supporting evidence is provided, nor are the terms expanded or the underlying concepts explored. This statement focuses the debate on social class using FSM as a measure. Linking to my third research question, the implication is that social class is a site of educational inequality and this policy solves the identified problem. The text makes no reference to ethnicity or gender, therefore implying that these areas are not problematic.

There are many examples in this section of contentions being stated as incontrovertible facts. In the PM/DPM foreword, for example: “The only way we can catch up, and have the world-class schools our children deserve, is by learning the lessons of other countries’ success” (p.3). This is not the only way to catch up, and it assumes that readers accept that the OECD PISA statistics used within the text provide acceptable evidence that the country is ‘”falling behind”. No room for alternative debate is provided. Using PA arenas 1 and 3, the identification of the problem is taken in a certain direction, which leads only to the stated solutions.

The text continues with loaded statements, for example: “All schools… will see a massive reduction in the bureaucracy foisted on them in recent years” (p.4). The use of the adjective “massive” implies that schools will not just see a ‘small’ reduction but an exceptionally large one. Furthermore, the use of the past participle, “foisted”, infers that previous work schools did was unjustifiable and ‘forced’ upon them. This foreword closes with the statement: “Reforms on this scale are absolutely essential if our children are to get the education they deserve”, implying that children did not previously receive an appropriate education.

The range of word classes (nouns, verbs and adjectives) is different within Gove’s foreword. Loaded language is used to support the constructed story and historical narrative. He creates a ‘potted history’ from some unspecified time when only social class impacted on future life chances, shifting to a future situation where all can be “authors of our own life stories” (p.6). He then states that social mobility is in decline, using figures to argue that FSM children are disadvantaged by the current educational system “just 40 [FSM children KH] of those 80,000 made it to Oxbridge”. This loaded language, without explanation, evidence or question, continues: “this injustice has inspired a grim fatalism” (p.7). Such lexis choices serve to reinforce the implications that the previous government presided over a decline in social mobility. Again, the focus is on social class as the area of concern, linking to my third research question. Using Scheurich’s identification of an education problem, it is a surprising stance for a right-wing government to be using the underachievement of working class children to criticise of a previous Labour administration. This can be seen to add strength to the stated policy solution, since it appears that the government is placing itself above party political ideological arguments in agreeing that working class underachievement is a problem, keeping the focus on the ‘best’ solutions for increasing working class educational achievement. Skrla and Scheurich (2004) claim that US politics is facing an historic moment where both major political parties are committed to high academic performance by all social groups (p.16). With the Coalition government adopting a number of US educational strategies, this equality focus may be an example of policy borrowing (Lingard et al., 2014).

The section finishes with a dramatic utterance: “And that is why there is a fierce urgency to our plans for reform” (p.7). The verbal communication processes are different in each of the two forewords, possibly to highlight the different roles these politicians have in designing, implementing and overseeing the policy. The PM/ DPM agree to the overall direction of the policy but Gove has to inspire, persuade and hold to account the teaching profession for its delivery.

Persuasion is evident within the White Paper speech. The list of “loaded, dramatic, and stereotypical adjectives, adverbs and nouns” (Hyatt, 2010, p.2) is much greater than in the two forewords, for example, when praising schools as “great schools” with “superb teachers” (p.1). In contrast, schools have also “slipped behind other nations” and the “gulf…has grown wider”, resulting in an “unhappy trend”. In reference to previous National Curriculum requirements, Gove states:

…we will slim down a curriculum that has become overloaded, over-prescriptive and over-bureaucratic by…specifying the core knowledge in strategic subjects that every child should know (p.2).

The verbal process of repeating a word three times is familiar in political rhetoric. A range of selective lexis are used to outwardly imply the speed of reform intended to be undertaken, including inscribed evaluation (overt author judgement) and evoked evaluation (judgements the reader is led to making themselves) (Martin, 2000). This is evidenced via: “urgent”, “accelerating”, “rigorous”, and “ambitious”. The White Paper “affirms the importance of teaching at the heart of our mission to make opportunity more equal” (p.2). Gove’s moral outrage at inequalities is clear to the reader, with the ideas behind the policy presented as common sense solutions to the stated problems (Arena 3).

The Addendum, as a factual elaboration of an area of policy, uses a much a less prescribed and intensified range of specific word classes, for example, “broad range”, “promotes that aspiration” and “rigorous GCSEs” (p.2) Even here, such connotations lead the reader to an evoked evaluation, as this choice of vocabulary within a technical, factual list of qualifications is loaded and judgemental.

### 4.2.6 Metaphor – literal and grammatical

The texts include a range of literal and grammatical metaphors. The literal metaphor creates association or resemblance between two items, whereas the grammatical metaphor, through the conversion of a verb into a noun, has the effect of increasing the lexical field as well as frequently changing a sentence from the active to the passive voice, allowing for generalisation and depersonalisation. Hyatt (2010) comments that the “metaphor is more than just a literary device – it plays a fundamental part in the way people represent social reality” (p.3).

The foreword by the PM/ DPM starts with literal metaphors, such as: “so much of the education debate in this country is backward looking: have standards fallen? Have exams got easier?” (p.3) and concludes with “We have no choice but to be this radical if our ambition is to be world-class” (p.4). While there are many literal metaphors within this text, there are few examples of grammatical metaphor. In contrast, the foreword by Gove uses grammatical metaphor as a device to allow for generalisation and to remove individuals from statements, for example: “But education provides a route to liberation from these imposed constraints” (p.6). The text allows for more vivid description than by congruent or literal means. Fairclough (2003) comments that such nominalisation (the device of turning a verb into a noun) can hide agency and responsibility.

This device serves to disguise the fact that the Conservatives were in power for much of the time span referred to within the texts and therefore their policies did not prevent the situation or provide solutions. The text obscures the debate about continued inequalities created through private education, a sector supported by the Conservatives, for example, the references to the numbers of children who go to Oxbridge from key private schools such as Winchester. In relation to my third research question, the debate is not being framed in terms of the inequalities created by the existence of independent schools, rather the failures of some state schools to allow all to achieve (Arena 2).

Gove’s foreword uses a number of metaphors to convey the idea that historically there has been a problem of restricted social mobility and ambition. The text contains a lexis of liberation from oppression, leading to a lexis of democracy: “They [other countries KH] have made opportunity more equal, democratised access to knowledge and placed an uncompromising emphasis on higher standards all at the same time” (p.7). Gove sets up two specific opposing lexical fields using metaphors to create a gap between two historical junctures in the past, in which opportunities were “restricted”, and the future, in which achievement is “democratic”. He also uses metaphors to convey the essence of needing to act now, as exemplified by the statement: “And that is why there is a fierce urgency to our plans for reform” (p.7).

The EBac section of the White Paper, 4.20, contains repetitive metaphors such as “a broad and rounded range of academic subjects” (p.44). The concept of “broad” is referred to six times within this section, “rounded” four times and “academic” six times. A repetitive device highlights the importance of these concepts, foregrounding them in the text.

The White Paper speech reflects the tone and language of Gove’s foreword, using metaphor to depersonalise and disassociate the identified problem from previous Conservative administrations. For example, “we will slim down a curriculum that has become overloaded, over-prescriptive and over-bureaucratic” (p.2). This is stated without reference to the fact that the Conservative administration in 1988 designed and introduced the National Curriculum to which the text refers. The speech finishes with a metaphor which would appear to be more in keeping with Labour than Conservative education policy “to make opportunity more equal” (p.2).

In relation to my third research question, the White Paper presents a surface image that the EBac will reduce inequalities by providing all children with access to the same subjects and qualifications up to age 16. There is, however, no discussion of the impact and influence of underlying issues such as social class, gender and ethnicity on subject choice and achievement within and between schools.

### 4.2.7 Presupposition/ Implication

Representing constructions as convincing realities occurs throughout all three texts in terms of using a range of linguistic devices to present beliefs as truth. Within the PM/DPM foreword, the argument is prefaced by the statement “but what really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors” (p.3). The use of a non-hedged adverb creates the impression that a contention is a “fact”; “the truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past” (p.3). In this case, the use of a change-of-state verb highlights the suggested gap between English education and an unspecified ‘other’. The rest of the PM/DPM foreword is built around explaining how the White Paper addresses this articulated concern. The text goes onto state “as the best education systems have shown, this power shift to the front line needs to be accompanied by a streamlined and effective accountability system” (p.4). There is no elaboration of which education systems are deemed to be the best, by whom or using what measures. The implication is that there existed in the past an ineffective accountability system which disempowered teachers. Again, no reference is made to the fact that much of this accountability system was put in place by Conservative governments. The presupposition promoted is that these concerns are addressed by the policy reform (Arena 3).

The PM/DPM foreword concludes with an incontrovertible statement stating that huge change is about to happen: “Reforms on this scale are absolutely essential if our children are to get the education they deserve” (p.5). “Absolutely essential” is not a phrase to be argued with, particularly when linked to denying children a proper education.

The foreword by Gove contains greater presupposition and implication due to the narrative style of portraying a historical account leading to his future proposals, for example: “wealth governed access to cultural riches. Horizons were narrow, hopes limited, happiness a matter of time and chance” (p.6). Again, the use of factive verbs and adjectives suggest that these statements are a reflection of truth, not presuppositions. The text states that “this injustice has inspired a grim fatalism in some, who believe that deprivation must be destiny. But for this Government the scale of this tragedy demands action. Urgent, focused, radical action” (p.7). The clear implications, using change-of-state verbs, are that: there is an injustice; the previous government did not take appropriate action; the problem is very big; and that the scale of reforms must be large-scale and immediate. The key presupposition of the text and White Paper proposals is that other countries have addressed these issues, so England must now adopt the same measures: “It outlines a direction of travel on the curriculum and qualifications which allows us to learn from, and outpace, the world’s best” (p.7). Again, the use of a factive verb presents this assumption and hope as a statement of certainty. The intention is not that England catches up with those currently ahead in international league tables, but overtakes them.

This linguistic device can be seen to reinforce Scheurich’s third arena, in that policy solutions are legitimated within the text. The desire to compete internationally and improve results in the PISA tests can be seen as an explanation for why the EBac policy was introduced as part of the wider policy framework. Concern over Britain’s position in international comparisons and global networks has created a policy solution that requires English pupils to have a greater focus on Mathematics and sciences to improve performance on these tests. This is a network of testing and surveillance which, as described by Lingard et al. (2013), acts as a form of “global panopticism” (p.539).

### 4.2.8 Medium

All three texts are written in the mediums of persuasive policy. The White Paper speech is political rhetoric that is designed to persuade while introducing and outlining the policy. The tone of both forewords in the White Paper combine a formal business style with an informal, conversational approach. The foreword by the PM/DPM follows the expected schema, with its standard introduction to a government policy written in a formal yet non-technical style. The arguments put forward are stated to be ‘lessons’ which can be seen as an attempt to use familiar vocabulary for the education sector and to provide a structured layout to the list of proposals. The foreword by the PM/DPM takes an approach of appearing to praise and support teachers: “there is no question that teaching standards have increased” (p.3). They then briefly outline three “lessons” that the country needs to learn from others using the persuasive device of the ‘power of three’. These lessons form the basis of the policy solutions emerging from the constituted policy problems (Arena 3).

In contrast, the foreword by Gove reads as a story with a set narrative over time to outline where the problems have come from; the key issues of the day which he feels illuminate the current problems using a range of facts and figures, ultimately leading to the stated solutions. As a piece of persuasive writing, it also uses the ‘power of three’ to reinforce the direction and purpose of the speech, maximising rhetoric. “Horizons were narrow, hopes limited, happiness a matter of time and chance” (p.6).

The EBac section (4.20) moves back into a more formal academic style, continuing to present opinion as statements of fact; “this basic suite of academic qualifications” (p.44). Persuasive language and grammatical devices continue to be purposefully used: “pupils will of course be able to achieve vocational qualifications alongside the English Baccalaureate” (p.45). This does not present information about the reduction in vocational qualifications and related performance points or the fact that if additional time is required for children to be successful at EBac subjects then the number of other subjects that they can study is reduced.

The Addendum is written as an information sheet using a “frequently asked questions” (FAQs) structure. In contrast, the White Paper speech is a clear persuasive speech designed to articulate the government’s position and to persuade readers of the validity of the initial premises, the stated solutions and their promised impact. The style and tone is different to the policy documents, yet incorporates many of the ideas and phrases from the White Paper forewords. The speech consists of many short sentences, reinforcing pace and ensuring brevity to support audience absorption of an otherwise dense, lengthy and rich speech.

### 4.2.9 Audience

The audience for the White Paper is headteachers, LA officers, academy chains, examination boards, the media, education professionals, interest groups, and the general electorate. In contrast, the Addendum, a technical paper, is aimed at school and advisory audiences. The White Paper speech, however, was written to be listened to by MPs and the media (who then reflect the headlines to the wider electorate via either television, print or online news), as well as a text available for other interested parties to read later.

Affiliations and interests determine how the audience approach and understand the White Paper. The Labour audience are looking for points of comparison and contrast with previous policies, as well as objectionable content. The unions, education professionals, teachers and headteachers have differing concerns and timescales. The immediate issues centre on the impact on current procedures and routines as well as future impact. A White Paper, whilst identifying the headline polices, does not provide the implementation detail needed to effect change. The Addendum is written to provide information and guidance to explain and elaborate on the minimal information in the White Paper. There is little, if any, room for alternative interpretations of this document.

The White Paper speech is a different text which is more accessible by a wider audience and therefore open to greater interpretation. For many, this speech *is* the White Paper, as they will not read the full text. The White Paper speech begins by praising schools and teachers, positioning this audience to then receive further information, which turns out to be various weaknesses that the policy aims to address.

For Coalition MPs, this was one of the first opportunities to hear how the beliefs and aspirations of the two parties intertwined into policy. One key difference compared to the White Paper is that Gove is directly critical of the previous Labour government, explicitly naming them four times as the cause of problems, for example: “social mobility went backwards under Labour” (p.1). This device is used with MPs in mind, presenting an ideal platform to attack the opposing party in a situation where the Labour politicians will not have an immediate right to reply. In terms of political parties moving closer to each other, it is perhaps ironic that a Labour party is accused by a Conservative Education Secretary of reducing social mobility. In terms of amalgamating the polices of two previously opposing parties, however, it shows the common ground between Conservative and Liberal Democrat ideals and positions them as being opposed to Labour’s.

### 4.2.10 Visual images

The visual images used within the White Paper are standardised head and shoulder pictures of the politicians. In terms of one of the first Coalition White Papers, the fact that the foreword is authored and has pictures of both the PM and DPM, at the same height and size either side of the page (Cameron on the left and Clegg on the right) is of historical interest. Both signatures are included, though in terms of status, the PM’s signature takes up more space, both vertically and horizontally.

### 4.2.11 Age, class, disability, gender, race – equity, ethnicity and sexuality issues

This criterion links to my third research question on the implications of the EBac for educational equality. The main social characteristic referred to within the White Paper and speech is social class. The focus is on ensuring that those on FSM are able to access the same educational success and pursue the same ambitions as those who are wealthier. PM/DPM state that “No country…can afford to allow children from poorer families to fail as a matter of course” (p.4). There is no reference to other social groups such as gender or ethnicity, other than that Chinese girls on FSM are singled out as a group who outperform the national average, although no context is given in terms of the number of this cohort as a proportion of FSM. Gove comments in his foreword:

Throughout history, most individuals have been the victims of forces beyond their control. Where you were born, both geographically and in class terms, was overwhelmingly likely to dictate your future. …Opportunities for women outside the home were restricted (p.6).

This may be a mythical understanding of history; no facts or evidence are presented to support any of these statements. Working class women have always worked outside the home, yet this statement is applied to women of all classes.

Gove makes no mention of gender or ethnicity other than using the mode of address “masters” when he states “becoming masters of their own fate” (p.6). The assumption may be that this term applies both to men and women. Other than this word, all students are treated as gender and ethnicity-neutral throughout all texts. Gove makes a point that would not be out of place in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976):

Children from poorer homes start behind their wealthier contemporaries when they arrive at school and during their educational journey they fall further and further back. (p.7).

The argument against the EBac is that it exacerbates rather than reducing this social divide. If alternative routes to and through university, such as vocational routes are closed down or reduced and the only route is a traditional academic one, poorer children with less cultural capital are likely to have limited access to HE (Hillman, 2015). The final element within Hyatt’s Critical Literacy Framework is that of reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals.

### 4.2.12 Reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals

Within the selection of texts analysed are references to two other texts and discourses. The first reference is a quote from Arne Duncan, the US Secretary of State for Education which includes a secondary quote from Wildavsky (2010). The second reference is to the work of Hirsch (1996) on core knowledge.

The most direct reference to another text is in the EBac section 4.20 (p.45) where a quote is included within the White Paper from a UNESCO speech by US Secretary Duncan (2010) “ultimately, education is the great equaliser. It is the one force that can consistently overcome differences in background, culture and privilege” (DfE, 2010, p.45). The Duncan speech is an important text for the Coalition in terms of educational thinking and for the format of the White Paper. This is demonstrated in the fact that much of the language used in the White Paper is the same as the language used in US education documents. For example, Duncan’s speech closes with the time bound statement: “The urgent need to provide an excellent education for every child is a right that cannot be denied. We can't wait because our children can't wait. The time for change is now” (Duncan, 2010). This can be compared to the closing paragraph in the White Paper foreword by Gove “nothing matters more in improving education than giving every child access to the best possible teaching…And that is why there is a fierce urgency to our plans for reform” (DfE, 2010, p.7). The linguistic and ideological similarity between the two documents is immediately striking.

A reference to another US discourse within the White Paper (2010) is that of the discourse of Hirsch’s “core knowledge” (1996). Hirsch’s work in the United States is based on the same premise stated within the White Paper that the economic and educational gap between the rich and poor is widening. The concept of “core knowledge” is a strong influence on the Coalition’s education policy. Reference is made in section 4.21 to “this basic suite of academic qualifications” (p.44), reinforced in the White Paper speech by Gove’s statement about “specifying the core knowledge … that every child should know” (p.2). Hirsch states that, “such universal participation by students cannot occur unless they all share a core of relevant background knowledge”, (1996, p.14). Hirsch’s ideas have resonance with the underlying EBac premise, that by encouraging all children to study academic qualifications at age 16, they will have equal access to core knowledge, in turn allowing access to high-status educational opportunities and universities.

### 4.2.13 Conclusion

The use of Hyatt’s Critical Literacy Framework allowed me to consider a range of literacy devices in operation throughout the sample texts. By focusing on the texts in this way, I illuminate a range of issues relating to my research questions that would otherwise have remained obscure. Applying Scheurich’s PA framework, I identified some key issues and social regularities arising from my CDA. The policy of the new Coalition government outlined a set of stated educational problems from which uncontentious policy solutions were presented, using the TINA discourse (Fairclough, 2003) with the main social division addressed by this policy being that of disadvantage as identified by FSM categorisation. The identified educational problems include: the nature and range of the curriculum and knowledge offered to children up to 16; the measurement and judgement of individual and school achievement; and whether the curriculum of schools offers equality of opportunity for all. These problems and social regularities are next explored with school leaders within four different schools via semi-structured interviews, the analysis of which covers five overarching themes (section 4.3). In order to address my first research question “What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?” I critically analysed sections of the EBac policy text, also addressing my third research question: “Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?” I go on to explore the latter question via analysis of my semi-structured interviews, while engaging with Research Question 2: “What are teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac?”

## 4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The CDA allowed me to focus on key EBac policy texts, highlighting key policy problems and social regularities. These problems and social regularities were then explored from the perspective of policy implementation and practice in four contrasting state secondary schools. Within this section, I introduce the four schools and the 10 school leader interviewees, drawing out elements which led me to classify each school within a fourfold EBac typology. All schools and teacher names have been anonymised. The interview transcripts were analysed using a thematic approach. I coded my transcripts for 31 codes within five themes (see Section 3.5.10). The themes were: the nature of knowledge, differentiation and hierarchy; choice and resistance; control and accountability, and equality. I critically discuss the five themes in this section, making links to the research questions, the CDA and key literature. The notion of ‘ability’ became apparent as an issue throughout my interviews and this concept is explored and discussed. In the conclusion I review the analysis of the interview data before moving onto the discussion of my findings in Chapter 5.

### 4.3.1 Schools

My interviews took place in four schools; Bluefield, Yellowfield, Purplefield and Redfield, located within one LA area in England between April-July 2013 (see Section 3.5.8 for sample section).

**Table 2 - Overview of schools and school leaders**

*Table introducing the four sample schools and 10 school leaders and their roles within each school:*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **Sample designation** | **Student characteristics[[35]](#footnote-36)** | **Deputy (DH)** | **Head of Department EBac**  **(HoD/EBac)** | **Head of Department non-EBac**  **(HoD/non-EBac)** |
| Bluefield | High-performing academy | Low FSM, EAL [[36]](#footnote-37)and SEND | Simon | Pam | NA |
| Yellowfield | Low-performing non-academy | High FSM, EAL and SEND | Susan | Jill | NA |
| Purplefield | Rapidly improving academy | High FSM, EAL and SEND | Jane | Richard | Debbie |
| Redfield | Rapidly improving non-academy | Low FSM, EAL  High SEND | Angela | Annie | Deborah |

I provide a brief introduction to each school outlining the designation achieved from my sampling frame (see Section 3.5.8) followed by a summary of my analysis of the data relating to the research questions. Each school is then classified into one of four EBac typologies reflecting the attitude towards the EBac as identified from the data; acceptance, resistance, compliance or confusion.

### 4.3.2 High-performing academy - Bluefield

Bluefield is an 11-18 converter academy with a traditional academic curriculum focused predominantly on GCSE and A level courses with a new, limited vocational provision as part of the KS4 programme. The school rates highly on achievement of five or more A\*-C’s at GCSE, including English and Mathematics measure and the EBac measure. I interviewed Simon (DH) and Pam (HoD/EBac). Simon stated the school was “heavily oversubscribed” (p.3) and the families in the catchment area were described as having “reasonably affluent backgrounds” (p.3).

The school welcomed the EBac and their ‘traditional’ academic curriculum meant that no changes were required. The school had, however, revised the teaching time allocation for certain subjects, most notably an increase for languages at KS3 in order to better prepare students for the demands of GCSEs in languages. Simon (DH) was positive about the EBac and the emphasis on “traditional” (p.8) core subjects, as well as subjects such as languages, which he felt required additional effort and perseverance by students in order for them to be successful. “There is no bad thing in saying to students those old fashioned values of discipline, and resilience and hard work” (p.7).

Pam (HoD/EBac) felt that the EBac had little impact on the school within or between departments because the academic curriculum meant that the EBac was on offer anyway and was studied by large numbers of students prior to the policy announcement. She was, however, affronted by the retrospective calculation of the EBac performance figures, which she felt was unfair and unjust.

It just seems like, we are setting out to trip these kids up…why would you narrow the curriculum knowing that huge numbers of students are either going to be alienated because they just don’t want to do it or disadvantaged because they can’t? (p.18).

In relation to my research questions, Bluefield, with its traditional, academic curriculum, experienced very few issues in making the EBac available to all students. EBac student numbers had increased each year due to the school’s information and advice and parental knowledge and encouragement. School confidence was evidenced by the fact that staff had increased the range of subject choices to include vocational options, targeted at what they described as “our less able students” (p.3). I have classified Bluefield within my EBac typology as ‘acceptance’. The school leaders were happy with the EBac premise and accepting of the policy for the majority of students within the school, though some concern was expressed regarding the universal imposition of the EBac.

### 4.3.3 Low performing non-academy – Yellowfield

Yellowfield is an 11-16 maintained school which had a mixed curriculum of GCSE and vocational courses. Policy reform compelled curriculum change to promote GCSE courses, though a cohort of students were operating at Level 1 and Entry level qualifications[[37]](#footnote-38). The school is within the lower end of the LA league table for achievement of five or more A\*-C GCSE grades with English and Mathematics and has a low EBac figure. The school faces a declining student population leading to pressures including the need to reduce staffing. I interviewed Susan (DH), and Jill (HoD/EBac).

The school has a clear focus on the needs of their students, irrespective of the changing government direction, carefully considering the changing landscape while trying to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by school decisions.

We’ve still held firm with the belief that we will not do things just to satisfy a league table. We will do the right things by the students …and we have held onto this belief and I am quite proud really because it is quite hard to do (Susan, p.5).

The school changed the KS3 curriculum to create additional time for languages and humanities in order to increase student confidence and attainment in these areas, with the expectation that more students would study EBac subjects. Additional time was created for English and Mathematics, which were perceived to be becoming harder; this time increase was at the expense of personal and social education. Susan did feel that the EBac was “divisive” amongst departments and that a “three-tier system” (p.25) of subject hierarchy had now been created of Maths and English, EBac subjects and non-EBac subjects.

Jill (HoD/EBac) found herself in an ambiguous position in relation to the EBac. She was pleased that her subjects, History and Geography, had been acknowledged as an important subject, but she felt in a difficult position compared to non-EBac colleagues who were concerned about their jobs. She also felt under pressure in terms of the ultimate aim of the EBac; if all students took a humanities subject, it would potentially have a huge impact on resources, staffing and results. Her greatest fear was that if additional teachers were required to teach History and Geography non-specialist teachers[[38]](#footnote-39) would be drafted in (p.9). Jill believed passionately that all students should be given the opportunity to access subjects that they enjoyed irrespective of their so-called ‘ability’. “Unfortunately a lot of our students come in below level 4[[39]](#footnote-40)and so actually they are not going to be high flyers going to university (p.12)”.

Yellowfield faced a number of challenges with EBac implementation. The school was keen to continue to offer the curriculum that it felt was most appropriate for its students, yet was creating additional time and support for specific EBac subjects. The teachers were concerned about the impact of the EBac on children and staff. I have classified Yellowfield within my EBac typology as ‘resistance’. A school which rejected the EBac premise as a single curriculum choice, remaining determined to provide the qualifications and courses staff believed to be most suitable for students, whilst also taking steps to prepare a greater number of students for the EBac.

### 4.3.4 Rapidly improving academy - Purplefield

Purplefield is an 11-16, sponsored academy, opened with the aim to reverse low student achievement. The number of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A\*-C (including English and Mathematics) had increased dramatically in the previous three years, though the EBac figure remained low, reflecting the school’s previous vocational curriculum. The school roll was low and fluctuated annually, having a major impact on the viable curriculum choices each year and leaving little if any choices beyond the EBac for the majority of students. I interviewed Jane (DH); Debbie (HoD-Non/EBac) and Richard (HoD/EBac). The school focuses on improving levels of literacy and numeracy; student behaviour and engagement, and developing parental engagement with the school. The intake was described as “predominately towards working class, it comes with its challenges, often a lack of parental support for school” (Jane, DH, p.4).

Due to its previous poor Ofsted rating, the school was under detailed scrutiny from Ofsted and had little power for policy negotiation or resistance: “being in a weak position creates pressure” (Jane, DH, p.6). The overriding pressure was to raise league table results. This was the only sample school that had made the EBac compulsory, though some students, mainly SEND, were able to opt out of studying a language, while others were moved into BTEC Science rather than GCSE. With the EBac announcement, the school stopped all vocational college courses, despite this having been the curriculum for 20% of previous cohorts. Jane (DH) tried to navigate an appropriate curriculum path for her students through these completing pressures, feeling unhappy that staff now had to dictate and “be explicit about what constitutes broad and balanced [curriculum]” (p.7).

Richard (HoD/EBac) welcomed the EBac and the focus on all students taking a humanities subject. He initially felt that he could take any student through GCSE Geography at grade C, but later recognised that his confidence was knocked when faced with the reality of every student taking History or Geography, irrespective of their interests or abilities.

We do have students of a very low ability…they find it very, very difficult…and they are never going to get a C. Should they still study humanities? (Richard, p.5).

The Design department had reduced the number of courses and consequently teaching staff due to the EBac. Debbie (HoD-non/EBac) was upset at what she perceived as a devaluing of her subject, Technology, within the curriculum and a decline in the status accorded to the trades, which she felt was ‘forcing’ students she believed could excel in a more practical vocational route into academic courses where they had less chance of success (p.9). The calibre of students now taking Technology had declined, as more able students were redirected onto the EBac. This was then compounded by the removal of the vocational options, which meant that academically ‘weak’ students taking the GCSE either failed or dropped out as they could not cope with the theoretical and exam focus (p.9). Debbie felt strongly that the EBac was catering for the academic child at the expense of the full range of abilities.

The changes are trying to promote children who are academic, they are not catering for the full spectrum of children that we do have in this country…the students who are coming who are less able, less academic…are being given a raw deal, (p.12).

She was concerned that some children would be put off education by not being allowed to study courses of interest to them.

In relation to my research questions, Purplefield, with its highly vocational curriculum, faced the greatest number of challenges with EBac implementation. Purplefield was the only school in my sample to state that the EBac was compulsory, yet since the cohort mix included a large number of SEND students, this suggests that the EBac was not likely to be the most appropriate curriculum for all. Making the EBac subjects and knowledge a compulsory part of a student’s curriculum supports Hirsch’s (1996) argument of universal access to “core knowledge”. Purplefield’s approach to the EBac supports the initial Government position that denying some students’ access to EBac subjects does them a disservice, underestimates their potential and prevents them access to future higher level courses (see Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.11). The EBac policy, stipulating a pass as requiring a grade C or above at GCSE, has led some schools and teachers to restrict access to the EBac to students deemed to be of high enough ability to achieve grade C or above (see Redfield, Section 4.3.5).

Purplefield complied with the policy requirements of the EBac. The speed and all-encompassing way they initially adopted the EBac created a number of largely unintended consequences, such as a dramatic reduction in Technology and Arts subjects. The staff within the school were not wholehearted supporters of the EBac and could see many issues for their students, but felt that the school had no choice but to react as it did. I have classified Purplefield within my EBac typology as ‘compliance’ because staff had taken the radical decision to agree in full with the EBac premise for all students initially, even when they did not believe that this was the most appropriate course of action for some individuals.

### 4.3.5 Rapidly improving non-academy - Redfield

Redfield is an above average-sized 11-16 maintained school. GCSE grades of five or more A\*-C’s including English and Mathematics had rapidly improved over three years, but with a low EBac figure which reflected the vocational curriculum on offer. While the vocational offer was declining, links were maintained with the local college to offer some Level 1 provision. I spoke to Angela (DH); Annie (HoD/EBac), and Deborah (HoD/non-EBac). The school is described as being in a “predominately white, working class area” (Angela, DH, p. 3).

The EBac was incorporated into planned school curriculum changes as the academic path out of three possible routes. A number of initial decisions were taken by staff without full information being available, i.e. informing students that Religious Studies would count in the EBac. Many parents were described as being ‘educationally ambitious’, “they wanted the prestige of an EBac” (Annie, HoD/EBac p.7) and were keen for their children to take the EBac though some staff felt that these ambitions were not always most suited to the abilities and interests of the students (Annie, HoD/EBac, p.8). In this way, the EBac policy appeared to have been incorporated into the school’s curriculum without full consideration of the wider philosophy inherent within the policy. This may have been a pragmatic way of approaching the policy, it did appear to have led to some confusion for staff, students and parents.

Annie (HoD/EBac) experienced a number of effects on her department of Languages. Prior to the EBac, all students at the school had to study a language, either at GCSE or an alternative vocational NVQ[[40]](#footnote-41) which she had introduced for those not felt able to achieve a grade C or above at GCSE. The NVQ programme was successful in terms of results, but since the change in performance points this course was stopped and students now have to opt for GCSE language, resulting in a 50% reduction in student numbers and a decline in departmental staffing. Added to this, the GCSE results for languages were not strong, leading to close scrutiny by the school’s leadership team. Annie felt under immense pressure to improve results and this was in direct contradiction to her desire to encourage all students to study a language. “So we cannot say ‘no’ to any of the students, we can guide them…we just have to say that you are not suited for this route [EBac]” (p.13). This is clearly a difficult message and one that does bring into question the role of teachers as EBac ‘gatekeepers’ (see Section 4.4.2).

Annie (HoD/EBac) commented that the focus on achieving the C Grade for EBac meant that if students did not achieve the benchmark, “it is classed as a failing department” (p.9). She felt that attention had been taken away from students who could achieve lower grades in languages, “that is the biggest pressure really… worrying about the EBac pupils when we should be worrying about all of them” (p.16). The requirement of a grade C seems to work against the notion of core knowledge being made available to all. If the EBac subjects do embody such ‘core’ knowledge, then the access to these subjects with this knowledge should be the overriding importance, rather than the achievement of a specific grade.

Deborah, whose department spanned EBac and non/EBac subjects, was initially both welcoming and concerned about the EBac. She was supportive as a teacher of History, but nervous due to her belief that GCSE History is not suitable for all students, particularly those with low levels of literacy.

Obviously for us we thought it was good …we were apprehensive about the idea of maybe all students doing it, because obviously for some students it’s…not a suitable GCSE if their literacy levels are low it will be demoralising, (p.5).

Deborah was also disappointed that Creative Arts and Design Technology had lost student numbers to the EBac, leading to staff losses.

Redfield had incorporated the EBac into one of their three curriculum pathways at KS4 with relative ease, as this matched their desire to have an academic pathway. Problems were encountered when subject staff did not feel that students had chosen subjects appropriately and various techniques were in evidence for staff to ‘persuade’ or guide students and parents away from certain choices. Annie, for example, would phone parents to discuss the choice of a language for students who she felt were not likely to achieve a grade C, with many students then selecting another subject. Further problems were created when courses were changed mid-way through, for example moving students from GCSEs in sciences to BTEC Science.[[41]](#footnote-42) Redfield is unclear in its position towards the EBac, appearing to accept it but without ensuring that the position was articulated by the school to students and parents or that the requirements could be met by all students initially opting for the EBac. I have classified Redfield within my EBac typology as ‘confusion’.

I have now introduced the four schools and the 10 members of staff interviewed. The next section discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews using the five themes identified from my thematic analysis. The themes include: nature of knowledge; differentiation and hierarchy; choice and resistance; control and accountability, and equality.

## 4.4 Thematic analysis

Immersing myself within my data by listening, transcribing, summarising and highlighting to identify recurring themes and anomalies, I proceeded to conduct a thematic analysis of my interviews. I initially identified 31 separate codes within five overarching themes (see Appendix 7). The five key themes are:

1. The nature of knowledge - this theme underpins all of the interviews and the policy analysis in terms of the ongoing debate about what counts as legitimate and worthwhile knowledge both as part of the official curriculum content of the EBac and from the perspectives of individual teachers and schools.
2. Differentiation and hierarchy – this theme is apparent in: types of curriculum knowledge; curriculum structures; the options offered by schools; stated characteristics of students (usually in terms of perceived academic ability of high, middle or low); types of schools (academy and non-academy and high achieving and low achieving ), and different subjects.
3. Choice and resistance - this theme explores the issues of: choice and which students and/or parents can choose the type and range of qualifications; what influence HoD have over the courses offered and to what extent they can select students for their subjects; and what resistance is possible from students and teachers to the choices presented by school policy and practice. This theme is linked to the research questions around teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation on the EBac as well as highlighting implications for educational equality.
4. Control and accountability - This theme considers the accountability agenda which was strengthened by the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010). There exists a political neoliberal emphasis on accountability and high-stakes testing as a way of raising educational standards. The reduction of coursework and the proposed increase in knowledge content of GCSEs in an attempt to raise the academic demands of courses mean that children will be faced with one examination at the end of two years of study in order to display their abilities. In this way ‘intelligence’, ‘ability’ and ‘hard work’ are reduced to a single grade and statistic, education becomes reduced to data. I argue that this ‘datafication’ of education acts as a driver for the EBac policy implementation as well as impacting on the choices made available to different students.
5. Equality - this theme relates directly to my third research question regarding implications of the EBac for wider educational equality. This concept was framed within a discussion of potential winners and losers of the EBac policy and the notion of ‘ability’ became an important aspect.

The following sections explore each of the five themes in turn. I identify key discussion points arising from interview transcript analysis around each theme, interpreted in light of my aims, research questions and the literature. This leads onto the discussion chapter, where I bring together the overarching findings from the CDA and the semi-structured interviews using Scheurich’s PA framework.

### 4.4.1 The nature of knowledge

The theme of the nature of knowledge and what is considered legitimate and worthwhile knowledge underlies all of the interview discussions. As highlighted by Apple (1996) “the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge…it is always part of a *selective tradition*”*,* (p.22). This theme is a key debate within my literature review (Section 2.5) in terms of considering what is regarded as valuable knowledge and the power relations involved in these classifications (Moore and Young, 2001; Apple, 1996). All interviewees made reference to different types of knowledge and the associated status accorded, though this was often expressed in terms of a subject discussion rather than a philosophical discussion of the nature of knowledge. Simon (Bluefield/DH), for example, talked about the Bluefield curriculum as a “traditional” curriculum (p.3) and Susan (Yellowfield/DH) discussed the differences between the knowledge requirements of a GCSE and BTEC in PE. Curriculum knowledge relates fundamentally to my research aims and is reflected in the first research question concerning what the EBac policy is and how and why it was introduced.

Simon (Bluefield/DH) and Susan (Yellowfield/DH) commented most on this theme, which I believe is linked to each school’s culture and staff attitudes towards the EBac policy. Both teachers had strong opinions about the EBac and the value of the type of knowledge encompassed by it, with Simon supporting the EBac as “no bad thing” (p.7) and Susan seeing it as a curriculum which was “not appropriate” (p.6) for all students.

Simon’s discussion regarding knowledge focused on the position of Bluefield as having a traditional “academically robust and rigorous” (p.20) curriculum. This fits with my initial assertion that the EBac curriculum would be more attainable for those schools requiring less changes required to the existing curriculum, such as independent schools, selective schools and those with a predominately academic GCSE curriculum. This links to Carr and Hartnett’s (1996) arguments, suggesting that social inequalities continue to be replicated within a single compulsory curriculum when the explicit and implicit cultural assumptions underpinning the curriculum are not universally shared.

Simon (Bluefield/DH) was also strongly of the opinion that the EBac would not disadvantage any students or restrict their future options, rather keeping students’ options open for longer. Interestingly, the only students at Bluefield who were allowed to opt out of languages were SEND students, which teachers felt to be too difficult; “a bridge too far” for some of those young people (p.11). Even in this academic school, the EBac subject combination was not considered appropriate for all groups of children. Languages were mentioned by Deputies in all four schools as being most likely to be an obstacle to achieving the EBac, as highlighted by Taylor (2011). Redfield held a confused position, whereby the information presented by the school about the necessity of the EBac for future progression had been taken on board by the parents and students to the extent that some students who wanted to study, or felt they *had* to study the EBac, in the teachers’ eyes were not ‘appropriate’ candidates because they were unlikely to get a GCSE grade C. Annie (Redfield/HoD/EBac) therefore spoke directly to students and phoned home to parents to caution against taking the GCSE as “quite often that puts them off and they don’t take it” (p.13). In this way the EBac policy of more students taking the ‘core subjects’ was undermined by the requirement to achieve a grade C.

This act of ‘persuading’ students to study certain subjects and not others also extended to non-EBac subjects. All HoDs commented on the emphasis placed on giving information to parents and students about the EBac as part of the GCSE options process. This emphasis could easily be interpreted as a value judgement on the worth of certain knowledge.

I had children who were saying: ‘ … well we wanted to do this subject, a DT[[42]](#footnote-43) subject’, but they were told that if they wanted to get the EBac…they had to do this [EBac subject] (Debbie, Redfield/HoD/non-EBac, p.8).

In this way, the EBac policy had created clear divisions between knowledge deemed to be valuable and less valuable. Students could only consider non-EBac subjects once they had selected EBac subjects. This left non-EBac options of one subject at Purplefield and two subjects at the others.

I suggest that the move within the EBac to prioritise core subject knowledge has impacted on some schools more than others. Using Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) concept of cultural capital (Section 2.3) Bluefield was able to capitalise on the benefits of an EBac curriculum which largely corresponded to the existing traditional academic curriculum and knowledge within the school. Yellowfield tried to remain focused on a more varied range of curriculum knowledge, including vocational options and courses at different levels such as Entry level and humanities subjects, believed to be better suited to some of their students. In contrast, Purplefield, while not necessarily embracing the core knowledge ethos behind the EBac curriculum, was working hard to ensure that students within the school were supported to succeed within this knowledge framework. The divisions apparent in the worth of knowledge were evident in other areas of school life, which are now considered.

### 4.4.2 Differentiation and hierarchy

This theme was prominent within all interviews and spanned a number of coding categories. The first differentiation referred to the types of knowledge on offer within a school curriculum, which was often articulated in the form of the binary ‘academic versus vocational’ knowledge, but was extended in terms of traditional academic qualifications being regarded as more valuable or higher status than vocational qualifications by some teachers and parents. Secondly subject status was expressed by the teachers who were aware of the order of ‘value’ that they felt had been applied to subjects. Finally, divisions were apparent regarding different types of students, usually expressed in terms of the concept of ‘ability’ and the courses then considered appropriate for the ‘ability’ of the students. The differentiation created by the EBac was a strong undercurrent throughout all of the interviews.

All deputies made some reference to the academic-vocational divide. Three of the schools had reduced the vocational offer available to their students in response to the changes to the performance tables, which reduced the number and type of vocational courses included. Purplefield underwent a dramatic change, closing down vocational college courses which had made up 20% of the KS4 cohort. Redfield restructured their vocational offer, reducing it to Level 1 college courses only, though Angela (Redfield/DH) did support individual variations after extensive conversations with parents and students (p.13). Such a variation created potential difficulties for the school in terms of results and performance tables. These students were restricted to achieving a Level 1 course, even if they were felt capable of achieving Level 2. While this decision supported the students’ interests and potential career progression, it had a negative impact on the school’s performance data, as these pupils did not then contribute as many performance points to the school as school felt they were capable of doing. In contrast, Bluefield, which had no tradition of vocational courses, had recently introduced a BTEC in Business Studies to broaden their curriculum for their ‘less academic’ students. This academically successful school felt in a strong enough position to offer a new vocational course, albeit to a certain ‘type’ of student, whereas academically less successful schools felt under pressure to move away from or restrict vocational courses, even when they felt that these courses were appropriate for some students.

A definite division was apparent between EBac and non-EBac departments in all schools with the exception of Bluefield. As Head of Art and Design, Debbie (Purplefield/non-EBac/HoD) felt that her subjects were afforded less value than others, to the extent that students were diverted away from these subjects. At Purplefield, the numbers taking arts and technology subjects had severely reduced. Debbie was concerned that the lack of a technology subject within the EBac reflected a value judgment by the government on the worth of the subject “it felt as if the subject itself was completely devalued and pointless” (p.7). She felt strongly that society required both skilled tradespeople and people with design and engineering abilities to develop the wider economy.

History teacher Jill (Yellowfield/EBac/HoD) found herself in the difficult position of initially being pleased that the subject now had been accorded the value she felt it deserved, yet uncomfortable with the way it was introduced and presented. Pam (Bluefield/HoD EBac) echoed these comments:

Initially quite sceptical because I thought here’s another way of separating out the valuable from non-valuable but then part of me … went “oh goody we are valuable now as well!”…but I think overall it just kind of added to my belief that somewhere someone was inevitably trying to create a tiered education … all subjects are equal but some are more equal than others (p.6).

For Deborah (Redfield/HoD/non-EBac), the main division between subjects remained between Mathematics and English and other subjects. With achievement of a grade C or above in Mathematics and English afforded the greatest consideration and importance at Redfield, she did not feel that the EBac had made any difference to how the other subjects were considered in the school and society.

While teachers were concerned with the ‘value’ accorded to their subjects, the impact on student uptake of the different subjects was of more practical and immediate importance. History and Geography were expanding in terms of student numbers at GCSE in all four schools, while technology and arts subjects were reducing across all schools and languages at Yellowfield, with corresponding staffing reductions. All schools had increased the teaching time allocated to EBac subjects in KS3, making reductions to other aspects of the curriculum. While the stated aim of the EBac was to create a “broad academic core at 16 and a rounded education” (DfE, 2010, p.44) the reality is that a declining breadth of GCSE and vocational subjects is on offer. Such changes had strong implications in that more teachers of EBac subjects were required, with fewer non-EBac teachers.

Regarding differentiation between students, repeated reference was made throughout the interviews about students of different ability, usually expressed as a binary distinction between ‘high’ or ‘low’ ability. While HoDs wished to attract students to study their subjects in KS4, this was often qualified in terms of a student’s perceived ability to achieve in the subject, therefore staff wanted the ‘right’ type of students in their classes. This desire was directed by the necessity to achieve a grade C or above to attain the EBac (p.7). One HoD acknowledged this as a key issue.

I think that we felt a lot of pressure, whereas before we would be striving to get the students through on their potential … if they don’t get a C or above then they don’t get the Baccalaureate and then it is classed as a failing department (Annie, Redfield/HoD/EBac, p.9).

Jane (Purplefield/DH) also commented that sometimes students opted not to study a language as they felt that they had a better chance of getting a grade C or above in a different subject. I suggest that both of these consequences were not considered when the EBac policy was conceived. Data held on students, particularly data on achievement on entry to the school and indicators of likely outcomes at the end of secondary education, appear to play a large part in how teachers assess student ability. In this way, as suggested by Rose (1999), choices and decisions appear to be individual actions, but are in fact governed and are evidence of self-surveillance and internalised behaviour (see Section 2.7). Expert professionals, in this case teachers, then make decisions based on this data (Billington, 2000), which impacts on the selection or otherwise of the EBac.

The EBac requirement for students to gain at least a grade C to achieve the EBac created a contradictory position, with staff wanting the maximum number of students to study EBac subjects, but only those deemed ‘capable’ of achieving a grade C or above. This dilemma enhanced differentiation between students based on perceived abilities and reinforced the academic hierarchy in existence between those who are seen to be academically successful and those who are not. While I have located perceived differences in student ability under the theme of differentiation and hierarchy, this also links closely to the theme of choice and resistance.

### 4.4.3 Choice and resistance

This theme encompasses a range of interview coding categories, including: school staff decisions to implement the EBac policy for either all or some students; teachers as gatekeepers and their ability to resist or at least modify or interpret the school’s adopted EBac policy for some students; the impact of academy status and academic standing of the school, and finally, parent and student choice. This theme of choice and resistance links to literature on social and cultural reproduction (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and to areas of resistance (Willis, 1977). Some students and parents appeared to be able to exercise more choice over whether to take the EBac or not. Resistance came largely from teachers, who sometimes appeared to make decisions that contradicted the stated intentions of the school for students to take the EBac.

The interviews highlighted the variation in choice that teachers felt their schools had around the implementation of the EBac for either all or some of their students and the degree of choice around GCSE subjects afforded to the students themselves. For Bluefield, the EBac fitted the existing culture and curriculum structure of the school. As such, a high EBac uptake was further enhanced by parents and students choosing to study the EBac combination, which was perceived by them and reinforced through the school’s position as being an appropriate route to university. The EBac was presented favourably to parents by Simon (Bluefield/DH) at the Year 9 options event for GCSE subject selection, where he openly advocated taking History or Geography as part of the EBac (p.10). This school was in a position of strength, with the highest Ofsted rating; academy status; a supportive and active parental body; academically able students, and a budget position which meant that curriculum choices were not driven by financial pressures. In contrast, Purplefield had a much wider academic student profile in terms of prior attainment and SEND needs, yet the Deputy described a situation of little choice and little power to resist imposed EBac changes due to their low Ofsted rating and urgent need to improve examination results. Yellowfield actively resisted the policy by boldly stating that their curriculum choices would not be constrained and reduced by the EBac. Susan (Yellowfield/DH) was adamant that the EBac would not be compulsory “unless we really, really have to” (p.6). Despite this stance, they also ensured that parents and students were given full information about the EBac; the option blocks facilitated the EBac, and the amount of time devoted to EBac subjects in KS3 was increased. The consequence was an increase in the uptake of EBac subjects.

The schools were all ‘gatekeepers’ in terms of option choices, either for KS4 subject choice or qualification routes such as entry level or vocational college courses. Some teachers influenced the individual student subject choice or later amended a school-wide EBac decision by changing the qualification for which students were entered. Jill (Yellowfield/EBac/HoD), for example, was very concerned about the GCSE recruitment tactics of some of her colleagues, such as language staff telling students they couldn’t go to university if they didn’t study a language (p.9). To counter-act the potential influence of teachers, Purplefield invited parents and students to one-to-one interviews with a senior member of staff. Staff at two schools described examples of later decisions being made to remove students from the EBac even if they had initially chosen this route. In both Purplefield and Redfield, some students had started GCSEs thinking they were on the EBac, but were then switched to BTEC science (where they were believed to have a more likely chance of gaining a grade C equivalent for the performance tables) which meant they did not achieve the EBac. In contrast, attempts were also made to convince high ability students to study EBac subjects as a requirement for university (Angela, Redfield/DH, p.7).

The type of school, either academy or non-academy and high-achieving or low-achieving, impacted on the actual and perceived choices available with the EBac. Academy status was presented in the White Paper as a way for headteachers to have more freedom of choice. Being an academy allowed Bluefield a greater choice over many curriculum decisions, for example introducing vocational choices when other schools were reducing them, however it was the strong results position that allowed this freedom of choice rather than the school’s academy status. In contrast, Purplefield was not able to benefit from academy freedom due to their weak position regarding overall student attainment, “you need a lot of good results to be able to resist change” (Jane, Purplefield/DH, p.6). Indeed, they made curriculum choices that contradicted what they believed was in the best long term interests of their students “The students who are coming who are less able, less academic… are being given a raw deal and with very few options being made available” (Debbie, Purplefield/HoD/non-EBac, p.12). The power to implement academy freedoms appears to be mitigated by the academic standing of the school.

In the first year of the EBac at Purplefield, the case stated to parents regarding the necessity of the EBac for future progression to university was presented robustly, to the extent that it was potentially described as “overemphasised” (Angela, Redfield/DH, p7.). The EBac is not required for university admission, therefore parents were provided with incorrect information on which to try to make a rational decision. Redfield also provided parents with what turned out to be incorrect information in the first year, when they stated that Religious Studies was an EBac subject. Bluefield parents were presented with a very pro-EBac scenario, which corresponded with their educational ambitions and understanding. Simon (Bluefield/DH) stated that Bluefield was a “type of school where parents take a very keen interest in their sons’ and daughters’ education - I think that they would be very sensitive to [EBac requirements]” (p.16). As seen in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), social and cultural reproduction is likely to be perpetuated when some parents have access to greater knowledge than others.

In summary, schools did have choices over their response to the EBac. My typology of the schools’ approach to the EBac demonstrates the different stances taken. School-wide decisions impacted on the individual departments, though teachers could work to influence student and parent decisions, particularly around the emphasis placed on the need and desire to achieve a GCSE grade C. Later departmental curriculum decisions sometimes worked against the whole school position on the EBac, for example moving students from GCSE Science to BTEC Science, which does not count towards the EBac. In this way, both the school implementation decisions and the advice given by teachers could operate to either encourage some students and dissuade or even disallow others from taking the EBac. The accountability measures appeared to influence many decisions, as will be discussed within the following theme.

### 4.4.4 Control and accountability

Control and accountability were underlying drivers behind EBac implementation decisions. I next consider the impact on educational equality. All state school performance data are published on the DfE website and is publicly available. Schools are ranked against each other in terms of performance on one or a number of key measures such as the EBac. Many school decisions are driven by the need to ensure that the performance tables reflect a strong, positive and developing position for the school, because a weak or declining position could lead to reduced student recruitment, corresponding loss of funding and/or trigger an Ofsted inspection and the risk of identification as a ‘failing school’. In light of this ever-present theme, the following explicit coding categories were included in this analysis, Ofsted, political pressure and performance tables.

Ofsted, designated as a separate coded category, was not explicitly or frequency discussed by teachers. Main references to Ofsted were made by the Deputies rather than HoDs; league tables, however, were much more extensively discussed. The EBac led to greater monitoring and guidance of the courses and subjects that students chose. Notions of student ability as ‘capable’ or ‘not capable’ of achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE were prominent within this theme, linking to the work of Hope (2013) who engaged Foucault’s thinking about governmentality in his school surveillance research (see section 2.7). In addition, the work of Rose (1989) and Billington (2000) into the control and classification of children links to this theme.

Both Yellowfield and Redfield entered cohorts of students for Level 1 and Entry level qualifications, albeit smaller numbers than pre-EBac, under the policy that a free choice of courses was allowed because these students would not count in the A\*-C figures for the school. In contrast, Purplefield had taken the opposite decision and had closed down such courses so that all students had to study courses that would ‘count’ in the performance tables. In this way the curriculum decisions of all schools were determined or constrained by the rules surrounding performance tables and which courses would be counted and therefore demonstrate school achievement, rather than driven by the needs of individual students.

Reference within the interviews to political pressure was mainly from the deputies, concerning the announcement of the EBac at a time after schools had already embarked on their options process for September 2011. This provided little time to reflect carefully on options or to change curriculum options. Pam (Bluefield/HoD/EBac) was very vocal about her unhappiness at the retrospective EBac measure applied in the first year:

I thought it was outrageous, absolutely outrageous for a government intent on promoting education as they claimed they were…to do something like that was just beyond belief. I can’t understand how you can set up a qualification and apply it retrospectively and not expect people to be offended by that (p.9).

While acknowledging that for Bluefield the EBac figure was very high and that this was a measure that “we came out of it looking pretty good” (p.9), Pam was concerned about the impact on other schools and the perceived unfairness of the approach.

All schools felt constrained by accountability measures. The changes to the performance tables appeared to be the biggest driver for curriculum and examination entry policies and changes in practice. The aim of the EBac policy was to ensure that all students were offered access to EBac subjects, under the premise that these subjects would allow access to a greater number of high-status progression routes in the future. It became apparent during the interviews that the accountability measures were leading the schools to classify students according to perceived ability, which decisions such as EBac entry were increasingly being based on. The emphasis on the grade C and above criteria appeared to be an instrumental and technical driver behind many decisions, at the expense of the goal of equal access to all students to EBac subjects. This theme of equality is explored in more detail in the final section.

### 4.4.5 Equality

I address my third research question: ‘Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?’ via two discrete coding categories; firstly, the concept of ‘appropriateness’, and secondly, ‘winners and losers’. I also consider the implications of my identified typology in terms of the schools’ responses to the EBac policy and the practice of equality in each school.

The EBac curriculum was felt by all in my sample to be an appropriate curriculum for a ‘certain type’ of student, but not all (see Section 4.4.2). The EBac was described by Annie (Redfield/HoD/EBac) as no real change for academically able students as “most students who are on the academic route take a balance of subjects” (p.7). All sample schools offered the EBac, though Purplefield had to undergo the largest curriculum change, moving away from a vocationally-based KS4 college curriculum to an in-house GCSE curriculum.

When teachers discussed issues of ‘winners and losers’ of the EBac, children perceived to be the most academic or ‘high ability’ were perceived to be winners.

If curricula nationally is lurching back….to a more traditional curriculum, students who have those more academic abilities are going to be more favoured by a curriculum like that, (Simon, Bluefield/DH, p.18).

Simon’s comment supports Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) thesis that middle class children who have access to cultural capital are better able to learn successfully with this style of academic curriculum. In contrast, children perceived to be non-academic were potential losers. The view was expressed that forcing students to study EBac subjects could be damaging. Pam (Bluefield/HoD/EBac) commented that:

I think it is literally criminal because I can’t believe that the welfare of a child is at the heart of these changes. Why would you narrow the curriculum knowing that huge numbers of students are either going to be alienated because they just don’t want to do it, or disadvantaged because they can’t do it? (p.18).

Teachers were concerned that vocational qualifications appeared to be declining and that some students would find an academic curriculum both difficult to access and inappropriate for the careers that they wished to pursue. SEND students and those considered to be of low ability were felt to be disadvantaged both by the move away from vocational courses and the move towards examination-based linear courses.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Some students perhaps should be doing cooking and resistant materials and PE because that’s what they are really good at and that’s what they enjoy and that’s what they will do better if they do, (Richard, Purplefield/EBac/HoD p.13).

Simon (Bluefield/DH) also made the point that it is not just lower ability students who might lose under the EBac, but the middle ability students may also be disadvantaged because they may feel compelled to study the EBac when they would really prefer to study different subject combinations. Arts students were also viewed as losers, as curriculum opportunities in this area diminished. Clarke’s (1988) label of “dataveillance” appears to play a part in this classification of students as ‘capable’ or ‘not capable’. All schools had predictive data on their students. This data appeared to determine which students were considered capable of achieving the EBac, in opposition to the government-stated intentions that all students be given the opportunity to study EBac subjects.

I was unable to discover if any groups of students had been impacted negatively or positively by the introduction of the EBac on the basis of social class, ethnicity, gender or SEND. Instead, all interviewees amended my question and responded by talking about students of different ‘abilities’. I argue that such a stance has been created by the “datafication” (Clarke, 1988) of education, whereby academic ability as measured and predicted by tests has become the main way of identifying, classifying, labelling, and discussing students. Such so-called ‘objective’ data on ‘ability’ is used to justify or explain social inequalities such as social class, ethnicity and gender. This became apparent in my study, as the notion of ‘academic ability’ was presented as the main driver of educational outcomes with no discussion of the impact of social characteristics. Gillborn (2011b) suggests that ethnic minority students are more likely to be deemed ‘not appropriate’ for EBac courses, yet this is explained in terms of their ‘ability’ not their ethnicity. Likewise, teachers in my sample assigned a social class description to their school cohort, but made no reference to social class during the discussions about students’ selection of courses, individual students or winners or losers of the EBac. It may be that as Reay (2006) suggests, teachers have moved away from consideration of students’ social class in their work. Reay argues that the lack of emphasis on social class within teacher training is a key issue. I also argue that the lack of any school data directly relating to student social class is a significant factor. While ethnicity and gender are categories of measurement and focus, teachers were still quick to assign ‘ability’ as the underlining explanation rather than enter into debates about the impact of racism and/or sexism on the educational choices of some students. The school leaders identified winners and losers in terms of the curriculum policy change, but drew only on the concept of ‘ability’ as the underlying factor determining who ‘wins’ and who ‘loses’.

The interviews revealed teachers’ beliefs that they continued to try to navigate the most appropriate path for their students through rapidly changing criteria and demands:

The students here still benefit from the creative subjects, they like hands on creative subjects. These options have closed down a little bit however we have tried to preserve this curriculum where possible, (Angela, Redfield/DH, p.10).

My belief…the students should be doing things that engage, interest, motivate, challenge them, that keep them on task, that give them the best opportunity of success and give them the opportunity to move onto what they want to do, (Susan, Yellowfield/DH), p.16).

The moral purpose of the schools and the desire to do the best by the students was evident, even if on occasions short-term compromises had to be made in hope for longer term benefits.

My typologies reflect the different practices related to equality in each school in relation to the EBac. Bluefield, as accepting of the EBac, took an approach which appeared to be in line with the described academic nature and ethos of the school and academic aspirations of the students and parents. The majority of the students achieved high GCSE grades and went onto A-Level, with a substantial number progressing to university each year. The EBac therefore fitted within the existing school curriculum and the academic strength allowed expansion of subject choice to include a greater range of non-EBac subjects, including a vocational option. The EBac did not exacerbate inequalities within this school, though when comparing Bluefield students, the curriculum choices offered and the results achieved there to those of students in other schools, we may come to a different conclusion.

Yellowfield resisted the EBac and emphasised a desire to continue to offer the most appropriate curriculum to their students. This was, however, a pragmatic resistance; they nonetheless ensured that students were prepared and offered the EBac so as “not to disadvantage the students” (Susan, Yellowfield/DH, p.5). In complying with the EBac, Purplefield underwent the most radical curriculum change, closing down vocational routes and moving to a full EBac curriculum. This presented an equality challenge for the school, as those studying at the time of the EBac policy were presented with very different choices and experiences compared to previous students.

Finally Redfield, with its confused approach to the EBac, left many decisions to individual teachers, which ultimately undermined the school’s stated position that the EBac provided the academic pathway for the school. The inaccurate information caused students to study the wrong courses and the influence of teachers when directing or redirecting students to particular subjects created unfairness and bias in EBac access.

### 4.4.6 Conclusion

My analysis has highlighted a number of key points in relation to my research aims and questions concerning what is regarded as ‘legitimate’ knowledge, who should be given access to it and if access divisions exist, what issues of equality such differential access creates. In my discussion chapter to follow, I link my CDA and interview analysis results, referring to the literature and issues arising from my research using Scheurich’s PA framework in order to build a case for my conclusions. The concept that has emerged throughout my analysis is that of ‘ability’ influencing teachers’ assessment and decision making about students. I explore the concept of ‘ability’ using Foucault’s concept of governmentality, which I have articulated within my study through three frameworks, namely Clarke’s ‘datafication’ (1988), Rose’s discussion of self-surveillance and internalised behaviour (1999) and Billington’s labelling of children (2000). I also consider recent research about the impact of neoliberal global policy approaches, which focus on high-stakes testing (Lingard and Sellar, 2013; Lingard et al., 2013; 2014; Ball et al., 2012; Angus, 2012). I consider how the surveillance and control of schools may have created a situation whereby the goals of the EBac policy could not be achieved due to the nature of control exerted by performance measures, of which the EBac is one. In Chapter 5, I also apply Scheurich’s PA framework to my analysis and explore the concept of ‘ability’ within a discourse of testing and accountability.

# Chapter 5 – Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction and aim

This chapter brings together key findings from the CDA and semi-structured interviews in connection with my research questions, literature and theoretical framework. In the first section I apply Scheurich’s PA framework (see Section 2.6.3) as a unifying device for my analysis with respect to the constitution and implementation of the EBac. In Section two I critique and develop Scheurich’s PA in light of my own research experiences. In the final section, I consider the notions of ‘ability’ linked to accountability evident in neoliberal education policies. I engage with Foucault’s discussions about power to illuminate how ‘datafication’ using high-stake tests as a technology of governance ensures that individual students and teachers are self-governing within the EBac policy.

## 5.2. A consideration of EBac policy archaeology

Scheurich’s PA provides a framework for identifying socially constructed problems for which supposedly logical and inevitable policies provide appropriate solutions. The framework identifies four arenas of study: Arena 1, the education/social problem arena; Arena 2, the social regularities arena, grids of social regularities which exist across and between all social problems; Arena 3, the policy solution arena which aims to uncover possible legitimate policy solutions occurring within the given social regularities, and Arena 4, the policy studies arena. I have engaged Scheurich’s four arenas in the analysis of the EBac policy through the CDA and semi-structured interviews. In the following section, I consider each arena to discuss my key findings (see Appendix 9, which presents tables for each arena, including key aspects identified and the reference within the thesis).

Arena 1 links to my first research question in terms of what the EBac policy is and how and why it was introduced at this particular time. Arena 1 is where the education/social problem resides and where investigation of the social construction behind the problem takes place. My findings reflect how concern over a perceived decline in educational standards, using international measures and the widening gap between disadvantaged students and others within England, became the focus for the new Coalition government. These concerns were illustrated by the perception that the curriculum in some schools had become dominated by vocational qualifications attracting a high number of performance points but not offering clear progression routes into further study or high-status careers (Wolf, 2011). The move to a vocational curriculum corresponded with a reduction in the number of students taking academic subjects, such as languages, History and Geography, which was interpreted by the government as a sign that the curriculum was not as academically challenging as it had previously been. This belief was clearly evident within the policy documents analysed (section 4.9) and also by some teachers. Simon (Bluefield/DH p.120), for example, believes the academic nature of the EBac supports student progression from school to university.

The newly formed Coalition government faced an urgent necessity for new ideas and directions arising out of, and as a response to, the identification of poor educational standards as ‘the’ problem. CDA highlighted an ‘historical’ basis to the problem, creating the reader as the ‘in group’, within a TINA discourse (Fairclough, 2003), thereby presenting as inevitable, and logical, the stated policy responses. The Coalition government wanted a clear change of direction from that of the previous government, who had placed importance on vocational qualifications, flexibility and alternative curriculum pathways. These were believed by the Coalition to be confusing and less academically challenging than GCSEs, which had led to some schools attempting to use certain qualifications to boost their position on the performance tables (Wolf, 2011). The government wished to increase the rigour of GCSE qualifications in order to strengthen performance and they also intended to increase entries for certain academic subjects at GCSE. All of this would be assessed via increased accountability using Ofsted and performance tables, whilst operating under the premise of headteachers having more freedoms (DfE 2010).

Arena 2 focuses on grids of social regularities which exist across and between a given social problem. The intention of PA is to uncover these grids and make them explicit. Scheurich identified this arena as the most complex, terming it a “mobile metaphor” (1994, p.313). Whilst it is complex, this arena allows for reflection on intersecting elements and institutions which combine to identify a specific problem that needs attention, in this case low educational standards. Scheurich commented that the grid of regularities “attunes its listeners to hear (see) [sic] a particular frequency (the problem group) and constitutes the frequency (the problem group) itself” (1994, p.308). My study identifies a range of intersecting, and sometimes contradictory, grids that coalesce to highlight the stated problem of low educational standards particularly for the disadvantaged, the increase in uptake of vocational qualifications and decline in popularity of some subjects (see Table 4 Appendix 9). The CDA demonstrates that the traditional areas of educational inequality of gender and ethnicity made a limited contribution to the construction of the policy and that social class, whilst referred to in terms of social mobility and the gap between rich and poor, has indeed been reclassified as ‘disadvantaged’ using FSM. Reay (2006) and Gillborn (2011b) support this claim by arguing that social class and ethnicity are becoming marginalised as educational problems by both governments and teachers. This reclassification of inequality was evident in the interviews with a focus on the notion of ‘ability’ rather than other social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, and social class (Section 4.4.5). This re-alignment or reconstitution of factors supposedly contributing to poor standards removes the necessity for teachers to consider the impact of social characteristics such as social class, gender and ethnicity on access to, and success within, the EBac. The problem was reframed around a discourse of academic ‘ability’.

The third arena (or policy solution arena) aims to uncover the possible policy solutions occurring within identified social regularities and arising from identified educational problems. Scheurich argues that the policy solutions arising from the constitution of the problems are shaped by influences operating in the intersections of the grid of social regularities in Arena 2. The grid privileges some solutions and obscures others. My research highlights a set of intended consequences, such as increased GCSE entries for some subjects as articulated in the EBac policy documents, but also a range of unintended consequences which serve to weaken or even diametrically oppose the stated intentions. Accountability measures, pressures and outcomes, for instance, are so great that some schools and teachers (Redfield and Purplefield) redirected students away from EBac subjects either through persuasion (p.115) or course changes (p.111), resulting in some students not being able to study EBac subjects even if they wished. This situation arose as the accountability measure of five GCSEs at A\*-C including English and Mathematics was perceived to be more important than the EBac measure.

Poststructuralism allows me to look below the surface language of the policy and interviews to highlight what is being privileged or obscured, particularly in relation to the power and control exerted over schools via accountability measures. The EBac policy of promoting prescribed, academic GCSE subjects demonstrates political control through accountability mechanisms and highlights the power that these mechanisms exert over the education system and individual schools and teachers. Angus argues that “[t]he Foucaultian concept of ‘performativity’ is associated with strategies of surveillance that consolidate a culture of managerialism and compliance within the education profession” (2012, p.242). In this way, it is possible to see the impact of the EBac as a controlling device. Both the CDA and interviews illuminate some of the mechanisms in operation, such as the construction of timetables or creation of EBac curriculum pathways, but also highlight the contradictions inherent in the policy when teachers actively persuade students not to study subjects such as languages.

The response of all four schools to the EBac was driven by the accountability framework rather than student need as perceived by teachers, students or parents. Curriculum changes were introduced as a result of the EBac policy, even where teachers overtly expressed that they believed that this was not the most appropriate course of action for all children at their school (p.111-2, 113-4). The EBac policy therefore creates inequalities for some students who either cannot succeed at (for example, SEND, or defined by teachers as ‘low ability’), or do not wish to follow this set of subjects and qualifications.

In Scheurich’s framework, Arena 4 is the policy studies arena, where consideration is given to the wider social function of policy studies, considering the effects of such policy analysis and discourse. My intention in undertaking a critical policy analysis was to examine the EBac policy text, consider teacher perspectives and explore how the policy was implemented at school level, whilst focusing on associated implications for social justice. One aim of this study is to recommend amendments to the policy in order to encourage more socially just outcomes for all children, schools and teachers (see Section 6.3). My study has explored and analysed the EBac policy with the explicit aim of researching “why this policy” and “why now”. I have focused on the impact of the policy on students and teachers and discussed ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ from the perspective of teachers. I have used Scheurich’s PA to highlight a number of unintended consequences created by the EBac policy. The fact that the accountability measures have become so self-controlling has led to some schools and teachers actively preventing students deemed ‘not appropriate’ from taking the EBac, in direct contradiction to the stated aims of the EBac to ensure a “broad and rounded range of academic subjects” (DfE, 2010, p.44). In this way, I hope that my analysis of the EBac contributes to the critical evaluation dimension as indicated by Scheurich’s Arena 4.

Despite my application of Scheurich’s PA to the EBac policy as a way of uncovering the hidden aspects and regularities within and behind the policy, there are some aspects of the framework that warrant critique and further consideration. In the next section I put forward my evaluation of this framework and offer suggestions for further developments.

## 5.3 Critique of Scheurich’s policy archaeology

Scheurich argues that PA is “complex and sometimes ambiguous”, whilst also being an unfinished framework: “I am similarly aware that I have left loose ends and confusing contradictions” (1994, p. 313). He states that Arena 2 and the grid of social regularities requires “more scrutiny and thought” than the other arenas and I agree with all of these points. While the framework provides a way of identifying a given problem, exploring what led to this problem at this time and then identifying what has led to a politically acceptable solution, the ambiguity and fluidity involved has the potential to lead to many areas of crossover and repetition. This fluidity can be a strength, but could also be tightened to provide clearer direction to the researcher. Arena 3 effectively becomes the starting point for research and it is only by identifying the policy solution that the researcher can then work backwards to identify Arena 2, the social regularities arena, and ultimately Arena 1, the education/social problem arena. A more structured set of questions following a logical progression from the policy to the regularities and the underlying problem might therefore ensure that steps are considered in order and prevent duplication. Such a rigid formula may, however, undermine the strength of the approach, which encourages the policy researcher to look beneath the policy to view policy making and effects as complex and nuanced. Any structure has to allow the researcher to look at policy choices, but also at policy origins, as fluid and dynamic interactions.

The tables (see Appendix 9) allow me to display my engagement with Scheurich’s ideas, add to my thinking and provide suggestions for others who may use PA in the future. Careful thought needs to be given to the classification of social regularities (Arena 2) and the social construction of the problem (Arena 1) to ensure that social regularities are identified as distinct from problem arenas. Recording the elements within the table has aided my reflection and highlighted areas of potential cross-over. When considering Arena 1, for example, the identified problem of increasing vocational qualifications in school is also part of the social construction of the problem of perceived declining standards in schools. I believe that there is scope to strengthen the framework further by delineating these concepts further when applying them to research topics.

Despite authors such as Gale (2001) Winter (2011) not finding Arena 4 applicable to their work, I have found Arena 4 to be helpful in considering the potential, or desired, role and function of my CDA. I do recommend, however, that Arena 4 is addressed at the start of a policy analysis to guide the approach to the research as well as allowing for final reflection. I found Scheurich’s PA framework a useful way of structuring and thinking about my research, allowing me to amalgamate findings from my CDA and interviews. The notion of ‘ability’ became of great importance during my analysis. The final section considers the impact of ‘ability’ as a controlling device over the EBac decisions of teachers.

## 5.4 Governance, surveillance and ‘ability’

There is a growing body of literature on the impact of testing and accountability measures on schools, teachers and students, which applies Foucault’s concepts of power and governmentality to testing (Lingard et al., 2013; 2014; Lingard and Sellar, 2013; Angus, 2012). My study has highlighted the impact of high-stakes testing, a central tenet of neoliberal education policy, as a key part of the technology of governance through the self-governance of individual teachers and students using data generated on likely educational outcomes.

Lingard and Sellar (2013) state that:

[h]igh stakes testing is thus linked to an affective politics through which the work of educational governance is increasingly operationalized within education systems in control societies. This is one vector of governmentality and the self-governing of policy-makers, school leaders and teachers (p.639).

As part of the accountability system, the EBac is a performance measure of schools and teachers, yet has very little direct impact on students in terms of them being required by universities or employers to demonstrate achievement of the EBac. In order to encourage students to study the EBac subject combination, teachers admitted using a variety of persuasive techniques to portray the EBac as a valuable route to study, or in some cases, not as an option if success was not regarded as a likely outcome. It was evident that for three of the four schools, the EBac was directed at particular students who were classified as ‘high ability’.

During the interviews with teachers, I was surprised by the lack of consideration or even acknowledgement of potential issues of social class, gender, ethnicity and SEND as possible factors when considering the EBac and issues of equality. Lingard and McGregor argue that a return to traditional curriculum structures (that I suggest the EBac represents), “would potentially entrench middle-class educational advantage, particularly when coupled with the current regimes of testing and accountability” (2014, p.102). The issue of key importance that was referred to by teachers when discussing the EBac was that of student ‘ability’ and of students being considered ‘capable’ or ‘not capable’ of achieving the EBac, however. I argue that Clarke’s (1988) concept of “dataveillance” (Section 2.7) has classified students as a grade and has limited discussion about how this grade is arrived at, the impact of external factors on perceived ‘ability’, or the possibility of challenging this data. Angus (2012) and Lingard et al. (2014) argue that external factors still exert the most influence over a student’s performance at school, however the discourse is now directed towards school or teacher deficits, not at deficits of government i.e. resources, training or research. That discussions about external factors did not take place within my interviews suggests that teachers had internalised this discourse and that notions of individual ‘ability’ within an external testing and accountability framework were now paramount in their thinking. This finding corresponds with that of Ball et al. when they comment that “most teachers in our study appear to be thoroughly ‘enfolded’ into and part of the calculated technologies of performance” (2012, p.518). Teachers within my study did not appear to question the EBac premise that a grade C was the minimum acceptable pass grade and focused only on which students were deemed ‘EBac-capable’, not the wider value of studying the subjects. The study of languages or humanities could be regarded as valuable in their own right. Hirsch (1996) regards subjects such as these as part of core knowledge, therefore achievement at any grade still represents student exposure to such knowledge. In this way teachers and school leaders were ‘self-governing’ within a regime of testing and accountability.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The discussion draws together findings from my CDA and interviews in order to address my research aims, whilst assessing the methodology I used. I found the application of Scheurich’s PA a useful framework to guide my thinking and the importance of the concept of ‘ability’ became evident during my analysis. When researching the area of high-stakes testing and accountability within neoliberal educational policies I was able to apply Foucault’s concept of governmentality to highlight how the EBac policy is both governing, but also generates self-governing actions by teachers, students and parents. In the final chapter, I summarise and offer conclusions from my research, evaluate the study, make recommendations for research, policy and practice, as well as reflecting on the research process overall.

# Chapter 6 - Conclusion

## 6.1 Introduction

This final chapter, divided in to eight sections, draws all aspects of my study together to reach overall conclusions in relation to my aim and research questions. I start by considering my research conclusions in relation to my original aims and research questions, referring to previous research where appropriate. In the second section I make recommendations for policy and practice, whilst the third section considers the original contribution to knowledge of my work before evaluating the contribution of my theoretical framework in Section 4. I consider the strengths and limitations of my study in the fifth section, before reflecting on how I would undertake the research differently in light of my experiences. The sixth section examines recent developments in the EBac policy and political leadership and I make recommendations for future research in this area before concluding with my reflections on my journey as a researcher in the final section.

## 6.2 Addressing the research questions

My research has focused on the policy and policy implementation of the EBac as a performance measure for English secondary schools. I aimed to investigate how and why the EBac was introduced in England, to look at the potential and actual impact on the school curriculum from the perspectives of teachers, and also to identify potential winners and losers of this policy. I address each research question in turn.

### 6.2.1 What is the EBac policy and how and why was it introduced as part of a wider policy framework?

The EBac policy was part of the first education White Paper published by the Coalition government in 2010 and was an amalgamation of the ideas of two political parties. Nonetheless, it consisted of a predominately conservative, neoliberal agenda. Much of the policy aimed to overturn actions by the previous Labour government. The EBac was presented as a traditional academic curriculum, which aimed to ensure that all students retained a breadth of academic study until the age of 16 when they could either continue on an academic route or could study a vocational route during their post-16 education. The policy claimed to address the concern that social mobility was declining in England and that part of the reason was that ‘disadvantaged’ children were being diverted into qualifications which did not allow them to access higher status courses, universities or careers. The EBac policy and its links with performance tables was seen as a way of influencing schools’ curriculum decisions, with the intention that more students would study academic subjects. Linked to this policy was a reduction in vocational subjects that schools could offer and changes to the ways in which performance points for subjects and qualifications were calculated.

CDA allowed me to highlight the linguistic devices that were used to present and frame the discussion, whilst the application of Scheurich’s PA enabled me to identify elements that came together at that precise moment in time, leading ultimately to the creation of the EBac as a solution to the identified problem. My interviews highlighted an educational discourse which views ‘ability’ as a key, fixed student characteristic, in stark contrast to government policy rhetoric of opportunity and possibility. In addition, the neoliberal focus on ‘high-stakes testing’ appears to have transformed discussion about educational inequalities away from social characteristics external to the school and towards notions of student ‘ability’ and internal school factors such as school and teacher performance. The EBac serves as a school accountability measure which governs behaviour and appears to be internalised by participants as a self-governing technology, while being presented as promoting achievement for a wider range of students across stated academic subjects.

### 6.2.2 What are teachers’ perspectives on the constitution and implementation of the EBac?

Semi-structured interviews in four different types of state schools demonstrated the different approaches taken by teachers. Staff at Bluefield, a high performing academy, broadly welcomed the EBac and while no changes were necessary to the curriculum, an increasing number of students opted for it. Yellowfield, a low performing non-academy, felt very strongly that the EBac was not an appropriate curriculum for all students and while a number of curriculum changes were made, particularly with regard to vocational courses, the school maintained a broad and varied curriculum offer, although curriculum changes were made to prepare future students for the EBac. Purplefield, a rapidly improving academy, experienced a huge change in curriculum, moving 20% of the cohort from vocational college courses. It was the only school to make the EBac compulsory for most students. In contrast, Redfield, a rapidly improving non-academy, had made languages optional but incorporated the EBac into their curriculum pathways, maintaining a much greater focus on the five A\*-C including English and Mathematics performance measure.

The teachers felt that the EBac had been divisive, creating a further hierarchy within schools between EBac and non-EBac subjects. All schools had experienced some curriculum changes, which in turn led to alterations in time allocation and staffing, with time for EBac subjects in KS3 increasing often to the detriment of others such as Technology or Arts subjects. The numbers of students studying EBac subjects in KS4 was increasing in all schools, putting pressure on non-EBac subjects as they faced declining numbers.

Schools with a vocational offer had reduced or eliminated such options. This was felt to be detrimental to some students, particularly those who did not enjoy or find success in academic subjects. Debbie (Purplefield/HOD/non-EBac) was concerned that students were being directed away from ‘the trades’ when she felt that this could lead to a range of career choices. Many teachers were not convinced that the EBac was the most appropriate curriculum for all students, feeling that ‘high achievers’ were largely unaffected as they were likely to have taken EBac subjects anyway, while those who were felt previously to be better served by vocational subjects, and those described as ‘low ability,’ faced the greatest challenges by this subject combination.

Pam (Bluefield/HoD/EBac) was the most vocal in her unhappiness at the retrospective implementation of the EBac. She felt that it was unfair to judge schools on curriculum choices made two years earlier. She also felt that the narrow EBac range of subjects was not an appropriate curriculum for all schools or students.

All teachers appeared focused on performance measures. For teachers of EBac subjects the perceived ‘ability’ of students to achieve a grade C seemed to be more important than the number of students taking a subject. In contrast, non-EBac subjects appeared to be facing changing and declining ‘ability’ profiles of students opting for the subjects, with ‘high ability’ students opting for EBac subjects, reinforcing the new subject hierarchy that the EBac had created.

### 6.2.3 Does the EBac have implications for educational equality?

All teachers could identify winners and losers of the EBac policy, with ‘high ability’, academic students experiencing very little change to their curriculum and being defined as ‘winners’, whereas ‘middle’ and ‘low ability’ students (including those with SEND), experiencing more radical change and narrowing of curriculum options, hence being regarded as potential ‘losers’ of the policy. There appeared to be a more limited discussion regarding equality issues than the literature initially led me to expect. Teachers did not focus on issues of social class, gender, ethnicity or SEND; rather teacher discourse around the appropriateness of the EBac was based exclusively on notions of ‘ability’. Predictive data about a child’s ability to achieve a grade C or above appeared to direct decisions about which students were suitable for the EBac. In this way, Hope’s (2013) discussion of ‘dataveillance’ as a controlling and selective device within education was evident. I believe that the focus on outcomes of high-stake tests such as GCSEs can be used to explain this reliance on data, along with issues of governance and self-governance. Teachers appeared to be using the data to categorise students by ‘ability’, which in turn permitted or denied students’ access to EBac subjects. Current accountability measurement hierarchies, such as the greater importance attached to the five A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and Mathematics, may ultimately have worked against the full implementation of the EBac as teachers felt greater pressure to meet that measure than the EBac. This resulted in some teachers diverting students away from EBac subjects if they felt students were not capable of achieving a grade C. The EBac may never have been intended, however, to lead to greater student equality; rather to lead to clearer divisions between those who achieve the EBac and those who do not. To present an academic curriculum as the solution to ‘disadvantaged’ student underachievement is to ignore the work of writers such as Carr and Hartnett (1996) and Ball (1994) after the introduction of the 1988 National Curriculum in England, as well as Lingard and Sellar (2013) and Angus (2012) when looking at the impact of neoliberal testing regimes. Such a curriculum benefits schools with the EBac curriculum already in place and is therefore likely to widen the achievement gap rather than reduce it. As Lingard et al. argue:

This most often means that schools serving poor communities need to focus more on improving test scores than those with middle-class clientele, which reduces the likelihood of socially just curriculum provision, narrowing opportunities for young people from poor families to access high-status capitals necessary for educational success (2014, p.726).

If academic success or failure is regarded as a product of ‘ability’ rather than social context, then the myth of meritocracy is strengthened (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) and the social position of the elite is secured.

I do not believe that the EBac in its present form has the potential to reduce educational inequalities in achievement between different social groups such as social class, ethnicity, gender, or those identified as ‘disadvantaged’, as stated in the Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010). The case for the EBac as a progression route for the majority of students has not been clearly stated and the actions of most teachers remain determined by the neoliberal drive for outcomes and performance measures, which for the EBac require students to be capable of achieving grade C or above. Rather than encouraging more ‘disadvantaged’ students to study the EBac, students are being denied the opportunity to study this combination of subjects at GCSE if they are perceived to have a better chance of gaining a grade C in other subjects or qualifications. Williams, adopting a poststructural position, argues that “it is the intertwined threads of genealogies – of historical forms expressed in language and spaces – that restrict the paths that can be taken towards the future” (2005, p.109). In this way, a performance measure with a stated aim of supporting the achievement and progression opportunities of the disadvantaged child actually exacerbates the very problem it aims to solve.

## 6.3 Recommendations for policy and practice

In light of my study, I now turn to suggest eight recommendations; four of which propose new developments to improve current EBac policy and practice and four that call for the rejection of EBac and performance measure discourses.

### 6.3.1 Four recommendations of reform to EBac policy and practice

My first recommendation is to acknowledge EBac success at all GCSE grades, not only at grade C or above. If the EBac was created, as claimed, with the intention that core knowledge is a valuable part of *all*students’ education up to age 16 in England then the arbitrary cut off of grade of C or above in all EBac subjects counters this intent. For a student to achieve a grade D in a language or History after working hard allows them access to core knowledge and warrants recognition. The evidence from my interviews showed that students deemed ‘not capable’ of achieving a grade C were directed away from EBac subjects. This appears to contradict the policy of giving all students access to core knowledge and skills. I recommend that that the EBac performance measure is divided into two sets, for EBac A\*-G and EBac A\*-C. In this way, *every* student who embarks on the EBac is acknowledged and counted within school performance tables. It may be that this recommendation is addressed wholly or partially by the move to Progress and Attainment 8 performance measure[[44]](#footnote-45), where any achievement in any three EBac subjects is recognised, or it may be that a different kind of filtering device is adopted by teachers and schools to try to maximise achievement on this measure irrespective of the underpinning desire to increase access to particular subjects.

I recommend secondly that the government considers the impact on schools, teachers and future recruitment of subject specialists of creating an additional hierarchy of academic subjects within the school curriculum (currently in state schools, Mathematics and English are considered the most important subjects up to the age of 16 and the performance tables are heavily skewed towards these subjects)[[45]](#footnote-46). Such a hierarchy is unsupportive of the desire to enhance the achievement of all students and to allow them access to high-status progression routes. The EBac has created a divisive labelling process, as some students realise that they have chosen or been filtered out from studying high-status subjects. Subject associations for non-EBac subjects such as Design and Technology, Religious Studies, Music, and Drama have been very critical at being excluded from the EBac, drawing attention to the declining number of students opting for these subjects at GCSE (Religious Education Council, 2011).

Third, politicians and educationalists should engage in a wider debate about different progression routes and the value of them for different subjects and qualifications. Under Labour, the education system in England was encouraged to expand the range and type of subjects and assessments, which resulted in a confused and fractured system in which some students were faced with curriculum outcomes that ultimately left them with restricted or non-existent progression options (Wolf, 2011). The attempt to eradicate all vocational qualifications and pathways within secondary schools continues to disadvantage many students.

My fourth recommendation concerns the support needed by schools, particularly small or financially insecure schools, to offer a broad, high quality curriculum. Small schools cannot resource a wide range of subjects and therefore are less likely to offer a curriculum that meet the needs of all of their students, especially if the student cohort has very diverse or demanding needs. No school can offer unlimited courses, but the options available to students at different schools, even within my small scale sample, are wide and have a large impact on future progression for many students. Achievement in a single performance measure such as the EBac cannot tell the full story of whether any school is providing the most appropriate type, range and quality of curriculum for its students. Indeed, a focus on the EBac may actually have diverted some schools away from this aim.

The above policy and practice recommendations are based around reforming the current policy. In the following section, I present some more radical suggestions for change emerging from my research.

### 6.3.2 Recommendations for radical policy and practice change

My first recommendation is the immediate abolition of the EBac policy. The EBac can be regarded as a symbolic solution (Scheurich, 1994), a solution not designed to solve the original problem, the underachievement of disadvantaged children, but rather to encourage people to think it solves this problem. This being the case, actually abolishing performance tables as technologies of governance (Lingard and Sellar, 2013) is an appropriate way to tackle the underlying issue. Schools can then return to providing the most appropriate education for each student without having to be “skilled at meeting government targets” (DfE, 2010, p.8) and without reference to how many qualifications they offer and how many points they accrue. All students would then have a better chance of succeeding and progressing to the next educational stage. “We must keep chipping away at the greater goal of achieving democratic schooling for social justice” (Angus, 2012, p. 247).

My second recommendation is that the country needs a much more radical plan for putting in place high quality, high status vocational education. The academic-vocational divide is now a serious threat to the economy in that there are insufficient skilled workers (HM Treasury, 2015, p.23), whilst also affecting students who could excel in a vocational situation but struggle to excel in an academic classroom. The University Technical Colleges (UTCs)[[46]](#footnote-47) may well provide a blueprint for new vocational thinking and provision.

My third recommendation requires a large injection of funding to schools in challenging situations with high levels of FSM, SEND and EAL, and high levels of student mobility, usually located in areas of high deprivation. These schools require the highest quality of resources and provision, yet often they face inequalities of funding compared to schools in more affluent areas (DfE, 2014c). Students who already face challenging situations at home and in the community require small, bespoke teaching groups where individual needs can be met through high quality, highly trained, permanent teachers and access to appropriate curriculum materials.

My final recommendation is that the education system and policy is taken out of the hands of politicians and given to educational practitioners and organisations or a new body such as a democratically elected teaching council. The fact that Gove remained as Secretary of State for Education for four years from 2010-2014 is an unusual situation. Under the Labour government, education ministers had much shorter tenures. Any institution or business that faces a change of leadership at such short notice with a requirement to make instantaneous, popular changes to attempt to ensure re-election every five years is built on unstable foundations.

## 6.4 Original contribution to knowledge

My work provides a contemporary investigation and analysis into a Coalition government policy and charts a period of intense change in education. Across four schools, I investigated the implementation of the EBac policy, from its announcement in 2010 until the summer of 2013, incorporating national statistics on the impact of the EBac. I have illuminated three inadequacies in the policy: firstly, the claim that schools were already working towards performance measures to the detriment of individual students, but then a further performance measure, the EBac, was introduced; secondly, the stated intention that the EBac would support ‘disadvantaged’ students into higher status courses and universities, therefore reducing inequalities, when the national statistics show that there is still a gap between the entries for the EBac across different types of schools (DfE, 2013), and finally, the claim that schools would be free to implement actions they believed would support student progress while simultaneously introducing stronger accountability measures which reduced school freedoms.

I believe that my reference to, and links between, my findings on the EBac and the literature of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Carr and Hartnett (1996), Apple (1996) and Lingard et al. (2014) have demonstrated that the provision of a specified common curriculum does not necessarily ensure that everyone is able or willing to succeed in that framework. The EBac does not provide a level playing field for children to be compared and assessed against and will not, on its own, ensure equality of outcome, or that FSM children access Oxbridge in the same proportions as other groups.

I stated that my research would investigate issues surrounding governance. The discourse of ‘ability’ became an important aspect of my research, with reference to the work of Hope (2013) into governmentality and school surveillance, along with the work of Rose (1999). Also considering the work by Billington (2000) into the pathologisation of children and how labels such as ‘low ability’ or ‘not capable’ are generated from the huge amount of data that is now collected on children and used to predict outcomes. Further research into recent literature has highlighted the debate about the effects and inequalities of high-stakes testing within a neoliberal perspective. Such literature (Lingard et al. 2014; Lingard and Sellar 2012; Ball et al. 2012; Angus 2012) reflects Foucault’s concept of governmentality, particularly the move to self-governance, which creates a situation where teachers and students do not require external control but rather internalise, with self-surveillance and control evident. The teachers in my research framed all responses to questions about equality in the form of perceived ‘ability’ rather than social characteristics such as social class, ethnicity or gender. Despite (or maybe because of) working in education for 22 years, I had not appreciated how totalising the discourse of ‘ability’ and data had become and how far my actions can be seen as part of this governance both through my expectations and demands of others but also in my own behaviours and beliefs. The EBac can be seen as a way of encouraging teachers to reflect on their assessment of student ability and to expect that all their students can study and succeed in EBac subjects. In reality, however, the EBac confirmed the ‘ability’ discourse - that these subjects were only for a ‘certain type’ of student, which therefore encouraged teachers to further restrict access to these subjects for some students (Ball et al., 2012).

Finally, I stated that my research would contribute to the continuing tradition of critical policy research with the intention of encouraging educational change. In my study I applied and critiqued Scheurich’s PA framework, creating a method of explicitly identifying the many interacting components associate with this policy. I devised a fourfold typology for classifying the responses of schools to policy initiatives (see appendix 8), which prompted me to give critical consideration and reflection to my own practice. My typology included the responses of:

* + - 1. **Acceptance**, the ethos, cultural and structural components of a school provides an ideal backdrop for initial and future success adopting the given policy.
      2. **Resistance**, the confidence and belief of the school in their current course of action leads them to be determined not to be driven solely by the given policy. Care must be taken to ensure that resistance does not become an end in itself to the detriment of the students or the school.
      3. **Compliance** is the reaction by a school which feels that it had no power to determine its own course, even when it may have structural freedoms such as academy status which imply opportunity to deviate from national policy.
      4. **Confusion** is experienced by a school that reacts quickly to policy announcements and does not consider the implications of decisions taken and does not prepare and plan for the changes implemented.

This typology may be of use when evaluating the actions taken by schools when considering or implementing future policy initiatives, however, there may be other categories not covered in this study.

I have also reflected on my approach to the testing and performativity discourse and the restrictions and limitations this places on my actions as a school leader and my expectations of others. Many of my current actions can be regarded as “thoroughly ‘enfolded’ into and part of the calculated technologies of performance” (Ball et al., 2012, p.518). My aim now is to maintain this conscious awareness and to seek ways that I can challenge these technologies from within the system for the benefit of students and teachers.

## 6.5 Contribution of my theoretical framework

My theoretical position changed and developed throughout the course of my research. I began with a structuralist, Neo-Marxist framework associated with the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Apple (1996), but slowly realised that my increasing references to the work of Foucault, the policy analysis framework of Scheurich (1994), my use of CDA and my application of self-governance (Rose 1999) were all guiding me towards a more poststructuralist perspective. Carlson (2006) resolved the seeming tensions between my contrasting frameworks and I have attempted to apply a poststructuralist lens by trying to uncover what is not said and what is hidden from sight (Miller et al. 2013) through my data analysis, interpretations, discussions and conclusions. I have attempted to adopt Foucault’s approach as articulated by Williams (2005, p.109) in order to question the EBac policy and its implementation and make visible some of the background elements contained within this policy. Elements that lead not to a socially just curriculum paving the way to university and high status progress for all, but a socially unjust curriculum which serves to reinforce inequalities and barriers for some. My research has highlighted that the EBac curriculum presented few difficulties of implementation or student uptake in schools which were already high achieving (Bluefield). For other schools the need to increase performance on measures such as 5A\*-C with English and Mathematics appeared to override curriculum decisions and also led to teachers ‘dissuading’ certain students from taking the EBac if they were felt more likely to achieve grade C in other subjects. The EBac curriculum therefore intersects with the neoliberal focus on high stakes testing with consequences for EBac implementation, as these drivers appear in some circumstances to work in opposition to each other.

## 6.6 Strengths and limitations of the study

This section begins with a discussion of the strengths of my study, followed by a consideration of the limitations and concludes with suggestions for changes I would make if I were to repeat this research.

### 6.6.1 Strengths of study

My study has five main strengths. First, my research is a contemporary study into an aspect of the first education policy of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government. At the time of publication of the EBac policy (October 2010), many were unsure how the Coalition government would amalgamate differing ideological positions into coherent policies (Quinn et al., 2011). My study provides an original analysis of key parts of the policy text and a contextualised reflection on EBac policy implementation in four differing secondary schools in England from 2010 to 2013.

A second strength is the period of time spent completing the study. Given recent rapid changes in educational policy, I was unsure if the EBac policy would have the longevity required for a study of this nature. The Statistical First release (2014c) demonstrates impact in terms of increased uptake of EBac subjects over the last five years. My research began with reflection on, and critical analysis of, parts of the policy documents using Hyatt’s CDA framework. The results in turn fed into the semi-structured interview questions. The timing of the research study was judged so that reactions to the initial policy were made, embedded and amended by schools before I carried out my interviews in 2013. This allowed a timely study focusing on the implementation of the EBac policy at school level.

Third, is the inclusion of four different case study schools. This allowed me to compare and contrast the key issues from the EBac policy that have impacted on schools in different circumstances. My sample is not representative and cannot be generalised, but I believe that the four contrasting situations of the schools in my study can allow others to find resonance with other similar contexts (Bassey’s 1998).

The use of semi-structured interviews with school leaders is a fourth strength. These allowed me to explore implementation issues relating to the EBac at school level from a number of perspectives. I was able to gather rich, valid data in order to begin to understand and critically reflect on the contexts, pressures and issues impacting on different members of staff in different schools. Ten interviews of approximately one hour each provided a wealth of research data from which to analyse and ultimately draw conclusions.

Fifth, my critical stance has allowed me to put forward a range of recommendations for policy and practice improvements which have caused me to reflect on my own beliefs, values and practices as a school leader and I hope encourages others to do so even if ultimately they reach differing conclusions.

### 6.6.2 Limitations of the study

This is a small scale, four-school study, a sample which is not representative of different schools within one LA. I initially believed the second limitation to be my neglect within the interviews of explicitly addressing the impact of the EBac on different social groups. I originally felt that this omission was due to issues with my interviewing skills, or a structural problem with my question framework. After careful revisiting of the data, and reflection on a wider set of literature (Ball et al., 2012; Angus 2012; Lingard and Sellar, 2013; Lingard et al., 2014), I have realised that this was in fact a key finding that required additional analysis and reflection in order to attempt to uncover the social processes in operation.

A final limitation of this study is the volume of data collected using two research methods. Wellington (2000) cautions that researchers have a tendency “to *over*-collect and *under*-analyse” (p.133). My data analysis eventually took place over two years, with the CDA in 2012 and the interview data analysis from August 2013 until April 2014. Such a time period has allowed for consideration and reflection. While much of my original data is not necessarily included in my final thesis, I believe that I have been able to incorporate and distil the key elements and overarching themes and do justice to its richness and complexity. In light of these strengths and limitations, I conclude this section by considering what I would do differently.

## 6.7 Update on developments in 2015

After four years of EBac implementation, the Coalition government announced a development of performance measures starting from 2015 to be published in the performance tables in 2017. To incorporate a broader spread of subjects within the measures and to move away from the arbitrary success criteria of a grade at GCSE, it was announced that the new key measure for English secondary schools would be “Progress and Attainment 8”. Progress 8 measures student progress from KS2 to KS4 in eight subjects: English and Mathematics, three EBac subjects and three non-EBac subjects.[[47]](#footnote-48) Whereas Attainment 8 measures final outcomes in these subjects, irrespective of starting points. In this way, schools are recognised for both overall attainment *and* student progress across a wider range of subjects and grades than current measures of the EBac or 5 A\*-C (including English and Mathematics). Such a measure addresses a number of the inequalities identified from my research, including the hierarchy of subjects created by the EBac and the need to achieve a minimum grade C. This measure continues, however, to build on the EBac premise by still classifying and recognising the EBac subjects separately from others.

In May 2015 the Conservative party was elected to government without the need for coalition partners. The impact of this change of political leadership on education policy is not yet clear, but current policy announcements indicate that schools will be expected to enter 90% of all students for the full EBac from the summer of 2020. As the current EBac national rate is 23.9% (DfE 2016) this development will have a major impact on schools if this policy remains. One immediate impact will be the further narrowing of curriculum choice at KS4 for a greater number of students, along with a corresponding realignment of teachers with far greater numbers of language and humanities teachers required and a decrease in requirements for technology and creative arts. I argue that such a move will further increase the reliance on data as students are classified only in terms of their predicted and actual examination results, rather than as individuals who may have skills and talents not captured within current data.

## 6.8 Recommendations for future research

I suggest three recommendations for future research into this area, the first being to continue critical educational research into the policy constitution and impact of school performance measures on the decision making of school leaders and the impact on children. The school performance measure I recommend for current research would be Progress and Attainment 8. It may be that this performance measure can address many of the concerns and issues identified by my research into the EBac, or it may be that this leads to alternative, as yet unknown and unintended, consequences. On initial reading, I believe that this measure is a better reflection of a broad and balanced curriculum which should allow for all student achievements to be acknowledged and recognised within the school performance tables. Nevertheless, I have grave concerns about the impact of the move to 90% EBac entry by 2020, particularly in light of the totalising discourse of testing and performativity.

Second, I recommend the inclusion of the student voices in research studies. While one of my initial premises was that the EBac would impact in different ways on students with different characteristics, such as social class, gender, ethnicity and SEND, I was unable to focus directly on these groups because of the lack of response from teachers as they shifted the topic of discussion to the impact of the EBac on students of differing ‘ability’. A questionnaire to a sample of students with different characteristics across a range of different types of schools would provide an extension to my original work. This would enable me to compare the advice or guidance they were given when choosing KS4 options, discover what barriers, if any, were present and also what subjects they would have liked to have done, if not available at their school.

My final recommendation for further study is to research teachers’ awareness and understanding of the social justice issues inherent within the EBac policy and other accountability measures. I am concerned that a focus on student ‘ability’, with limited reference to the key social characteristics which impact on educational outcomes, seems to have been unproblematised. Also, considering how such issues can be brought to the foreground of teacher thinking and reflection, both at initial teacher training stage and throughout a teacher’s career. After considering future research into this area, my final section reflects on my research journey.

## 6.9 Research journey

My research diary reflects my recurrent procrastination and broken promises about how and when I create time for my research, yet I somehow find myself approaching the end of this study. My mantra has been ‘slow and steady wins the race’, with the added benefit that, over time, the EBac policy has been implemented and reflected upon within my own school, my sample schools and indeed at government policy level.

I have learnt to plan, manage, carry out and write up a thesis and to balance the many competing demands from both within and outside of the research. I have also had the opportunity to reacquaint myself with many classic texts from the sociology of education as well as discovering many new and valuable contributions. My knowledge and understanding of the power and use of theory as a point for reflection on wider educational issues is much enhanced. I have learned to approach government initiatives and policy announcements in a more theoretical and critical way rather than simply seeking an immediate practical implementation solution. From the beginning I stated that my goal was to reflect on and attempt, in some small way, to address or redress issues of social justice. From my interviews, in addition to the understanding I gained of the multiple pressures faced by staff in all schools, I am left with an enhanced level of respect for teachers, who every day attempt to address issues of social justice in order to do the very best by their students. I am saddened, however, that I have become ‘enfolded’ (Ball et al., 2012) into the very system I initially desired to challenge and change. I have realised that an increasing part of my working life is focused on student progress data and outcomes for key performance measures. I like to think that I keep individual students at the centre of my focus, but I also know that they can easily become numbers which I have to account for and justify, with increases perceived to be ‘good’ and decreases ‘bad’. I continue to look for ways to support my colleagues in this ongoing endeavour and also attempt to ensure that social justice issues are at the forefront of my mind when making or justifying decisions for my school and my students, as well as considering where I can make the biggest impact in the future.

I began the EdD course as a continuation of my educational journey. This journey has allowed me to visit a range of schools, talk to staff and students about my research as well as leading teacher training events on the benefits and practicalities of embarking on practitioner research. On a more local level, my current A-Level sociology students are continually amused at my deadlines and this has encouraged some of them not to give up when studies seem impossible. The completion of the EdD coincides with start of a new school leadership journey as I move into Headship. I will continue to combine practitioner researcher with my leadership role to continually seek and secure change for the benefit of children, teachers and schools.

Appendix 1– Ethical permission letter from University of Sheffield

**

Appendix 2- Orientation questions for frame application **(Hyatt, 2005)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **White Paper** | **Addendum** | **White paper speech** |
| **Is this a typical text of its type?** | Yes – foreword by both PM and DPM: a typical introduction to a policy paper. The unusual aspect here is that this was one of the first Coalition policy documents and therefore the foreword was from both the PM, David Cameron (Conservative), and DPM, Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrats). | Yes – additional guidance to exemplify and provide the detail behind policy headlines or overviews is often provided. | Yes – policies are usually presented to Parliament and therefore the wider world via the media in summary form. |
| **Who produced this?** | Coalition government | Coalition government | Michael Gove on behalf of Coalition government |
| **Who will read it?** | Headteachers, Curriculum Deputies, LA, Academy chains, Media, Educational professionals, interest groups | Those responsible for curriculum and curriculum interest groups. Aimed at school audience and those who advise schools. | Speech to be listened to by MPs, media, teaching unions and read by interested parties. |
| **Will everyone understand this text in the same way?** | No – depends on affiliations and interests as to which bit is of interest and which angle is to be taken. Politicians of different parties will view this differently. Unions/education professionals/teachers/headteachers will have differing concerns and time scales. Media will cherry pick headlines without necessarily understanding the background detail or implications. Rhetoric of forewords may be very important to media but considered less important by educationalists who may move straight into the policy to find out what is being suggested. | Yes – aim is to provide clear information and guidance to explain and elaborate on the minimal information in the White Paper. | No – as with actual White paper, it will depend on affiliations and interest. For many this speech will be the White paper as they will not go to read the full text. Also, educational professionals and MPs and media all have different approaches and different levels of understanding and requirement to understand. |
| **Why was it produced?** | First education policy of Coalition government. Setting out agenda for next Parliament. Providing differentiation of tone and action between new administration and the old. | To inform schools, Heads and curriculum leaders as well as those creating the performance tables and related tracking data about what exactly will count in the Performance tables. | State speech to Parliament. |
| **In what other ways could it have been written?** | Style/stance could have been different. Identified problems similar to previous administration but solutions often very different. |  | Unlikely – set format required. |
| **What is missing from the text?** | Missing from the text is evidence for many of the assertions. Along with any explanation of information such as PISA ranking which set the context. Also missing is the detail such as the exact qualifications in the EBac and full supporting detail as many other reports were not yet published, for example, the Wolf report and the National Curriculum review both of which are referenced. | Nothing – January 2011 included a link to a full and detailed technical list of all qualifications. | Any reference to inequality of gender, SEN or ethnicity. Along with alternative view. Detail is missing to support assertions. Air brushing of many educational reforms of the previous administration. |
| **How does this text reflect the wider society?** | Wider aims and beliefs of the Coalition amalgamated and reflected. E.g. Pupil premium from the Liberal Democrats, academies and standards from the Conservatives. Reflects the concern over standards dropping and gap between rich and poor. | Usual technical document. | As with White Paper. |
| **What could we do about this text if we disagree with it?** | Complete the consultation. Write to MP. Write to M. Gove. Send children to private schools (though these people will probably agree with the sentiments of the text but feel that state education cannot achieve this for their children). |  | As with White Paper. |

Appendix 3 - Critical Literacy Frame Criteria **(Hyatt, 2005)**

1. Pronouns – Participant Choices

Way in which pronouns are used in the text. Inclusive (our, us, we etc.) or exclusive (they, their, he, she, etc.). Considers how readers are positioned as in-group or out-group by and through the text.

1. Passive/Active forms – Transivity Choices

Transformation of active constructions into the passive form. This can background or foreground responsibility within the text.

1. Time – Tense and Aspect

The way in which tense and aspect are used to construct an ‘understanding’ about events. Such a device impacts on the perceived ‘truth’ or significance of an event.

1. Adjectives, Adverbs, Nouns, Verbal Processes – Evaluation and Semantic Prosody

The use of loaded, dramatic or stereotypical adjectives, adverbs and nouns to construct a person or event. Also includes the use of overgeneralisation.

Evaluation as inscribed or evoked to present the authors views on the situation or to evoke such an evaluation in the reader.

Semantic prosody, words that co-occur with others often invoking positive or negative pre-conceptions.

1. Metaphor

Important in the way that the metaphor positions the item described and the readers relationship to the item.

1. Presupposition/Implication

Used to represent constructions as a reality.

1. Medium

Use of interdiscursivity, whereby other texts, textual devices, genres or discourses are utilised for effect on the audience.

1. Audience

Consideration of who the perceived/intended audience for the text is.

1. Visual Images

Impact of any included images or pictures on the reality or understanding of the text.

1. Age, Class, Disability, Gender, Race – Equity, Ethnicity and Sexuality Issues

Any group identified within the text as potentially being less socially valued.

1. Reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals

Any reference to other texts, genres, discourses and/or individuals in order to promote the legitimacy and/or worth of the current text.

# Appendix 4 – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Research Project Title:**

**The constitution and implementation of the English Baccalaureate: implications for educational equality.**

1. **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1. **What is the project’s purpose?**

The purpose of the project is to investigate the conditions which led to the Coalition government setting out an educational policy in 2010 which included the creation of English Baccalaureate. I plan to analyse the curriculum policy text and to find out the perspectives of Deputy Head Curriculum and Heads of Department of English Baccalaureate and non-English Baccalaureate subjects regarding the actual implications of this policy within schools. The project will take place between March 2013 and July 2013 and is being carried out as part of my Doctoral studies at the University of Sheffield, School of Education.

1. **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are the Deputy Head Curriculum and/or a Head of Department at an English Secondary school and you are involved in the implementation of curriculum policy at school and classroom level.

1. **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

1. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

I will ask if I can interview you for 45-60 minutes. No preparation is necessary, however I am happy to send you a copy of the key themes to be covered beforehand if you wish. The interview will be tape recorded. If any questions arise from the interview, I will ask if you will be willing to respond by email. I will ask you to check my transcription after the interview.

1. **Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The audio recordings made during this research will only be used for analysis and the anonymised findings for illustration in my Doctoral Thesis and any associated research publications, conference papers and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission and no one outside of the original project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Names and/or identifying details of individuals or institutions will not be revealed in any reports, publications, communications or general conversations. Data will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used at the transcription phase. A full transcript of the interview will be completed. The audio recorder will be stored in a locked cabinet and data will be stored on my password protected computer. The audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the project.

1. **What do I have to do?**

Participation involves answering questions in a Face to Face interview.

1. **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no possible dangers or risks of taking part.

1. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The potential benefits of taking part consist of an opportunity for you to reflect on and assess your own ideas, and those of your school, on the English baccalaureate curriculum policy and its current and possible future impact on your school and pupils. I will share my main findings with you after the completion of my Doctorate and will be happy to speak to staff at the school about my further studies and the advantages of further study at Masters and/or Doctoral level.

1. **What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If the research study stops earlier than expected, you will be informed of this and the reason for it.

1. **What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the project, please contact me straight away. I will address any concerns as soon as possible. You can contact me on xxx or on [edp09kfh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp09kfh@sheffield.ac.uk) or xxx In the event of you still being dissatisfied, please contact my supervisor, Dr Chris Winter, [C.Winter@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:C.Winter@sheffield.ac.uk) or tel 0114 2228142. Your complaint can be investigated by the University of Sheffield’s Registrar and Secretary.

1. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports, publications, conference presentations or lectures.

1. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research will be included in my Education Doctoral Thesis and may be published in a report in a peer reviewed journal. The dissertation will be lodged in the University of Sheffield Library. You and your institution will not be identified by name in any such report or publication. Data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research, but only after your permission has been obtained. Reports of the project may be shared at conferences.

1. **Who is organising and funding the research?**

There are currently no external funding sources.

1. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This research project has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Sheffield Ethics review Procedure as operated by the School of Education.

1. **Contact for further information**

Mrs Kathryn Hobbs

Deputy Head

xxx

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

**Thank you for reading this participant information sheet**

# Appendix 5 - Consent form

Consent form

**The constitution and implementation of the English Baccalaureate: implications for educational equality.**

I consent to take part in the research as outlined in the Participant Information sheet. This will involve an interview with Kathryn Hobbs for the purposes of Doctoral research supervised by The University of Sheffield. I also consent to the audio recording of this interview.

I understand that my conversations will be confidential and that the recording will be kept secure and that I, my school, students and LA will be anonymised both in the transcript and in the final write up.

I will be provided with a copy of the full transcript.

Name

Signed

Date

Kathryn Hobbs 24.3.12

# Appendix 6 - Interview questions

**Deputy Head – Curriculum questions**

1. *(Suggestion to begin with non-controversial questions framed in the present tense, focusing on experiences/behaviour Patton 1994).*

Please could you briefly describe your school, students and community?

* + *To focus on size of school, cohort breakdown and majority catchment. As well as to allow the interviewee to set out their own description and account of their school.*

1. Please could you tell me about the curriculum on offer within your school?

* Prompt to ensure that some mention is made of Key Stage 3, 4 and, where relevant, Sixth Form.
* Prompt to ensure that a full understanding of the subject choice - academic and vocational offer is gained.
* Underlying principles behind KS4 curriculum? E.g. freedom of choice, blocks, one humanity, all top set do Languages etc.

1. At aged 16 and 18 what are the usual destinations of your students?

The EBac was part of the 2010 White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, the first Coalition Government policy announcement.

1. Please could you describe to me how the EBac initial announcement a) was regarded by your school?
2. b) Please could you describe to me how the EBac initial announcement impacted on your school and curriculum in 2010/?
3. How did the retrospective measure of the EBac impact on your results for 2010 when the EBac measure was applied to your school results at a point when the EBac did not exist when the students had chosen their options?

* How did you feel about this?
* How did you respond to this??

1. How did the EBac initially impact on your curriculum/school?

Focus on 2011 curriculum offer and selection.

* + How did you present/ explain the EBac to Year 9 students and parents?
  + What was the student/ parent reaction?
  + Explore number of Year 9s choosing individual EBac subjects (as seen by the number of groups and class sizes) and percentage passing EBac in 2010
  + Focus on any changes in curriculum or curriculum organisation and why?

1. How has the impact of the EBac being felt since?
   * Any changes over time? Curriculum, school, option choices, parental requests, student awareness, pressure on HoD?
   * Discuss the percentages of EBac passes 2010, 2011 and 2012 + current percentage of Y11 and Y10 and possibly Y9 if this figure is now known who are taking the EBac*. I will ask for a copy of any results in written form for later reference.*
   * Focus on vocational offer and any changes to this either linked to the EBac or more generally to changes in Performance Tables and Performance measures.
   * Any particular pressures on the school caused by the EBac e.g. recruitment of staff for certain subjects, redundancy, variation of staff within EBac subjects and across all subjects etc.
2. Everything that you say to me will remain confidential as I am very interested in how these changes were regarded by the school (Head/ SLT/ ethos and values of the school)?
3. And how do you feel about these changes?
4. How has the EBac impacted on your departments?
   * Ensure discuss impact on EBac departments and non-EBac departments.
   * Relationship between departments to be explored.
   * Individual department issues to be explored. To focus on equality issues.
5. How has the EBac impacted on your students?
   * What has been student reaction to the EBac?
   * Parent reaction?
   * How relevant is the EBac for your students? Reasons for irrelevance/relevance?
   * Any cohort variation e.g. gender, ethnicity, FSM, Pupil Premium
   * Impact on different cohorts
   * Barriers to taking/ passing EBac
   * Follow up any equality issues mentioned.
6. How has the EBac impacted on you in your role as subject teacher, school leader and Head of Curriculum? *Use this question to ask some demographic questions e.g. length of time in post? Own curriculum background and teaching subject? Career path? Personal attitudes and values. Probe where they stand re equality issues and how they rationalise/ justify their positions.*
7. What are your thoughts on the EBac subjects as a curriculum for your children? (not as a performance measure)
   * Explore if this is regarded as a broad and balanced curriculum?
   * Explore notion of core curriculum.
   * What would their school ethos and culture regard as appropriate for your children?
   * What would they personally regard as appropriate for their children?
8. Has the EBac or other recent curriculum changes had any impact on the likely pathways of students at 16 and post 16?
9. From your perspective who are the winners and losers of the EBac policy?
10. What are the possible future impacts of the EBac that you can foresee?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
12. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Would it be possible for me to come back to you via email if I have any points that would be valuable to follow up?

Thank you very much for letting me interview you – I will send a full transcript of our conversation within four weeks.

* For pilot interview explore any issues of sensitivity whereby the Deputy feels that other colleagues may not feel comfortable answering these questions. Or areas where they feel that Deputies may be in conflict with their Headteachers position.
* Ask if there is anything that I haven’t asked about that would have been useful.
* Ask for copies of exam results and discuss if they feel that this would be appropriate to ask for at the time of arranging the interview.
* Ask about how to select/ ask for the right information to be able to select the Head of Department from an EBac subject (History, Geography or Languages) and non-EBac optional subject?

**Head of Department questions**

**Introduction**

1. *(Suggestion to begin with non-controversial questions framed in the present tense, focusing on experiences/ behaviour Patton 1994).*
   * Please could you describe your department?
   * To focus on size, staff membership and curriculum and course coverage of department. As well as to allow the interviewee to set out their own description and account of their department.
2. Please could you tell me about the curriculum and qualification offer within your department?
   * Course offer and number of pupils?
   * Prompt to ensure that some mention is made of Key Stage 3, 4 and where relevant Sixth form.
   * Prompt to ensure that a full understanding of the subject choice academic and vocational offer is gained.
3. At aged 16 and 18 what are the usual destinations of your students?

The EBac was part of the 2010 White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, the first Coalition Government policy announcement.

1. What was your own initial reaction to the EBac announcement?
2. Please could you describe to me how the EBac initial announcement impacted on your department in 2010?
3. How was the EBac announcement regarded and approached by the Senior Leadership team of your school?
   * Explore impact of this approach on own subject.
4. How did the retrospective measure of the EBac impact on your results for 2010?
   * How did you feel about this?

* What was the reaction by the SLT to this if any?
* How did you feel about this reaction?

1. How did the EBac initially impact on your department for September 2011?

Focus on 2011 curriculum offer and selection.

* + How did the school present/ explain the EBac to Year 9 students and parents?
  + What was the student/ parent reaction to your subject?
  + Explore number of Year 9s choosing this subject (as seen by the number of groups and class sizes)
  + Focus on any changes in department teaching, courses or organisation and why?

1. How has the impact of the EBac being felt in your department since?
   * Any changes over time? Curriculum, school, option choices, parental requests, student awareness, pressure on your department/ you as HoD?
   * Discuss the number of students taking this subject over 2010,2011,2012 and 2013 if known.
   * Focus on any vocational offer by the department and any changes to this either linked to the EBac or more generally to changes in Performance Tables and Performance measures.
   * Any particular pressures on the department caused by the EBac e.g. recruitment of staff for certain subjects, redundancy, variation of staff within EBac subjects and across all subjects etc.
   * How have these pressures being felt/ managed?
   * How do you feel?
2. What is the SLT position on these changes?
3. How do you feel about these changes?
4. How has the EBac impacted on your department in comparison to others?
   * Ensure discuss EBac departments and nonEBac departments.
   * Relationship between departments to be explored.
   * Individual department issues to be explored.
5. How has the EBac impacted on your students?
   * How relevant is the EBac for your students?
   * What has been student reaction to the EBac?
   * Any cohort variation e.g. gender, ethnicity, FSM, Pupil Premium
   * Impact on different cohorts
   * Barriers to taking/ passing EBac
6. How has the EBac impacted on you? *Use this question to ask some demographic questions e.g. length of time in post? Own curriculum background and teaching subject? Career path? Personal attitudes and values. Probe where they stand re equality issues and how they rationalise/ justify their positions.*
7. What are your thoughts on the EBac subjects as a curriculum for your students? (not as a performance measure)
   * Explore if this is regarded as a broad and balanced curriculum?
   * Explore notion of core curriculum.
   * What would their school ethos and culture regard as appropriate for your students?
   * What would they regard as appropriate for their children?
8. Has the EBac or other recent curriculum changes had any impact on the likely pathways of students at 16 and post 16?
9. From your perspective who are the winners and losers of the EBac policy?
10. What are the possible future impacts of the EBac on your department that you can foresee?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

1. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Would it be possible for me to come back to you via email if I have any points that would be valuable to follow up?

Thank you very much for letting me interview you – I will send a full transcript of our conversation within four weeks.

# Appendix 7 – Coding



# Appendix 8 - Fourfold typology of school response to policy

My research identified four main responses to the EBac policy. The likely response for each typology is outlined giving examples from the EBac policy implementation and considering issues of equality.

**Acceptance**, the ethos, cultural and structural components of a school provides an ideal backdrop for initial and future success adopting the given policy. In the case of the EBac policy this includes academically ambitious parents and children with high levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), a high degree of correspondence between the home and the school (Bowles and Gintis (1976) and a traditional academic curriculum and ethos already in place. Such correspondence between the school and the policy may initially promote equality within the school as there is no need to question fundamental beliefs and values but may lead to growing inequality compared to other schools.

**Resistance**, the confidence and belief of the school in their current course of action leads them to be determined not to be driven solely by the given policy. Care must be taken to ensure that resistance does not become an end in itself to the detriment of the students or the school. For example the case-study school resisted the rhetoric that all students should study the EBac however the school did make a number of changes in response to this policy to ensure that individual students were not disadvantaged. This reaction can be seen as a stance against the control and governing of schools through the accountability system of the performance points or as a reflection of the power of such systems to determine behaviour even when initially resisted (Lingard 2013).

**Compliance** is the reaction by a school which feels that it had no power to determine its own course, even when it may have structural freedoms such as academy status which imply opportunity to deviate from national policy. From an accountability perspective Hirsch (1996) would argue that this is an example of “core knowledge” having to be reinforced in the curriculum allows children access to future high level knowledge. Such a stance may lead to inequalities for the students who are not provided with appropriate solutions to their needs and potentially “learned helplessness” (Seligman and Maier 1967) for the teachers and school creating a future need to be supported rather than generating school led solutions.

**Confusion** is experienced by a school that reacts quickly to policy announcements and does not consider the implications of decisions taken and does not prepare and plan for the changes implemented. Such an approach while initially complying with a policy request has the potential to generate additional problems and inequalities for students and teachers which may then require a further policy solution at a later time.

# Appendix 9 – Scheurich’s 4 Arenas

**Table 3 - Scheurich's Arena 1**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Arena 1 – Problem** | **Social construction of problem** | **Source and page** |
| Educational standards in England with a focus/ concern on:   1. Declining educational standards on International measure 2. Attainment gap between disadvantaged students and others 3. Increase in vocational provision in schools – perceived to be of lower standard and less demanding than GCSE qualifications 4. Impact on Performance tables of vocational qualifications 5. Decrease in examination entries at GCSE for subjects such as Languages, History and Geography | New Coalition government | 1.2 Context p.10  4.2.13 Conclusion - Coalition policy p.107  5.2 EBac PA p.133 |
| Declining PISA rankings | 1.2 Context p.11  1.6.3 Governance and Neo Liberalism p.22  2.6.2 PA p.47  4.2.5 CDA p.97/ p.102 |
| Grade inflation[[48]](#footnote-49) | 1.2 Context p.10/ p.11 |
| Increase in vocational and alternative qualifications under previous government | 1.2 Context p.9/p.13  2.2.2 1988 National Curriculum p.29  4.3.4 Rapidly improving Academy p.111  4.3.5 Rapidly improving non-academy p.113 |
| Lack of progression/ career routes with some vocational and alternative qualifications | 1.2 Context p.10  1.5 Researchers positionality p.18  5.2 EBac Policy PA p.133  6.3.1 Recommendations p.146 |
| Perception of importance of subjects such as Modern Foreign Languages, History and Geography | 1.6 Significance p.19  4.3.3 Low Performing non-academy p.110  4.4.2 Differentiation and Hierarchy p.123 |
| Desire to strengthen accountability measures on schools (Performance tables, exams and Ofsted) | 2.6 PA p.51  6.2.2 Teachers’ perspectives p.142  6.2.3 EBac implications for equality p.144  6.4 Original contribution to knowledge p.148 |
| Impact of performance tables on decisions taken by schools - Concern over some schools ‘league table game playing’ [[49]](#footnote-50) at expense of the best interests of children | 1.5 Researchers positionality p.18  4.3.3 Low performing academy p.110  4.4.3 Choice and resistance p.124 |

**Table 4 - Scheurich's Arena 2**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Arena 2 – Social Regularities** | **Grid of Social Regularities** | **Source and page** |
| Intersection of regularities which constitute and construct the problem of Educational standards in England | Political ideology around concern over the lower educational standards achieved by the ‘disadvantaged’ (FSM). An ever increasing education gap in place between the better off and poorer children. As social class statistics aren’t collated by schools FSM is used as a proxy indicator of poverty. | 1.2 Context p.10  2.2.3 Social Class p.30-31  4.2.5 Verbal processes p.96  4.2.11 Class issues p.104 |
| New Coalition government working and, Conservative combined with Liberal Democrat ideologies. | 1.4 Research aims and questions p.10  1.6 Significance p.19  1.6.4 Critical Educational research p.22  2.2.2 1988 NC and links to EBac p.28-29  2.5.2 Core knowledge p.42  4.2.10 Visual images p.103  4.2.12 Other texts p.105 |
| High stakes testing and assessment as a technology of Governmentality. Coalition government wanted to use outcomes as indicator of success not previous measures such as CVA | 2.7. Governmentality and surveillance p.51-53  2.8. Impact of the EBac policy p.53-54  5.4 Governance, surveillance and ‘ability’ p.137-139 |
| Datafication of education. Increased reliance on data as a predictive and controlling device. | 4.4 Thematic analysis p.116  4.4.5 Equality p.129  5.4 Governance, surveillance and ‘ability’ p.137-139 |
| Global education surveillance ‘global panopticism’ (Lingard et al. 2013 p.540). The increased use of high stakes testing as international comparators within a near unified neoliberal approach. | 1.6.3 Governance and neoliberalism p.22  4.2.7 Presupposition/ implication p.101 |
| Economy/ jobs market (budget deficit position of Britain) | 1.2 Context p10  4.2.7 Presupposition/ Implication p.100 |
| Educational establishment (e.g. LA’s, schools, teachers, universities). Increased educational market place as more academies and Free schools independent of LA control are created. | 1.2 Context p11-12  2.2.2 1988 NC and links to EBac p.28 |
| Student characteristics, e.g. social class, ethnicity, gender, SEND, as recognised characteristics which impact on student outcomes and educational opportunities | 2.2.3 Social class p.30-31  2.2.4 Ethnicity p.31-32  2.2.4 Gender p.32  2.2.6 SEND p.32-33  4.2.11 Age, class, disability, gender, race-equity, ethnicity and sexuality p.104 |
|  | Student ‘ability’ belief held about a student’s likelihood of passing certain qualifications | 2.3 Social and cultural reproduction p.36  4.4 Thematic analysis p.116-117, 120, 129, 131  5.4 Governance, surveillance and ‘ability’ p.137-139  6.2 Addressing the research questions p.140-144 |

**Table 5 - Scheurich's Arena 3**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Arena 3 – Social regularities** | **EBac policy solution - effects intended** | **Source and page** |
| Social regularities lead to a range of possible and impossible policy solutions for identified problem | Increase take up of specified academic subjects (EBac combination) | 2.8 Impact of EBac policy p.54-56  4.3.2 Bluefield p.109  4.3.3 Yellowfield p.109-110  4.3.4 Purplefield p.112  4.3.5 Redfield p.115  4.42 Differentiation and hierarchy p.120 |
| Decrease vocational options | 4.3.4 Purplefield p.111-112  4.3.5 Redfield p.113  4.42 Differentiation and hierarchy p.120  4.45 Equality p.128 |
| Retrospective measure of schools EBac performance to highlight low achievement on EBac and reinforce importance of policy | 2.2.2 1988 NC and links to EBac p.29  2.8 Impact of EBac policy p.53-55  4.4.4 Control and accountability p.126-127 |
| Changed accountability measures – performance tables and point allocation amended to highlight, reflect and reinforce the EBac | 2.2.2 1988 NC and links to EBac p.28-29  4.4.4 Control and accountability p.125-127 |
| Internal surveillance of EBac choices by teachers and self-selection by students | 4.3.2 Bluefield p.109  4.3.3 Yellowfield p.109-110  4.3.4 Purplefield p.112  4.3.5 Redfield p.115 |
| Continued surveillance of schools – Performance measures and Ofsted | 1.2 Context p.12  4.4.3 Choice and resistance p.123  4.4.4 Control and accountability p.125-127 |
| Focus on increasing future progression of disadvantaged students though specified EBac subject choice | 2.2.2 1988 NC and links to EBac p.30  2.5 Curriculum knowledge 9.40-41 |
|  | **EBac policy solution effects unintended** | **Source and page** |
|  | Students deemed ‘not capable’ of gaining a C grade directed away from EBac subjects due to pressure of Performance tables and accountability measures. | 4.4.3 Choice and resistance p.122-125  4.3.5 Redfield p.114-115  6.2.3 Does the EBac have implications for educational equality? P.143-144 |
|  | Ethnic minority students not entered for EBac subjects in same proportions as white students | 1.6.2 Anti-democratic political tool p.21  2.2.4 Ethnicity p.31-32 |
|  | Teacher redundancy for non-EBac subjects | 4.3.3 Yellowfield p.110  4.3.4 Purplefield p.112  4.3.5 Redfield p.114  4.4.2 Differentiation and hierarchy p.121 |
|  | Increased divide between schools with academic curriculum (selective/ Grammar schools) and those with non-selective or high disadvantaged intake | 4.4.2 Differentiation and hierarchy p.120 |

**Table 6 - Scheurich's Arena 4**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Arena 4** | **Function of critical policy analysis** | **Source and page** |
| Critical policy analysis of EBac | Research premises of initial policy problem and stated solutions | 1.3 Focus of study p.14  1.4 Research aims and questions p.14 |
| Research implementation at school level | 4.2 Policy analysis p.90-106  4.3 Semi-structured interviews p.106-113 |
| Areas of educational inequality | 4.4 Thematic analysis p.115-131 |
| Evaluation of outcomes of policy | 6.2 Addressing the research questions p.140-143 |
| Suggested amendments to EBac policy for more socially just outcomes | 6.3 Recommendations for policy and practice p.144-146 |

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1. The performance data for all English schools is published annually in the form of performance tables which are available for public scrutiny and consumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. External examinations taken usually aged 16 in schools in England and Wales. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Also referred to as failing school - schools which had an average GCSE achievement below the national minimum stated by the Government as acceptable, as measured by the percentage of students achieving 5 GCSE subjects at A\*-C [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The Local Authority (LA) is the elected public body that is responsible for the running and standards of maintained state schools within its area. Prior to 1988 all state schools were controlled by their LA . Since 1988, various types of schools such as City Technology Colleges (CTCs), Grant Maintained (GM), Academies, and Free Schools have been created, all of which are outside of LA control and are accountable to central government. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Academies until 2010 were state schools which were deemed to be ‘failing schools’, which were removed from LA control and given to a business, Church or charity sponsor to run, usually under a new leadership team. Academies have a range of freedoms such as the ability to opt out of the national terms and conditions for teacher employment and the ability to opt out of the National Curriculum, but they are still subjected to the same performance measures as state schools. These original academies are referred to as sponsored academies. Since 2010, ‘outstanding’ and now ‘good’ schools (as rated by Ofsted) can opt for conversion to academy status either as part of a group, or more usually as a single school. These academies are referred to as ‘convertor academies’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The personalised learning agenda was created by the previous Labour administration. Schools were encouraged to identify and create individual pathways and qualification combinations for students, with the intention of allowing all to achieve according to their individual strengths and future aspirations. A national qualification framework was created so that employers and universities could compare qualifications and routes, supposedly allowing alternative educational pathways to exist and be acknowledged. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. All educational qualifications in England and Wales were allocated a number of performance points based on the level of difficulty and the number of hours required to complete the course. These performance points were added together to allow qualifications of different sizes and lengths to be counted and therefore compared within and across schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Free School Meals – a benefit made available to the poorest 14% of children. This classification is often used as a proxy indicator for those children living in poverty. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey which takes place every three years with the aim of evaluating education systems across different countries conducting tests assessing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. From 2009 to include English Language and Mathematics GCSE, to make the key performance measure 5 or more A\*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) is a vocational qualification which can be taken in a range of subjects such as Business, Childcare and Engineering at a variety of levels and size of qualification. BTEC is equivalent to: Level 1 = GCSE grade D-G, Level 2 = GCSE A\*-C, Level 3 = A Level. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. From 2015 the stated aim of the DfE is that 90% of all pupils starting secondary education take the EBac combination of subjects at aged 16 (DFE 2015b). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. iGCSE – The International GCSE is an international English language qualification equivalent to GCSEs, often used in international schools and independent schools in Britain. They are awarded on the basis of a terminal examination and are therefore regarded as being more academically robust than coursework-based qualifications. iGCSEs are not included in the English performance tables and were therefore unavailable to state schools, though some equivalent courses were made available to state schools in 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Ofsted is a body that reports directly to Parliament on the inspection and regulation activities it carries out. Ofsted grades schools as grade 1 - Outstanding, grade 2 - Good, grade 3 - Requires Improvement (prior to September 2012 this category was Satisfactory, and grade 4 - Inadequate. An Inadequate rating will then result in either a notice to improve or special measures, in both cases, close monitoring takes place to support and check on progress. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Academically selective secondary state school which was part of the English school system 1944-1960, though some state grammar schools still remain in some areas today. Students must pass an entrance examination aged 10. Remaining grammar schools are oversubscribed and are particularly attractive to educationally ambitious parents who perceive the education to be superior to that offered in a non-selective school. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Social class definitions used within my study are based on the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (OfNS 2010) with ‘middle class’ corresponding loosely to groups 1 -4 and working class corresponding loosely to groups 5-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Pupil Premium – additional money paid directly to schools to support the progress of disadvantaged children, those who are Looked After (in LA care) or adopted, or those on Free school meals. A policy introduced in 2010 by the Coalition government. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) is a category for children with identified learning needs. At the most extreme level of need this could result in a formal Statement of Educational Need (SEN) which outlines the additional support that is required for the student and is supported by additional funding to the school. At the lower level of need, SEND students may be classified as having learning needs relating to emotional, social and behavioural needs or a specific issue such as dyslexia. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Schools which allow entry through passing an initial test, usually intended to test current academic knowledge and also future academic potential (as measured by an IQ test). Such schools are highly competitive to get into, with many applicants for each place. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. The expansion of vocational qualifications which were counted in the performance tables encouraged some schools to radically amend their curriculum in order to maximise student achievement as reported in the school performance tables. Some of these vocational qualifications are now felt to be of low educational value with very few progression opportunities (Wolf 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. The White Paper allowed all Ofsted rated ‘Outstanding’ (and later ‘Good’) schools to apply immediately for academy status, therefore removing themselves from LA control to become independent state schools, now referred to as ‘convertor academies’. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Figures on gender uptake of the EBac not provided in the 2015 Statistical First Release [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Different curriculum and qualification routes through secondary school and post-16 education, such as a GCSE academic pathway or a vocational pathway. Each pathway leads to different education progression routes and therefore potential careers. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The National Curriculum was suspended in 2013 – 2014 to allow teachers and schools time to prepare for the changed requirements for September 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Free schools are schools funded directly by the Government and outside of LA control. Free schools can be set up in areas where a need for additional school places is demonstrated, utilising spaces such as office buildings or other such locations not previously considered for use as a school. They can be set up by groups such as charities, universities, teachers and/ or parents. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Key Stage 3 is the stage of education from age 11 to 14 usually the first three years of secondary education. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Tests in education which are used to judge student outcome, but are also part of the government surveillance of the effectiveness of teachers (often now linked to pay in English schools) along with international tests such as PISA comparing nations’ performance [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. The House of Commons and the House of Lords consider and review government policies and actions via Select committees which are made up of members of both houses. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. CVA was used within performance tables from 2006-2011, when the Coalition government deemed that CVA was misleading and instead moved to a value added measure using raw scores only. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. There is a correlation between VA and prior attainment, which the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) claim shows that VA is not a true measure of progress, but reflects prior attainment (Blow, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. All qualifications were allocated a set number of performance points which reflected a comparison and equivalence to the points awarded to a GCSE grade, i.e. GCSE grade C is worth 40 points. In this way all qualifications officially approved for teaching in state schools could be described in terms of equivalence to a GCSE grade and the total number of points gained across a range of qualifications could be included for each individual student and for the school in the performance tables. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Deputy Head for the school with a particular responsibility for the curriculum, qualification and examinations. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. While the White Paper is a product of the British government, education policy is completely devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland and partially devolved to Wales; therefore this education policy applies in its entirety only to England. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Student characteristics taken from the relevant School Ofsted Data Dashboards 2013 (Ofsted, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who do not speak English as a first language. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Entry level is below GCSE level. Level 1 includes GCSE grades D-G and Level 2 includes GCSE grades A\*-C. Some qualifications offer access to multiple levels (such as a GCSE which offers grade A\*-G) other qualifications, particularly vocational qualifications, are offered only at one level and therefore success provides a qualification at the stated level. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Teachers within the school who have to teach a subject that is not the one that they were originally qualified or trained to teach [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Level 4 National Curriculum level, which is the expected level of attainment for pupils entering secondary school. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. NVQ – National Vocational Qualification, a vocational work-based qualification, originally not available for teaching in schools but then allowed as part of the curriculum under the Labour government 1997-2010 and counted in the Performance Tables. NVQs were removed from the performance tables as part of the Wolf review (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. BTEC Science does not count as an EBac science subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Design Technology [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Previously, GCSE courses had been modular, with students taking smaller, regular examinations over the two years as well as taking resits in order to increase marks. GCSEs are now moving back to two-year courses culminating in a one-off examination of all content. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Progress and attainment 8 is a new performance measure for 2016 which will include the best 8 grades achieved in English, Maths and Science, two additional EBac subjects and three non-EBac subjects from a prescribed list. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. The key performance indicator for schools remains 5+ A\*-C GCSE subjects including English and Mathematics [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. University Technical Colleges for 14-19 year olds with a vocational focus to the curriculum. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Non-EBac subjects have to be taken from a prescribed list of subjects and qualifications. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Concern with the increasing numbers of students achieving high grades at GCSE and A Level and the increasing pass rate from 1988 until 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. The expansion of vocational qualifications which were counted in the league tables encouraged schools to radically amend their curriculum in order to maximise student achievement as reported in the school performance tables. Some of these vocational qualifications are now felt to be of dubious value with very few progression opportunities (Wolf 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)