Diminishing inequalities? A critical feminist genealogy of education policy and practice in post-World War II England

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Abstract

Education policy is often considered to be something that has developed incrementally over time, building upon previous policy to ensure the continual improvement of opportunities and 'life chances' for children and young people in our schools. Successive governments (depending on the political party in power) may have adopted different policy agendas but the rhetoric within those policies has generally remained the same – they all claim that their policy is essential to further improve schools that invariably need 'fixing', in order that our children and young people can make more progress and educational standards can be improved.

The literature on policy tends to focus on it in terms of policy conception, development, dissemination and enactment. This thesis aims to examine and critique current education policy in four key areas – school organisation and structure, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education – over four post-war time periods, through a feminist genealogy approach. Using this approach, this thesis posits that as opposed to educational policy developing in an incremental way it is characterised by both continuities and discontinuities through time, with tensions inherent in the centralising and decentralising agendas that have emerged. As such, contemporary and historic education policy is problematized with a focus on dominant discourses – those who exerted power in the process and those excluded from it, in particular women – to demonstrate the contingency of current education policy and consider alternative future possibilities.

The study involved analysis of documentation and policy texts and also included semi-structured interviews with seven women who currently play, or have played, a key role in the national commentary about education. The thesis offers new insights and perspectives on the potential possibilities of education policy for the future and has implications for practice in schools and teacher education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In 1988 Gamble wrote in the preface to his book (The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism) that 'there are few things more difficult than trying to make sense of contemporary political events and the direction in which they are moving' (1988, p.x). This relates well to this study which examines the current context of education policy and considers how it has come to be like this and potential future direction. Education shapes the opportunities and experiences offered to individuals and communities in society and as such is necessarily a political issue (Saltman, 2014; Youdell, 2010). This is evidenced, for example, by the political debates surrounding the introduction of state funded education in the late 19th century (e.g. Mill 1859, Dewey 1916, Hopkins 1979, Donald 1992) and the continuing debates surrounding the nature and purpose of education to this day (Halsey 1965, Bowles and Gintis 1977, Chitty 1989, Ball 2008, Youdell 2010, Reay 2017, Gilbert 2018). It is the policies that have emerged from these debates, particularly on school structures and organisation, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education that provide the focus for this study.

Before I begin to explore these areas as a focus for this study it is important to offer some understanding of how education has shaped me as an individual; the opportunities and experiences I have had that have influenced my perspective on the education system and resulted in my interest in investigating this field. The following personal and genealogical reflection is intended to provide a narrative that exposes some of the critical influences that resulted in my journey from working class girl into adulthood, experiencing higher education and a career as a teacher, school leader and teacher educator. As such it is written in a different tone to subsequent chapters. There is acknowledgement here of personal reflexivity where it is possible that 'personal values, attitudes, beliefs and aims have served to shape the research' (Gray 2009, p.498), and also recognition that reflexivity as the 'process of continually reflecting' on interpretations of experiences (Finlay 2003, p.108) might support deeper understanding of research findings. There is no doubt my own experiences have shaped my understanding of education and led to this research.

1.2 A personal reflection

> *I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning (Martin et al, 1998, p.9)*

My educational journey and eventual career choice as teacher and teacher educator has been very much shaped by the experiences and challenges I faced growing up and going to school on a council estate in Hull (purportedly the largest in Europe - though in her 2014 book on Hull O'Neill suggests this accolade belongs to a council estate in Dagenham).

Reflecting on my schooling as a 'bright' working class girl, together with family influences, I see now how the conflicting contexts I experienced growing up have resulted in tensions that contributed to a feeling of divided identity; inner antagonisms that were reinforced through my experiences of higher education and that most certainly influenced my beliefs and views about society in general and education in particular.

I am considered, for all intents and purposes, to have achieved a level of 'social mobility' – a problematic and contested term, as considered below - but my journey has led me to question the very education system that may have supported me in this trajectory and hence the focus of my research. It is a system, by its very structure and organisation - together with the nature of the curriculum, focus on assessment and approach to teacher education – that is arguably undermining the opportunities for many of the children it purports to support.

Being working class is not a homogeneous experience; it is experienced differently by different people, as is the experience of social mobility – which might be perceived as a convenient notion that hides the real levels of inequality in society by suggesting openness and the possibility of advancement for those who deserve it. Within education the focus of social mobility and more recently 'levelling up' (HM Government 2022) seems to be about removing perceived barriers to learning to give the individual the opportunity to improve their lot in life, rather than focussing on societal (including educational) structures that often make it impossible to do so. The implicit suggestion here is that if the perceived barriers to learning are removed it is the individual who is at fault if they do not manage to improve their life chances. In her book Miseducation (2017, p.127) Reay suggests,

> The key issue we need to tackle in education is not social mobility but inequality. Far from being a solution, social mobility creates social and educational problems even as it provides a degree of success for a small number of working-class individuals.

Many sociologists, like Jackson and Marsden (1966) have attempted to explain common features of what they considered the typically socially mobile working class. For example, they describe this group as those from ‘respectable’ working-class families who work hard, value education, are conservative (with both a small c and big C) and aspire to home ownership. Reay (2017, p.1) outlines how her own experience of being a socially mobile working-class girl did not fit with these common notions:

> It was not middle-class dispositions and attitudes that facilitated and enabled social mobility, but instead a strong, oppositional, working-class value system and political consciousness.

This resonates greatly with me, though my journey was perhaps characterised by only some elements of the above. However, more significant for me was a growing political and social consciousness, at odds with my family, anchored by a strong sense of social justice and anti-elitism – the idea that no one should have opportunities borne from the circumstances of their birth rather than as a result of their achievements, whilst acknowledging the inequalities inherent in the given opportunities to achieve.

The following extract from The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (a book that has had a lasting influence on me after I read it in the 1980s) provides insight into enduring attitudes and perspectives that have pervaded generations of the working class, and indeed supported the perpetuation of a ‘ruling’ class,

> From their infancy most of them have been taught by priests and parents to regard themselves and their own class with contempt – a sort of lower animals – and to regard those who possess wealth with veneration, as superior beings. The idea that they are really human creatures, naturally absolutely the same as their so called betters, naturally equal in every way, naturally different from them only in those ways in which their so call superiors differ from each other, and inferior to them only because they have been deprived of education, culture and opportunity…..you know as well as I do that they have been taught to regard that idea as preposterous (Tressell, 1985, p.521)

Whilst Tressell suggested that the lack of education was a reason for working class compliance to their 'superiors', it is noted that the introduction and growth of state funded education for all, over the last century, might be considered to have maintained the status quo rather than offering a challenge to it – these are themes investigated in this study.

1.2.1 Early influences: family and school

Like Reay (2017) I grew up on a council estate from the age of 7 years old and was a free school meal (FSM) pupil[1] throughout my education. Ours was a traditional working-class family; neither parent having experienced schooling beyond the age of 15 years, though with some extended family members modelling what Jackson and Marsden might consider middle-class dispositions. My parents were very young when they married in 1958 – my mother only 17 years old and father 22 years old. This was in contrast with a national average of 25 and 28 years respectively for that time (ONS 2020a). By the time my mother was 23 she was managing three children under 4 years old, having had 4 children in the space of 5 years and having lost one in a tragic accident at the age of 2 years old. She was a full-time housewife and my father a builder. This 'model' of working-class life replicated that of their parents and was to provide a blueprint for the expectations imposed upon me. It was also to lead to a degree of conflict and tension, reflected in wider society, as traditional values, particularly those related to gender roles, were increasingly contested in society, and as I too began to question my own lot in life.

Unlike Reay's experience however, there was little political consciousness in my family and voicing any independent views or perspectives was very much discouraged, with a strong emphasis on conformity and children 'being seen and not heard'. Whilst there was most definitely a strong work ethic there was no expectation that this should lead me into further or higher education. These expectations were communicated at home via words and deeds and were both explicit and subliminal, with these two modes affording strong mutual reinforcement. I knew I was expected to work hard at school and do my best, to be well behaved and do as I was told – and whilst it was recognised that I was 'bright', it was also clear that I should not get 'ideas above my station', as I would be expected to contribute to the family income as soon as I left school. A work ethic was fostered from a very early age and older siblings and I all engaged in some form of paid work whilst at school, in my case working in a bed and breakfast in the school holidays from the age of 10, a fruit and vegetable stall at the age of 12 progressing to a Saturday job in a fashion shop at 15 years old.

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[1] Throughout this study the term pupil is used for those in school (with the exception of direct quotes) and the term student for those in post compulsory education

There was no access to books or newspapers in the home and few learning resources to stimulate thoughts and opinions, with my parents taking a non-critical and deferential approach to schooling; teachers knew best and were not to be questioned. This was probably a typical experience for many children from working class homes, and a reflection of their internalisation of the broader structural inequalities and disparities of the time and context, as opposed to a conscious bid to prevent me from improving myself. And, of course, the very concept of 'improving' oneself implies a deficit and rejection of family 'roots' – something that created further tension and much personal angst following my teenage years.

My experiences at home were reflected at school. Very few, if any, opportunities were provided that might have supported developing alternative ideas and viewpoints to those being reinforced. Compliance and obedience were valued at school just as at home and asking any questions beyond those directly related to subject content resulted in being regarded as impudent or challenging and generally led to being reprimanded or disciplined.

Overall, my recollections of school are mixed. I do have some positive memories and know I was considered 'clever', though even this positive label seemed to be qualified as 'clever for someone at this school' or 'clever for someone from your background'. Another similarity with Reay (2017) is that I have strong memories of the injustices experienced in school and the belittling humiliations – the corporal punishment which was meted out on an ad hoc basis and used as a tool for control as well as reprimand, the withholding of lunches for minor misdemeanours, the embarrassing interruptions to classes as the milk monitor distributed milk to the 'free school meal' children and teaching was actually halted until the recipients had dutifully drank their daily quota. This list could go on, indicative of the lasting legacy of social stigmas and educational inequalities that were reproduced with little thought yet profound consequences.

It is not of course, unusual for adults to reflect on their school experiences and consider how these influenced their later years and life choices and thus I have hesitated to include too many anecdotal ‘incidents’ here. It is also important to consider the potential furnishing of those incidents with additional emotional weight as time has moved on. However, there are some experiences that are illuminating – they are recalled with great clarity and profoundly influenced my developing consciousness, shaping my thinking and undoubtedly impacting on my career within education. Hence, I have chosen to include a selection of these experiences here, italicised below to distinguish as short vignettes.

Incident 1 – The Writing Competition in Junior School

Considered a ‘bright’ child I was top of the class in many subjects and in particular I loved the creative writing side of English lessons. As an avid reader too I had taken to getting the bus every Saturday to a public library outside of the estate (in the days when it was not considered inappropriate for a 10-year-old to be doing such things independently). Like many children at that time Enid Blyton’s Famous Five series was popular and I devoured all of them and many others of that ilk. Reading and writing went hand in hand as reading sparked my imagination to write my own stories. When the writing competition came up at school I recall being particularly excited and worked for weeks on my submission; a story about a circus complete with illustrations, all handwritten and carefully coloured in.

When I was called to the Headteachers office I recall being utterly bewildered when I was asked what book I had copied my story from. She was aware of my library trips and assumed I had copied the story I had submitted for the competition. No amount of protestation could convince her that I had not ‘cheated’. I recall being told that it was not possible that I had written it myself as it was ‘too good’ for someone of my age. I was disqualified from the competition despite vociferously pleading my innocence, and in trouble then for lying as well as cheating. Despite none of the staff being able to identify a book I had copied from and being put under much pressure to ‘own up’ I refused to say I had made up the story when I knew I had not. I had a very strong sense of right and wrong and I would not admit to something I hadn’t done. Today, parents would have been involved but it was different then and many families, like mine, were reluctant to ‘interfere’ in what happened at school. My English teacher offered quiet comforting comments but I recall feeling quite betrayed by him too as I felt he should have at least known what I was capable of and stood up for me. The *frustration and upset I felt about not being believed and my story being disqualified was hard to overcome. But it was the longer-term impact that really mattered. I understood something that I hadn't before; that it was irrelevant what I did or how hard I tried, as there were fixed expectations of what I could and couldn't do and this was deeply unfair. It is perhaps not surprising that fairness is an important value to me and this relates also to the expectations we have of all children within our schools and recognition that not all parents are able to be advocates for their children. This has undoubtedly shaped my thinking and actions as a schoolteacher and leader and also as teacher educator.*

Incident 2 – The Elusive Bird Table

The second experience impacted more on my understanding of gender inequality within the school system and developed my understanding that there were schools for some and schools for others, opportunities for some and not for others. Whilst this experience might be considered insignificant, it really impacted on my thinking, sowing the seeds of my developing perspective about equality in education and beyond, and in particular different curriculum provision in relation to gender.

Like other children in the 1970s I was very much aware of things that I was allowed and not allowed to do as a girl, in comparison to boys. For example, in the last year of junior school, aged 12, we had an option choice in the curriculum to take either needlework, cookery, woodwork or metalwork. I already knew what I would be doing as I was keen to build a bird table in woodwork that was superior to my brothers' efforts of a previous year. However, it was not to be. On my option form there was just two choices, either needlework or cookery and on the boys form their choices were woodwork or metalwork. Despite questioning this and requesting to be in the woodwork group, much to the chagrin and exasperation of my teachers, I was swiftly put in the needlework group. I recall expressing my dismay with this and asking for a reason I was not able to do woodwork. There was no discussion, no explanation and only the threat of harsh punishment should I cause further 'trouble' or ask about it again.

Incident 3 – Selecting Upper School

It was the selection of my upper school (secondary) that really raised my consciousness of more inequalities. On the estate I lived in children went to primary school until 8 years old, *then junior school and then upper/secondary school from 13 – 16 years (equivalent to Years 9-11 today). Like now, parents had to put down the options of Upper School for their child in rank order. It seemed there was no real option for me as I would be going to the secondary school all children went to on my estate. Until it became obvious that some had another choice; boys had a further option to apply for the naval school in the city which was held in high regard.*

Deciding I would like to have the opportunity to apply for this too I asked at school why it wasn't on my option form. This was met with a mixture of amusement and derision and a response around the fact that I was a girl and girls were not allowed in the naval school. Feeling indignant about this and having discussed this great unfairness with other girls we set up a petition and duly canvassed all girls in the year group to sign it. We had a good response and it caused a degree of 'trouble' as pupil voice was not a feature of schooling at that time. When I took the petition to the Headteacher I was duly reprimanded for causing trouble though we were eventually given a response to the petition. The reason girls could not apply for the naval school was that it only had toilet facilities for boys. Whilst this was intended to close the debate, we then suggested it would be easy to build girls toilets or divide them. At that point the Headteacher shut the debate down, threatening disciplinary action if 'this nonsense was not immediately stopped'.

It should be acknowledged that I hadn't particularly wanted to go to a naval school but had sensed the injustice of some having opportunities that others did not have. It was again related to gender and these experiences undoubtedly shaped my developing views on education and the opportunities and experiences that some children have and others don't. This also related to the structure and organisation of schools and significantly marked the recognition that some were afforded different opportunities by virtue of the type of school they were able to attend. This is a theme I take up in Chapter 4.

These experiences, and denial of the opportunities to develop voice and agency, perhaps typical of many schools at this time, certainly influenced my own vision for classroom practice as a teacher and school leader, and in particular drew me to the ideas of Freiberg (1996) and his notion of pupils as tourists or citizens in the classroom[2].

Whilst my experience of school as a pupil was very much as a tourist my vision for schools as a teacher and school leader was very much to develop citizens. This experience resonates with Bourdieu's theory of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and, in particular, Navarro's (2006:16) explanation of how it is shaped in social circumstances:

> Habitus is created through a social, rather than individual process leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Habitus 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period.

The inequalities I became aware of were not only perpetuated by schools and institutions. My experience is that the combination of parental deference to teachers and traditional expectations supported the perpetuation of differential educational outcomes. The absence of challenge from some parents enabled low expectations and poor educational experiences of some pupils to go unchallenged and unchecked. For me, this led to further frustrations and a growing understanding of inequality within the school system. In my own career, the experience and recognition that some parents will not challenge the school and the subsequent lack of advocacy for some children, further influenced my own practice as a teacher and leader in schools that I chose to work in – schools serving socio-economically marginalised communities.

My school experience was no doubt not untypical of that time. What might have been untypical was my family circumstance which influenced my time in and out of school during this period. My family life was characterised by the instability of marital relations and family divisions throughout my childhood, at a time when such things were greatly stigmatised. By the time I was 7 years old, and still the youngest child, I had attended several different primary schools and barely remember being settled in one. Following my parents' divorce, my mother's subsequent remarriage and the arrival of twins, I had become the middle child of five. By the time I was 12 years old neither of my natural parents were living in the home on the council estate, which meant I had substantial responsibility for my younger siblings, impacting on my own schooling and any parental involvement in it. There was significant stigma attached to a family where the mother had 'deserted her children'. While it might have been more common for fathers to abscond from their families, for a mother to do so, leaving 3 of her older children with someone who was not their own father (her second husband) and 2 small toddlers not yet at school, was far less common, and very much frowned upon. Critically, it is interesting as an adult to reflect on the fact that even today women who leave their families are judged very differently to men who do the same – a further instance of the themes at the heart of this thesis, in terms of the tenacity of injustice and inequality and the challenges facing those championing progressive values, social justice and educational change.

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[2] Freiberg argued that secondary schools in particular were often teacher centred with a focus on teacher control, in contrast to school systems based on trust and support. As a result pupils, and parents, were often 'tourists' in the school, visitors without a sense of belonging, commitment or involvement, as opposed to 'citizens' who were more actively involved and had a sense of ownership of the school experience.

Whilst today, a situation like that might attract the attention of school and trigger external involvement or support, at that time there was an unwritten rule of presenting a pretence of normality in order to avoid the unwelcome attention of school welfare officers or social services. Whilst the situation is very different today, and schools and associated support services are used to dealing with a range of family circumstances, there are still many examples in schools of encountering pupils who are reluctant to share the realities of their home experiences, and this of course impacts on their potential for educational achievement. In the 1970s, the provision of free school meals seemed the only tangible support for working class families and even this was often administered in a way that focussed unwanted attention on the recipient child.

These experiences very much influenced my practice as a teacher, though it was not until I became a school leader that I felt I had any real influence on school policy and practice. At the start of my teaching career, as a teacher of History and Sociology, I felt I had limited influence on pastoral issues beyond how I managed my own classroom. Later as I became Head of Department and later still as I moved to become Head of a Humanities Faculty I had more autonomy over my area of the school, and in operationalising school policy. In addition to my role as Head of Humanities Faculty, I also had a whole school responsibility for equal opportunities and this gave me more of a voice at a senior level. The school was at the bottom of the league tables, had a pupil population that was very diverse (around 97% from black minority ethnic communities) and was an all-boys school that became co-educational while I was there. However, it was undoubtedly in my role as a school leader, as Deputy Head with responsibility for pastoral issues, that I was able to exert most influence on policy and practice. This was at a time when teaching was very much considered a ‘middle class profession’ and there seemed to be few fellow teachers who had a lived experience of the deprivation and social issues that many of our pupils faced. For me, my reflections on my own habitus and my navigation of childhood experiences supported my understanding as a teacher of those pupils facing complex home situations and how these can create barriers to learning and achievement. I am not suggesting that the absence of such challenging experiences prevents teachers supporting pupils, but the lived experience of similar situations is perhaps an advantage in understanding the potential impact of living in such contexts. I shall address these ideas later on in this chapter as I reflect on my early teaching career.

So, my early teenage years (12 – 15) saw me navigate the unchartered territory of living in a house with neither of my natural parents, or my older sister and having significant responsibility for caring for my two younger siblings. It was both functional and dysfunctional, as an effort to maintain the façade of normal family and school life was attempted alongside very abnormal circumstances and frequent disruption. At 15 years old the family was again split up and this time it involved being separated from all my siblings. I was sent to live with my mother on the other side of the city to my school, to live in a house in an area condemned as slum dwellings – complete with an outside toilet, no bathroom, damp and unheated rooms. This new living situation, and in particular being separated from the younger siblings had a significant impact on me and on my school life. The only way I could get to school now was to get two buses, one into the city and one out the other side. It is perhaps not surprising that my schoolwork suffered and, with other factors at play, I failed all but two of my O-Levels. I seemed to be on track to fulfilling the expectations, regularly articulated by some of my teachers, that I should go and work at one of the factories of the two big employers in the city at that time, Reckitt & Colman and Birds Eye. However, I had other experiences and influences that provided a contrast to my daily life on the council estate. Throughout my childhood I spent the majority of school holidays with my maternal grandparents, who had a small farm on the east coast. They were not affluent farmers and lived very modestly. My grandfather was from a farming family in Hull while my grandmother was one of 8 children whose father worked on the trawlers in what was to become Hull's thriving fishing industry. Following the death of her father at sea in 1915 (his ship sinking within three minutes of colliding with another trawler) my grandmother, aged 12, went to work 'in service', while some of her siblings were sent to the Seamen's and General Orphanage in Hull. Whilst my grandparents had both experienced poverty, and had not had schooling beyond their early years, they made a steady living on the farm, albeit living in a cottage with minimal facilities. I still recall my grandmother talking of her shame that they were the last house in the village to have a water closet toilet fitted, and her pride during the late 1970s, when this flushable feat of engineering was eventually fitted (albeit still outside) and the sewage collection visits ended.

Opportunities to stay on the farm provided a haven and much needed stability. Whilst traditional values prevailed I had much less responsibility and was allowed the freedom that was not afforded at home, giving me space to develop more independence and find my voice. Listening to the news was a daily feature at my grandparents and this provided some awakening to events going on in the country. However, this also led to a growing internal conflict; it was becoming clearer that my own emerging views and beliefs were not in alignment with many in my family.

I seemed to occupy two worlds, feeling like I belonged to neither; on the one hand the council estate and low expectations of those who lived there and on the other the farm near to those relatives who fitted more neatly into Jackson and Marsden's description of the respectable working class who had done well enough to buy their own homes. Spending time with these family members contrasted starkly to living on the large council estate and exposed me to different ways of living and different influences. However, what characterised both settings was a traditional view of life and lack of any political radicalism. I recall how it was such a source of embarrassment to some family members that my siblings and I were children of 'a broken home' and lived on a council estate, when they owned their own homes, enjoyed annual holidays and the trappings of a 'middle class' lifestyle that they aspired to. This source of embarrassment was exacerbated by the continuing family upheavals during my teenage years and compounded my inner antagonisms.

Fairness and equality were (and still are) my bugbear. My experiences at home and school had already given me an understanding of inequities in society and education, and this was manifested in a growing social and political consciousness. To take just one example, of gender, I was questioning the differences I saw at school in terms of experiences, expectations and curriculum (I had really wanted to build that bird table rather than do sewing!) and was regularly chastised for making comments and observations that were considered to be ‘causing trouble’. At home this was reflected in the perpetuation of very traditional gender roles underpinned by clear differences in expectations – firmly adhered to and validated it seemed by everyone but myself. Whilst this was perhaps not untypical of this time it just felt wholly unfair and wrong, with no rationale offered that seemed remotely acceptable.

At this time there was much coverage of women’s rights and the role of women in society and whilst I was not aware of these laws at the time, the impact of the 1970 Sex Discrimination Act and 1975 Equal Opportunities Act were being discussed in the news programmes I saw at my grandparents. These ideas really resonated with me though in my wider family the very notion that women might do the same jobs as men, and indeed be paid the same for doing so, was considered quite ridiculous. It became clear I would have a job on my hands to convince my family that I had ideas beyond getting married at 18 and settling down to become a wife and mother. I do recall however, that in a quiet way, so as not to upset the family status quo, my grandmother would offer reassuring words that indicated her tacit agreement with my views despite her not feeling she could articulate them herself; she was an ally who quietly encouraged me, even when my grandfather opposed me going to university because I was of an age to ‘settle down’. And of course, it is not particularly surprising that changing attitudes towards gender in wider society were reflected in families like mine with deep rooted traditional values; conflict and tensions in society are manifested in the hearts and minds of its citizens who constitute that society. Gender equality, and the wider equality agenda, was to become core to my value system providing a guide with which to approach all areas of life, and further reinforced by avid reading of feminist writers including Sally Cline and Dale Spender whose 1987 publication – Reflecting Men at Twice Their Natural Size – supported my understanding of the power of patriarchy and the collusion of many men and women with it. It is worth noting though that whilst I shifted away from some of the traditional values and notions I was brought up with the subsequent tensions and feeling of being at odds with some of my family persists and often requires careful navigation. Understanding this has also very much influenced my views and practice; the idea that 'bright' children might be 'socially mobile' through educational success, without a social cost, might be contested, but the larger issue is around the selection practices within our educational system that deem some bright and others not, which perpetuates inequalities in society. This is a theme I take up in Chapters 4-6.

1.2.2 The journey into higher education: first in family

On failing my O-levels I enrolled on a secretarial course in the school 6th form, taking typing and shorthand. Reflecting on this choice it is perhaps easy to assume my understanding of gender equality was rather limited at this time though it was duly noted there were no boys in the class. However, there were very few options other than to leave school to get a full-time job and something was stopping me doing that, despite the opportunities provided by the well-known city factories that recruited so well from my school.

And it is also worth noting a significant influence at that time; my previous form tutor who on reflection may have engineered those chance meetings where she took the opportunity to encourage me to re-take my O-levels and apply for A-levels at the city's further education (FE) college; whilst other teachers may have acknowledged I had academic ability she was the only one who clearly expressed an expectation that I should do something with it. At the FE college my understanding of inequalities in society deepened. Whilst the FE college itself was attended by students from all backgrounds, the A-level programme I had enrolled on seemed to have attracted those from 'middle class' schools from across the city and those from independent schools. Thus, I was in classes with students from very different backgrounds to myself and at the time perhaps failed to acknowledge that this was because most of those from schools like mine were not progressing to A-levels. Whilst my classes were generally positive it became clear that some students had very different experiences to my own and had access to much greater resources, exemplified not only in relation to the academic requirements of the programme but in the social and cultural opportunities these students clearly had. Thus, some students had a double disadvantage of not having access to resources and opportunities that others were able to access, like additional study resources and private tutoring, but also had to undertake paid work to support their studies, reducing the possible time and energy allocated to that study and potentially affecting outcomes.

In addition, I also became conscious of a degree of deference that some lecturers afforded to students from well-known ‘business’ families, and I recall this not sitting well with me as I believed all students should be respected equally – this perhaps contributed to a growing recognition during this period that inequality is not simply the result of overt discrimination but also due to more covert practices that serve to create barriers to opportunities and achievement. It was also at this FE college that I met someone who was to become a life-long friend who lived in a very middle-class, upmarket suburb of the city. I remember vividly getting the bus to visit her house for the first time and being astonished to see the size of some of the houses and gardens – it was through my visits there that I was exposed to a very different way of living, and this further served to magnify the disparities in living conditions and resources between different social groups.

There were several barriers to progression I faced during this time, that have had a lasting impact in my memory, which I am ever mindful of as these barriers are still present today for some young people. The family opposition to continuing my education, pressure to contribute to the family income and inability to support further study, was countered by my continuing part time work in a fashion shop and also a public house; like many others my family had been affected by unemployment which at this time, in the early 1980s, was almost at 12% for those over 16, the highest it has ever been in this country (ONS, 2020b). As well as financial barriers, the application process to get onto a higher education programme seemed very complex as did the application for maintenance grants – this also required some parental input that there was initially a reluctance to give. The support for finding accommodation was poor with few places available in halls of residence and there was an expectation that parents would manage the process of finding alternative accommodation. I still recall the day trip to Manchester, my first time travelling out of Hull alone, and the number of squalid rooms I looked at until I eventually secured a room I considered decent enough! The salutary point here though is that these types of issues, no doubt put many young people off applying to HE through what is arguably a process of mystification; whilst many young people may find such processes straightforward, others are not equipped with the necessary ‘tools’ to navigate this.

It was at the FE college to some extent but more specifically within higher education (HE), that I recognised I lacked quite a few of these tools; gaps in my knowledge and abilities that other students demonstrated confidently, both in class and in social settings. Bourdieu (1977) refers to these tools as social and cultural capital; the social connections and relationships that are fostered out of shared identity and understanding, and the knowledge, academic credentials, possessions or experiences people are able to draw upon. Essentially, those in possession of these forms of capital, in positions of influence and authority, support the advancement of those they recognise as having the very same attributes – as possessing the same capital – as themselves. On my degree programme, a BA (Hons) in Humanities and Social Science (specialising in Politics and History) it certainly seemed to me that other students had a much broader understanding of the world, including a greater awareness of social, cultural and political issues, and a language that was shared by our tutors.

My experience of HE demonstrated the importance of language and in particular the extent and sophistication of vocabulary and articulation. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977:73) refer to ‘linguistic capital’ as part of cultural capital indicating the significance of this in education.

> The influence of linguistic capital, particularly manifest in the first years of schooling when the understanding and use of language are the major points of leverage for teachers' assessments, never ceases to be felt: style is always taken into account, implicitly or explicitly, at every level of the educational system and, to a varying extent, in all university careers, even scientific ones. Moreover, language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family

This resonates greatly with me. It also echoes what Bernstein (1971) referred to as the restricted and elaborated codes; the former being characterised by a limited vocabulary, a non-standard kind of speech shorthand developed through familiarity, and the latter being more sophisticated vocabulary and speech. The idea that a restricted code of language can be crudely attributed to the working class and an elaborated code to the middle class is contested, with Ivinson (2018, p.539) arguing that ‘Bernstein’s disquiet can be sensed in many places across his work where he explicitly renounced a deficit model'. Snell (2013, p.110) suggests that

> it is not the presence or absence of non-standard forms in children's speech that raises educational issues; rather, educational responses which problematize non-standard voices risk marginalising working-class speech, and may contribute to the alienation of working-class children, or significant groups of them, within the school system

This perspective is reflected in Heath's work on language development in different communities (1983) and similarly Reay (2017) argues that schools simply do not value working class knowledge and culture, rather foregrounding the cultural capital of the middle classes – I would argue this includes language and extends to further and higher education (HE). My experience of HE whilst positive overall was also characterised by the dread of being put on the spot in seminars where, unlike in lectures, I could not be anonymous and make notes of terms to look up later but had to be immediately responsive to questions and topics of discussions that it was presumed I had a background knowledge of.

These considerations about language have influenced my own perspectives on education whilst also increasing my own consciousness in terms of how I teach, write and communicate. Hence, it could be argued that the impact of social relationships I experienced in school – the preponderance of middle-class teachers with associated social and cultural capital – were amplified in FE and HE and impacted on my development as a teacher and later as a teacher educator.

1.2.3 Becoming a teacher and school leader

My journey as a teacher began in 1987. The one-year Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) I started then was very different to the current PGCE qualification for initial teacher education. Firstly, there were fewer routes into teaching at this time and the nature of the PGCE programme was different, for example it did not include master's level components and the two placements were just six weeks long each. Secondly training to be a teacher in the late 1980s was against a backdrop of significant social, economic and political change, and whilst this might still be the case today the 1980s was different due to the specific context of that time.

My experience of the PGCE and training to be a teacher were very much influenced by my own pre-conceptions of what teaching involved, developed during my time as a school pupil and the many years of observing my own teachers in practice. Lortie (1975) suggests training to be a teacher is different to training in other professions as all those training to be a teacher already have broad experience of being in the classroom, just in a different role. They have undergone an 'apprenticeship of observation' as a pupil which might have generated preconceptions, or even mistaken assumptions, that they know what a teacher's role is – of course, they have only observed the visible element of the iceberg, to draw an analogy, and not what is submerged, in this case the vast plethora of unseen activities that are essential to the teacher's role.

Whilst Lortie (1975) argues this may influence the training of teachers, as they may well default to what they have observed during their years as a pupil, my own experiences as a school pupil had led to a strong consciousness around the inequalities that exist. This growing consciousness, developed from the ongoing reflections on my own experiences, might be considered – referring to the terminology of Paulo Freire – as a process of conscientization, that Lawton (2022, p.50) describes as

> the process of moving from naive or passively received understandings of self, others, and the world to more critical and active understandings, of moving from partialized or focalized views of reality to a more total and contextual view of reality

This 'conscientization' was further developed through my experiences in further and higher education and was to become a driving force behind my practice and developing perspectives on the education system.

My interest in the nature of our education system developed further as I undertook my PGCE. Whilst my views on the independent sector had evolved within my degree programme, via debates in and out of class, my views on the state system were further developed by the two school placements I completed as a student teacher – the first in a highly challenging comprehensive school that later gained notoriety in a television programme as one of the worst schools in England, and a second placement in a secondary modern school for those pupils who had 'failed' the eleven plus exam and hence not secured a place at the neighbouring grammar school[3]. In both schools I was struck by the low expectations teachers had of the pupils and the nature of conversations that some had, often denigrating the pupil population with those teachers seemingly confident that I would share their views, with the assumption that I was from a very different background and school myself. This was both challenging and illuminating, serving to consolidate some of my emerging views, with my experience in the secondary modern school particularly provoking further questioning of the inequalities inherent in the state education system (examined in Chapter 4).

Following the PGCE I moved 'down south' for my first teaching post, in what was considered a 'challenging' school on a council estate. Perhaps somewhat naively, and influenced by my own experiences, I was determined to contest the inequalities I observed, by, for example, becoming involved in the national programme to tackle gender inequality in schools. However, it soon became apparent that I had become a part of a large school community and the extent of what I could achieve on wider school issues as an individual was limited. Beyond my role as a school union representative there were some limited opportunities to question school policy and practice via department meetings and staff meetings, some of which provided opportunities for debate and discussion, but these seemed driven also by information giving/sharing rather than real debate or discussion on wider educational issues. Debate on emerging trends, for example, the shift from mixed ability classrooms to setting, was discussed but with most critical voices confined to the corners of the staffroom to avoid been labelled as a 'radical'. On reflection, I wonder how much feedback from these staff meetings actually influenced school policy and practice or how much the opportunities to give feedback simply provided a 'safety-valve' for staff to feel they were having a say and release pressure, in much the same way as many pupil-based school councils often do. Hence, we might question if teacher voice is actually any more powerful than pupil voice when set against imposed government policy (examined in Chapters 5 and 6).

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[3] Grammar schools and secondary modern schools originated from the Tripartite system which was established in 1944. This referred to three types of state-funded secondary school that children attended based on the results of the 11+ examination. 'Academic' pupils who 'passed' the 11+ exam attended grammar schools, 'technical' pupils would attend technical schools, and all others attended secondary modern schools. In reality very few technical schools were built and in most areas of the country there a two-tier system emerged, that is still in existence in some areas of the country (examined in Chapter 4).

It was as my career developed and I moved into promoted positions that I began to recognise the external constraints imposed on schools and question the level of autonomy that even school leaders had. During my role as a Head of Humanities Faculty and Equal Opportunities Coordinator I became very aware of the impact of Ofsted[4] inspections and the consequences of a growing focus on performativity. The school I was in at this time was considered a difficult school to work in, in terms of the diversity of intake with high proportions of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL), and many receiving free school meals (FSM). The school intake was highly multicultural, with only around 3% of the school being classified as White British[5] and had increasing numbers of refugees during my time there. The school sought to be inclusive and welcoming and was committed to supporting pupils academically and on a personal and social level. Whilst it was a ‘challenging’ environment it was a school I thrived in. However, it was here that I struggled to make sense of external policy that seemed to ignore the incredible achievements of very disadvantaged pupils and judged them (and the school) solely on their ability to pass exams. Many of our pupils made incredible progress, with some learning to speak English at the same time as trying to study for GCSEs, and whilst the school ‘added value’[6] the exam results were not going to compare with those of schools with less diverse intakes. It seemed grossly unfair to be placed publicly at the bottom of national examination league tables when the school was incredibly successful by other measures.

Later, as a Deputy Headteacher in another school that included a high number of pupils with SEN, behaviour related issues and pupils receiving FSMs, the ‘value-added’ details of schools were published but it was still the school percentage of (at that time) 5 GCSE A*-Cs that made more compelling headlines and resulted in the school being labelled as failing to achieve national standards. At this school I experienced first-hand working in an institution that was compared negatively with the high achieving ‘middle-class’ school a couple of miles away, and the detrimental impact of competition between schools. This was manifested in issues related to parental and community support, lower levels of funding and resources, teacher recruitment and retention, and indeed teacher and pupil engagement and perceptions of the school. It was interesting (and concerning) to note that as this school improved significantly during an intense programme of initiatives to support teaching, learning and positive behaviours, many of those in the wider community were still reluctant to acknowledge the school had changed and indeed the local press continued to take every opportunity to undermine the school with the same level of determination that it took to valorise the other local secondary. It was to take an intense focus on positive ‘marketing’ to change this, including inviting parents, community figures and the press to take tours of the school and classrooms during the school day so they could see teachers and pupils in action for themselves. This experience really highlighted to me the systemic inequalities within the education system and the detrimental impact that labelling a school has on whole school community, that is perpetuated and publicised with little consideration of the effect on the pupils who attend it.

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[4] This is the Office for Standards in Education – responsible for inspecting the quality of educational provision.

[5] It is acknowledged here that there are issues of using such broad categories, for example they do not distinguish between specific individuals and groups.

[6] Value-added is a measure of progress pupils make over a period of time, taking into account their starting points and comparing their progress to similar pupils – it is considered a fairer assessment of progress than overall examination results.

It was in this same school that I became acting headteacher prior to my emigration to Australia and this role cemented my views on the adhocery (Ball 1993) of government policy, and subsequent local authority policy, related to league tables and performativity, with one incident in particular illuminating the problematic nature of this. Following a forensic analysis of key stage four pupils and likely achievement in GCSEs, including value added, I felt thoroughly prepared for a meeting with the local authority to set the schools target percentage of 5 A*-C grades, the performance measurement at that time. However, this analysis was deemed irrelevant as I was informed that I simply needed to improve on the previous year’s results by several percentage points – an upward trajectory was required regardless of the individual make-up of the year group. My protestations that this was impossible, given the year group had a particularly high number of pupils with special educational needs that impacted on their ability to reach A*-C grades, was ignored and a target figure was imposed. Essentially the school was being set up to fail and to bear the consequences of that – this was a very sobering moment of understanding that whatever we might do as a school and however proud we might be of the achievements of our pupils, it was not enough, and it was experiences like this that have invariably impacted on my perceptions of the current performativity culture that is examined in Chapter 6.

1.2.4 Becoming a Teacher Educator

Whilst throughout my career I have been involved in teacher education, I had not planned to leave the school environment to pursue a career as a teacher educator, this happened more by circumstance than by design, following a period of living in Australia, where I worked on ITE programmes at a university there. The transition to higher education from a school environment was much more challenging than I had imagined it would be. As a schoolteacher I had been a mentor and then as a school leader I was involved in setting up a Graduate Teacher Programme with other schools in the region, and did a lot of teaching on it, which I both enjoyed and valued. As such, I had some experience of working with student teachers prior to moving into HE, but even so the shift into HE proved challenging. Early on in my HE career, as Head of Programme for the PGCE secondary programme, my recent teaching and senior leadership experience felt like a strength in my work with student teachers and schools, but tensions around identity soon emerged – I was no longer a schoolteacher or leader yet neither did I feel part of the academic community at the university, as I didn't have a doctorate or publications. Completing a master's degree was instrumental in me reflecting on my previous practice with student teachers. The more reading and research I engaged in the more I realised how the sessions I had led in school with student teachers were very much practice or training based and lacked significant academic underpinning. This marked a shift for me in both my thinking and practice, which supported further critical reflection on my own experiences of education, as both a pupil, teacher and teacher educator. I recognised that whilst in school I had focussed mostly on that specific school and had perhaps developed a fatalistic approach to education policy that saw me question *how* to implement it rather than to ask *why* I should implement it. Whilst in my role at university, particularly as Head of Initial Teacher Education, I have experienced some of the same issues as schools, for example, in relation to government policy and accountability. However, I have also had the opportunity to work with colleagues in a broader range of schools and different educational institutions and organisations (regional, national and international). This has exposed me to different ideas and perspectives that I have been able to critically reflect on, further supporting me in making sense of my own experiences and serving as a provocation to investigate education policy more broadly.

1.2.5 Concluding thoughts on personal reflection

It is important to acknowledge that this personal reflection is my lived experience and not necessarily a reflection of others from working class backgrounds, though these experiences are likely not so atypical and may resonate with others. As indicated in section 1.2 above, being working class is not a homogeneous experience – there are complexities related to social class and understanding is needed that being working class means different things to different people; identity is very personal. The legacy of my own school and family life have influenced my thoughts, views and world view and led to a strong sense of social justice that is integral to who I am. During my career the inequalities that some children experience have been at the forefront of my thinking and practice. These relate to the type of school they attend, the curriculum they have access to and the opportunities they have to succeed and achieve, given the challenges that many disadvantaged children face. The recent COVID-19 health crisis further exposed inequalities in society – not least the gross disparity in resources that some children had access to for their schooling – and this has also contributed to developing my thinking, raising questions about the very nature of our education system and the policies that are the foundation of it. Thus, the importance of giving some consideration here to the discourse around the purpose of education – what it is for and who it serves – that can then be drawn upon in later chapters. This is examined in the section below.

1.3 What is education for and who does it serve?

The purpose of education is complex and contested. Dominant perceptions around the purpose of education may be viewed to some extent through discourse[7] inherent in the most recent White Papers (DfE 2010, DfE 2016, DfE 2022a) that have aimed to set out the Conservative government vision for the education system. In a post-COVID world, that exposed such differentials between children from different social backgrounds (for example, access to food, space, technology, support) it is not surprising that the 2022 White Paper states the need to 'improve children's education, deliver the right support if they fall behind and give them the tools to lead a happy, fulfilled and successful life' (DfE 2022a, p.4). This implies the importance of both the social and economic purposes of education whilst also giving a proverbial 'nod' to current concerns about children's wellbeing and happiness. However, the statement about giving support if children fall behind (referencing the impact of COVID-19) exposes the assumptions that lie behind such discourse. The government acknowledge that some children are disadvantaged[8] but expects the education system to address this rather than adopt policy to tackle the real inequalities in society, thus implying that the purpose of education is to be a panacea for the 'ills' of society.

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[7] Examination/analysis of discourse underpins this study. Discourse in this respect refers to the narratives surrounding education policy, reflecting what Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p.1) suggest is 'a way of talking about and understanding the world, or an aspect of it' and what Ball (2008, p.7) argues enables us to 'mobilise truth claims and constitute, rather than simply reflect, social reality'. Examined more in section 2.2.3 below.

Whilst the 2016 White Paper is pre-COVID pandemic, which may account for the different tone, the government discourse around the purpose of education is consistent. The then Conservative Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan) stated that education should help children from all backgrounds 'shape their own destiny' and outlined the importance of education in 'preparing children to succeed in adult life in modern Britain', citing social justice and economic growth as significant in this endeavour (DfE 2016, p.5). This has been translated within schools into a focus on a knowledge-based curriculum and measure of performance via end of school examinations – discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 – at the expense of the development of practical and vocational skills. The reference to *all* children 'shaping their own destiny' reflects ongoing government discourse that it is the responsibility of children themselves to 'succeed', and simultaneously ignores the crucial influence of the very structures of the education system, like the existence of independent schools and grammar schools, that bestow advantage on some children at the expense of many others – and indeed serve as a reminder of the injustices and inequalities within the system. This statement also provides clues to the assumptions of these policy makers and the rhetoric they use as tools to legitimise their policy approach. It is perhaps significant that Nicky Morgan experienced the advantages of an independent school education herself, and also attended Oxford University, and as such is representative of other policy makers in the Conservative government that share similar experiences, beliefs and assumptions which – consciously or subconsciously – lead to the continuation of such injustices. She nevertheless cites the importance of social justice in the White Paper.

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[8] There are many interpretations of disadvantage. The DfE definition of disadvantage used in this study is pupils who are one of the following: eligible for Free School Meals in the last 6 years, looked after continuously for 1 day or more and aged 4-15, adopted from care. This definition excludes children looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements. The DfE definition is used to determine level of Pupil Premium support (additional funding given to schools to support disadvantaged pupils)

Tracing back through history, there are both continuities and discontinuities surrounding the purpose of education that current policy is contingent upon. Whilst many of those involved in education, including parents, might consider both the social and economic imperatives of our current education system, Ball (2008, p.14) argues the social purposes of education have been somewhat neglected in favour of a 'single, overriding emphasis on policy-making for economic competitiveness' – this view is borne out in the focus of the 2016 White Paper and perhaps more implied in the 2022 White Paper, given the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crucial exposure of the disadvantages that many children and young people experience because of their social class, things they do not have that are so essential for learning and achievement. Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.108) suggest the 'relationship between education and the economy has become inseparably woven' since the 1970s which marked a shift from the post-war reforms that saw such public services as a 'free-good'.

However, through analysing policy texts and discourse it is clear that a key purpose of education has always been to ensure the population is able to respond to local, national (and more recently international) economic demands – demands that have been socially and politically engineered and maintained – even though there have been disruptions to this over time, exemplified by the post-war focus on building public services for the general good of them (Garratt and Forrester, 2012) and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic that illuminated inequalities in schools and exposed the issues and barriers facing some children in education, like poverty and hunger (Holt and Murray 2022). At these moments in time alternative discourses, related to the wellbeing of the nation, were reflected in policy, representing interruptions to the economic imperative but not a full departure from it. In addition, these moments did not lead towards any real debate that might consider the purpose of education to be more than preparing children for a world that currently exists, reflecting the views of writers like Hannah Arendt (1954) who argue that whilst the aim of education is to serve the child, there is little account taken of their inner nature and needs.

An economic purpose of education can be seen as very limiting if it is the only purpose, but it is also problematic when the social class dimension is introduced, with the associated beliefs by some that the purpose of education and life 'destination' was different for different social classes. And within the social classes there were further beliefs about the purpose of education for males and females. Males from upper classes, and later middle classes, had access to private tutors and elite public schools for centuries (certainly since the 14th century when the first public schools were founded), the purpose of which was to equip them with an academic education and the 'tools' of power that would prepare them for future roles as leaders (in for example, government, law, business). Girls from such advantaged background were mostly tutored in the endeavours that would make them suitable wives and mothers with only few women having opportunities for more formal academic education (as indicated in section 2.3.2 on the First Wave of Feminism). Historically, it was not until the 1870 Education Act that all working class children (including girls) had the right to state organised education (Reay 2017) but this was only to a basic level and its primary purpose was to support social control. As Green (1990) indicated, the early English system was clearly about the dominant classes securing control over what were considered their subordinates. Concerns around social control were not new as Donald (1992, p.20) explained referring to the early 19th century, when Davies Giddy, a Tory MP, warned the House of Commons that education of the labouring classes would not only be too costly but would also enable them to read 'seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity', that might incite them to emulate revolution in Europe at that time. Whilst Giddy was concerned about potential uprisings of the labouring/working classes these views and assumptions endured and provide some understanding about the motivations around policy later that century and beyond into our own times. It is perhaps no coincidence that the current requirement to teach 'character' and 'British values' in state schools – demonstrating a continued focus on instilling compliance – gathered pace as governments had been 'discredited' through, for example, the financial crises of 2008 and 2011 which provoked the 2011 urban riots (Joyce 2013, p.5). Education as a 'tool' of social control thus continues even in a time when all citizens have social and political 'rights', and this exposes how policy makers are able to use their powers to attempt to 'shape' behaviours amounting to what Reay (2022, p.126) refers to as 'inuring the working classes to habits of obedience'. As Joyce comments, 'it is often the case that when we are most free it is when we are most governed' (2013, p.6).

This study is a feminist genealogy in terms of raising women's voices in the debates around education policy (explained in Chapter 3), and hence it would be remiss not to briefly acknowledge the underlying assumptions about the purpose of education for girls in the earlier state funded system that very much reflected a patriarchal society, and that our historical present is contingent upon. Whilst state funded secondary schools have generally been mixed (with the exception of some grammar schools) the segregation within them is a different matter. Social structures within these schools, as well as the curriculum, exposed the assumptions around the purpose of education for girls, particularly up to the 1980s. This can be illuminated by reference to section 1.2.1 of my personal reflection, where the curriculum experienced by girls like myself in the 1970s (e.g., needlework, cookery) indicated the purpose of education was to continue to prepare girls for future roles as wives and mothers. My own experience even included spending a week in a purpose built flat within the school where, on a limited budget, I had to prepare meals for school staff every day to demonstrate I had honed the ability to manage a household and look after its occupants – as would be my expected lot in life! It was not until the late 1980s that such assumptions were challenged more systematically in state schools, when initiatives like GenderWatch[9] sought to uncover and address the extent of gender stereotyping in education, in context of the second and third waves of feminism (outlined in Chapter 2). This might have resulted in the erosion of gender stereotyping, in terms of the published curriculum, but there are still challenges related to gender and equality in schools, and in wider society, as evidenced by continuing differentials in positions of power and unequal salary packages (Marren & Bazeley 2022) as well as more concerning trends of increasing misogyny and sexual harassment and abuse perpetuated within the pillars of establishment, like parliament and the Confederation of British Industry, and via social media (UK Parliament 2023).

Thus, historically education has been used as a tool to achieve different purposes for different social groups and in relation to gender, as indicated above, and essentially this is linked to power and patriarchy and an endeavour to maintain the status quo. This thesis traces the enduring threads of this discrimination in post-World War II England. This is examined in the following chapters as outlined below.

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[9] GenderWatch was an initiative in the 1980s that was based on a 'work book' – a project aimed at school teachers to identify gender issues in schools with a goal to expose and address gender issues inside the classroom and around the school. I was involved in this in the late 1980s but the actual resources are not available now.

1.4 Outline of the thesis: the current crisis and the four horsemen: centralising and decentralising agendas

This study aims to contextualise the current education ‘crisis’ through the lens of government education policy in four time periods following the second world war and will focus on what might be considered to be the proverbial ‘four horsemen’ of the education system: school organisation and structure, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education. Inherent in this is the tension between the rhetoric of policy and the practical application of it; the contradiction of both centralising and decentralising agendas that have characterised education policy of successive governments. Whilst an overt ‘play’ on the biblical reference to the four horseman of the apocalypse that pull in different directions (Revelations 6:2-8), and the allegorical struggle between good and evil, it might be considered that the four areas of policy that this thesis examines are also subject to struggle and contention. There are opposing perspectives on these four areas of educational policy that are investigated and whilst it is unhelpful to consider one perspective or another as good or evil, it is important to consider those who have or don’t have the power and influence in developing these policies and the voices that are not represented in the policy-making process. Not least the reference to ‘horsemen’ is a signifier of the patriarchal influence that has persisted over time and is currently being challenged by some. Hence the desire to include a focus on women’s voices, reflecting contemporary women who might have alternative perspectives.

Recent government policy on education has led to great upheaval in the sector, and this is analysed in relation to these ‘four horsemen’. Together with other current events, for example the COVID19 health crisis, which has shone a light on the importance of the school system, it might be argued that we are at a critical juncture in education. This premise, together with an interest in how women’s voices have contributed to education policy, has provided the stimulus for a feminist genealogical study and requirement to consider current policy in light of historic developments in education.

Fredric Jameson begins his book *The Political Unconscious* (1981) with the line 'always historicize' and this has relevance for this study. Successive Secretaries of State for Education, those in charge of policy direction, are often put in those positions for ideological reasons without any knowledge of that area until it becomes their remit. As Anthony Seldon (2020) suggests this can do 'immense damage' as 'Governments can arrive ignorant of the past, so repeat the same mistakes'. With the appointment of Gillian Keegan as the sixth Secretary of State for education since 2020 it is not surprising that accusations are levelled at the government of presiding over a 'carousel of education secretaries' during such a turbulent period in education, including the effects of the COVID19 pandemic together with a crisis in funding and the recruitment and retention of staff (Walker, 2022). Thus, the thesis is an interrogation of current policy in relation to these 'four horsemen', tracing the lines of present through past education policy and identifying continuities and discontinuities; what has been learned and what has not during this apparent 'experimentation' in education policy, within 'the social laboratory of neoliberal reforms' (Ball 2016, p.1047).

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 provides an examination of current and pertinent literature which is divided into two key sections, policy and feminism. Focusing on the literature in these two areas is key to this thesis, providing the context for subsequent chapters, where policy is analysed over four time periods and the absence of women's voices is contextualized, in respect to the social, economic and political position of women during those periods.

Following this, in Chapter 3 the research design strategy is discussed and justified. The study adopts a feminist genealogy approach. Reflecting Foucault's approach to genealogy, this approach seeks to problematize policy and discourse related to the four areas of education policy identified, adopting what Koopman (2013) refers to as three core features of problematization in genealogy – critique, contingency and complexity. Using these three Cs, dominant discourses related to the four areas of education policy is *critiqued* to consider how and why some discourses have proliferated over others and who or what has been excluded. The feminist aspect of this genealogy approach relates to this, exposing the absence of women in policy discourse and elevating the voices of women as a response to the historical context of male domination and patriarchy. Current policy is also analysed to consider its *contingency,* as by recognising *how* the present has been constructed exposes how current policy is based on a particular set of conditions – it is contingent rather than necessary – and thus enables consideration of different future possibilities. Finally, the *complexity* of issues around education policy is exposed with simplistic explanations and justifications for policy interrogated and problematized.

This choice of research approach resonates with my interest in history and genealogy. It is noted here that my own family genealogy, outlined in the above personal reflection – in particular the expectations and traditions passed on through generations in relation to social class and gender – perhaps provided the motivation to problematize policy and examine how education policy over time has been anchored to particular traditions and ideologies.

Chapter 3 also outlines the strategy for data collection and analysis. Two main data sets are examined, firstly a range of documentation on the four areas of education that have been identified, including key policies and literature, and second the data gathered from interviews with seven women, which provides the perspectives from women who currently play, or have played, a leading role in the national commentary about education. This data is scrutinised through abductive analysis, an iterative process moving back and forth between data and theory, enabling me to gain new knowledge and perspectives. The chapter also outlines ethical considerations.

The subsequent analytic chapters examine and problematize the four areas of education policy that are focussed on in this study – school organisation and structures, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education – in four time periods as follows:

- post second world war (1945-1979)
- the Thatcher years (1979-1997)
- the New Labour years (1997-2010)
- post 2010 to present.

These chapters are framed around Koopmans (2013) three Cs – critique, contingency, complexity – and are also informed by questions that can be used as tools to interrogate policy, posed by Rabinow, Pillow and myself, outlined in the table below – supporting a critical enquiry into problems of the present through examining and problematizing past policy.

Key Questions – Q1- Q3 Rabinow (1999, p.12), Q4 my addition:

1. What forms are emerging?
2. What practices are embedding and embodying them?
3. What shape are the political struggles taking?
4. How do contemporary women's voices in a post COVID pandemic contribute to a re-imagining of education policy?

Supporting Questions – Pillow (2015, p.137):

- Why this policy and why now?
- In whose interest?
- For whose needs?
- What is being contained or produced?
- What ideologies, constructions and discourses are proliferated?
- What is visible and what is made absent in these constructions?

Finally, whilst concluding chapters are generally intended to provide a summary of the main findings of a study, with a genealogical approach the purpose is to problematize and expose submerged and emerging problems and to consider how our 'historical present' is contingent – how it has been shaped by dominant discourses, power and influence over time and how things might have been, and might be, otherwise. The concluding chapter reflects this and rather than offering solutions or strategies borne out of the study, offers new insights and perspectives and considers alternative future possibilities, or as Koopman (2013, p.21) suggests 'invites reconstruction'. The conclusion does however consider some implications for policy and practice within schools and initial teacher education as well as indicating areas for future study, and some personal reflections resulting from the completion of this study.

The above section provides an outline of the thesis and the four key areas of policy that are examined over the four time periods. The following section argues why this study is significant and particularly appropriate given the policy context of the last decade.

1.5 The significance of this study

Since 2010 government education policy, in relation to the four areas examined in this study, has resulted in unprecedented change in our state education system, justified in government discourse by the imperative of responding to an apparent crisis in education (examined in Chapters 4-7). Successive governments since 2010, all led by the Conservatives, claim that their policy agenda is essential to create a 'world-class' education system (DfE 2010, p.3; DfE 2016, p.5; DfE 2022a,p.7), to ensure our children are not 'left behind' and to reduce inequalities, enabling all children to succeed.

The policy shifts related to each of the four areas of education examined in this study have resulted in significant change for each of those individual, yet related, areas. However, the significance of this study is in examining these key areas together, as a whole, which illuminates the unprecedented changes the state education system in England has been subjected to. This is not a conventional thesis. Whilst a traditional thesis might have a much narrower focus that can be examined in depth, I am taking a longer perspective, examining discourses around four key areas of policy over four time periods. By analysing these areas together, I aim to expose the full extent of recent education policy, that is reflective of a neoliberal agenda which is pervading policy and practice and is both centralising and decentralising.

I argue that this policy agenda has had significant consequences for schools, with empty promises of increased autonomy, for teachers who are now subject to a performativity culture that is reducing professional autonomy and reframing ontological perspectives, and for the pupils who are experiencing a narrowing of their curriculum and have reduced opportunities to succeed. Furthermore, I argue that there are key indicators that challenge the government discourse that they are developing a 'world-class' education system and diminishing inequalities, and rather justifies the argument that we are at a critical juncture in education. Hence this is a significant period in the history of our state education system and requires analysis and problematization, that this thesis seeks to provide. The foregrounding of women's voices is also significant and the inclusion of vignettes, is intended to disrupt dominant discourses around education policy, adding a further dimension to the study. The perspectives of these women are also used to consider future possibilities that provide an alternative to our historical present.

1.6 Conclusion

This introduction has sought to provide a context for subsequent chapters of the thesis as well as provide an outline of the thesis. The personal reflection is intended to illustrate how the education system has shaped me as an individual – as a pupil, teacher, school leader and teacher educator – reflecting on my experiences in terms of my social class and gender. It also outlines some of the factors that led to a growing understanding of the inequalities inherent in the education system which in turn has critically influenced the development of my values and commitment to social justice.

These experiences invariably led to questioning what education is for and who it serves – the purpose of education – and ultimate desire to investigate education policy and examine how it has been used over time as a tool to achieve different purposes for different people. Integral to this is consideration of those who have, and have had, the power to develop and implement policy and those that have been excluded from this process, recognising the historic power of patriarchy and marginalisation of women's voices.

The thesis will now examine pertinent literature around policy and feminism to support the subsequent chapters in which policy is analysed over the four time periods and the absence of women's voices is contextualized, in respect to the social, economic and political position of women during those periods.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines literature related to both policy and feminism. These two areas are fundamental to the architecture/structure of this study and are complex in meaning, interpretation, and practice. This study focuses on four areas of education policy – school structure/organisation, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education – through a feminist genealogy approach. More specifically, it examines the policy developments and changes in these areas, including the influence of women, over four key time periods: post second world war (1945-1979), the Thatcher years (1979-1997), the New Labour years (1997-2010) and finally post 2010 to present. The choice and rationale for these time periods are considered with both the advantages and limitations acknowledged and discussed. Prior to focussing on education policy, it is important to examine the complexities of policy per se, and before assessing the extent of women's influence in the policy process it is important to consider the status of women in the social, political, and cultural context of each period. Thus, the Literature Review examines existing literature to provide an understanding of both policy and feminism, that is drawn upon to inform the analytic chapters on each of the four areas of education policy focussed on in this study.

2.2 Policy - The complexity of policy

2.2.1 Introduction

The term policy is part of our shared language, but the term does not have a shared meaning or understanding – it means *different* things to *different* people in *different* contexts. There can be little doubt that if a public survey was completed anywhere in the world, asking people what the term policy meant to them, most would be able to give a response. Most people in society will be aware of a variety of policies – from the return policy on the items in their shopping cart, to insurance policies for their house or car, to the policies they have to adhere to in the workplace (e.g. health and safety, GDPR), to regional policies on specific areas (e.g. recent COVID restrictions) to the national and international government policies that are shared with populations via the media, related to particular areas of society like education, environment or health. The following sections trace some of the complexity of policy through a series of shifts in critical policy scholarship's understanding of its nature and scope – policy is problematized as indicative of Foucault's approach to genealogy, underpinned by what Koopman (2013) refers to as three core elements of problematization: critique, contingency and complexity.

2.2.2 From policy as thing to policy as process

The shift in thinking of policy from an entity – a 'thing' – to considering policy as a process is strewn with inherent layers that require teasing out and making sense of. Ball (1993, p.10) considers that 'the meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytical structures they build'. He suggests that 'much rests on the meaning or possible meanings that we give to policy: it affects "how" we research and how we interpret what we find' (1994, p.15). Hence 'policy' cannot be viewed simplistically in the way many might define it – as an outcome, a textual or physical document – but rather as a term which is multifaceted with complex layers of meaning and interpretation. Ball suggests there is no single theory of how to 'manage' policy but rather there is a need for a 'toolbox of diverse concepts and theories' (1993, p.10) – thus he distinguishes between policy as *text* and policy as *discourse* in the field of policy analysis. Gale (1999, p.405) provides further exemplification of both and suggests that 'policies are represented by texts and discourses, but they are also informed by particular ideologies'.

In addition, these complexities not only apply to analysis of an approved published policy but also to the process of policy *development* (the contexts of emergence of policy) policy *dissemination* and policy implementation – or *enactment* – all of which is determined by the specific contexts they are enacted within. In this regard the subtle nuances inherent in terminology might also be considered. For example, whilst government agencies refer to *implementation* of policy, those involved in policy analysis (Ball 1994) discuss policy *enactment*. The former is suggestive of something simplistic, the 'technical' putting something into place or effect, whereas the latter – *en-act-ment* – rather implies the importance of actors and people in the process. In their 2010 school-based study Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010, p.549) suggest 'the term ''enactment" refers to an understanding that policies are interpreted and “translated” by diverse policy actors in the school environment, rather than simply implemented’. Policies are put into place by *thinking people* not inanimate subjects. As Ball (1994, p.19) articulates,

> Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set.

Braun et al (2010, p.549) further reinforce this in their study as they explain that

> putting policies into practice is a creative, sophisticated and complex process that is always located in a particular context and place.

It is clear therefore that policy, in all respects, is complex and it is important to acknowledge such sophisticated dimensions that are inherent in policy emergence, dissemination and enactment throughout this study.

As this study focusses on education policy, it is therefore useful to consider not only how policy ‘texts’ provide a framework for educational practice but to also consider the ‘discourses’ surrounding the development, dissemination, and implementation of such policy. The distinction also needs to be made between policy that is statutory and non-statutory. Whilst this study is largely concerned with statutory policy it is important to consider the influence of non-statutory policy that provides potential challenge within the sector.

Education policy cannot be seen as something discrete either, as it is developed within a much wider context and this also needs to be considered. As Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.1) suggest, policy is

> subject to a range of competing influences, which can be broadly categorized under the umbrella of social, political, economic, technological, religious or cultural factors.

Hence, before interrogating education policy in the chosen time periods it is essential first to foreground this study with a broader understanding of what is policy (especially given the complexities outlined above) and to consider what both Ball and Gale suggest are the challenges of working with and analysing policy. This requires an understanding of the perspectives of ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’, the ideological underpinnings of both and the contextual framework that ‘policy’ operates within.

Furthermore these ‘tools’ related to policy analysis might also be used to analyse the production of policy-making – the discourse and context that brought policy into being should be analysed with as much focus as the policy that emerges from it and is then enacted – hence policy analysis cannot be seen as distinct from policy production, dissemination and enactment but rather these are inter-related and interactive. Policy is not simply a thing – an object – but rather a process. As part of this process it is important to acknowledge the different voices and discourses that surround policy.

2.2.3 From policy as text to policy as discourse

Policy is more than simply text – the process of policy production, dissemination and enactment involves various ‘actors’ and it is important to consider the voices of those that are heard and those that are not heard. Dean (2005, p.258) outlines one meaning of policy as ‘the plans, programs, principles, or more broadly the course of action of some kind of actor, usually a political one such as government, a party, or a politician’. This can be considered a technical description of policy and very much reflects the perspective of ‘policy as text’ – something that has been produced through a process, a tangible, final outcome – and something that has to be accepted and adhered to until it is reviewed, suspended or terminated. It has been through a process; the debate has been had and a document or ‘text’ produced. Garratt and Forrester (2012) make a distinction in policy arguing that government policy can be both formal, ‘government sanctioned’, legislated policy or informal – that is ‘government approved’ but not legislated. Both generally produce physical ‘text’ and both go through a process with involvement of often competing forces, before emerging for dissemination, interpretation, and enactment – as Ball suggests (1993, p.11) they are ‘representations that are encoded in complex ways …and decoded in complex ways’.

In terms of ‘encoding’, the formation of a government policy for England will have involved passage through parliament – through parliamentary debate on to Green Paper and White Paper status and finally to the formal presentation of a Bill that will be voted on and become law. During this period and depending on the level of consultation, many stakeholders will have had some opportunity to offer support, put forward opposing views and alternative approaches or simply reject the intentions proposed. This process might lead to some amendments or not influence the outcome at all, especially if the government has a significant majority in parliament – but the process does present a ‘safety valve’ approach, giving the veneer of appropriate consultation that then enables the government to claim validity through such a democratic process. Hence the policy might be considered set as it comes into being.

This technical approach and perspective of policy as text relates to policy analysis as well as policy production. Prunty (1985) suggests that prior to the 1980s those involved in analysis of education policy – decoding of policy – were focussed on a ‘policy science’ approach, taking a systematic and technical approach, seeking solutions to external issues that they perceive to be requiring action. Pillow (2003, p.146) suggests that despite the increase in critical discussion on policy there has been a dependency on this ‘technical-rational assessment framework to predict, influence and explain the policy process’, whilst Clarke (2019, p.13) outlines that such an approach is characterised by

> the rational analysis of the policy context, the identification of competing policy options, the determination of which option was most likely to meet the objectives of the relevant policy agenda, followed by its formulation, implementation and evaluation as policy.

Savage (2021) suggests that this level of thinking about policy is still prevalent today as governments continue to attempt to ‘impose order’ through such a ‘rational’ and systematic approach to policy. Policy makers may harbour modernist yearnings for certainty and systematicity (Toulmin 1990) but Ball (1993) suggests that in practice, rather than being such a technical process policy is in fact more dynamic – in both production, analysis, and enactment. Within production policy is a process subject to ongoing change – it is ‘re-worked’ as it is discussed and negotiated by, for example, the media and key stakeholders or interest groups. He suggests (1994, p.11) that ‘there is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formation process’. It is this space, where policy is debated by different players – or actors – with different influences, that determines any emerging policy. For example, the education policy landing in our inbox, has already got an ‘interpretational and representational history’ even before it moves into multiple arenas for further interpretation (this is considered further in section 2.2.4 below).

However, referring to the recent educational reforms in England (since 2010), Craske (2021, p.281) has suggested that these debates are often simply shut down or manipulated with the use of ‘populist reasoning’. He argued that key ministers in the government (for example, Michael Gove and Nick Gibb) made use of specific language in policy discourse during these reforms to ‘close down alternative viewpoints whilst attempting to institute their own’. These ‘rhetorical strategies’ were used to justify the necessity and urgency of the policy changes whilst also providing the opportunity to respond to critics who were branded as ‘the enemies of promise’ (Gove 2013a) – those who were reluctant to make essential improvements to support the education of our children and young people – the dream stealers of progress. This will be considered in more depth in Chapters 4-7.

When it comes to analysis and implementation, or *enactment,* of policy, Ball (1994) argues that texts not only reflect the conflict inherent in their production, coming with a history so to speak, but they also land in a context where there are varied ‘histories’ and contextual factors that impact on the ‘secondary adjustments’ made through a continuing process of interpretation. For example, an education policy might be subject to interpretation by a small group of senior leaders in a school before their interpretation of the policy is considered by whole school staff to determine these ‘secondary adjustments’, the amendments to policy in practice – and thus what the staff are working with has already been subject to the vagaries and personal representations of that small group, representing a form of gatekeeping. In fact, it might be possible that some ‘players’ in the process never actually see the policy text in its original form, only interpretations of it. Thus, policies are not static but active and are themselves ‘textual interventions into practice’ (Ball 1994, p.18).

This process is of course replicated, in the case of education policy, across the nation’s schools and educational institutions, and thus often leads to great variation in how policy is interpreted on the ground. This was exemplified in the small-scale study conducted by Braun et al (2010), a case study of how policy was interpreted and enacted in different school settings. Findings suggested this was dependent on many variables including internal factors – for example school leadership, school culture and dynamics and approach to the management of change – to external factors like the local ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger 1999), reputation and standing in the local community. The differences they found in how schools approached and enacted education policy were significant and based on only four schools in the same locality. It is not difficult therefore to imagine the differences across different schools on a national scale.

It is these differences in agendas and interpretations within such contexts that make policy an active process which Ball (1994, p.10) describes in the following way,

> Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice.

Thus policy ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ are defined in a context, in a space occupied by different actors with some having more power and influence than others. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault, that power is productive, Ball (1993, p.13) suggests that policies involve the ‘restructuring, redistribution, and disruption of power relations’. Inherent in the translation of text into practice is the degree of agency and autonomy that different players have within the process. The control or influence over the conception, formation, implementation (or enactment) or review of policy will vary depending on individual or group contexts and agendas and the ‘licence or even just space to adjust and re-write policy’ (Gale 1999, p.394). This study is not only concerned with the influence of different actors in the policy process but in particular the participation and voices of women – or their exclusion – and the influence over time on education policy. Whilst it is not possible to look at this on a micro level it is possible to contextualise this on macro level – focussing on the social, political and cultural context of each period in the study to consider the potential influences of women as actors in this policy process. This is addressed in the section 2.3 below.

Gale (1999, p.395) posits that rather than make the distinction between policy as text and action it might be more useful to see text as a form of action, ensuring the analysis of policy as text includes the analysis of this social action.

> This 'expansion' of text to include action not only advances policy texts beyond a narrow conception of policy as documentation but also more fully renders the context of practice as one of policy production ……effectively dissolving false dichotomies between policy production and policy implementation.

It is focusing on the spaces where text and action inter-relate that leads us into the idea of understanding and analysing the concept of policy as discourse. This very much reflects the perspective of Ball (1994) who suggests that policy text and policy discourse are implicit in each other. And of course, it is important to look at discourse in relation to those with different interests – local, national or international – and different levels of power and influence.

Defined simply discourse refers to oral or written communication and thus we might consider that 'policy as discourse' refers to what Ball describes as the 'ad hocery of negotiation' – for example, the areas of policy that are talked about, who is doing the talking, and the power and influence they have, and indeed who is not able to talk.

> Discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority (Ball 1993, p.14).

Legge (1995, p.326) suggests the discourse refers simply to,

> the way in which things are discussed and the argumentation between rhetoric used to support what is said. It also refers to 'reading between the lines' – what remains unspoken or taken for granted, such as assumptions or evasions.

However, policy discourse is so much more complex. As Bové (1990, p.53) suggests, to endeavour to define discourse 'contradict[s] the logic of the structure of thought in which the term "discourse" now has a newly powerful critical function'. He considers the work of Foucault has given 'special prominence' to the concept with the idea of discourse gaining a 'new rigor and new significance' that has 'changed the way we think of language and its relations to social institutions, systems of power, and the role of intellectuals in our society'.

Foucault himself (1977a, p.49) suggests, discourse is 'irreducible to language and to speech'. He goes on to say that we do not speak a discourse but it speaks to us. Ball (1993, p.14) exemplifies this,

> we do not ‘know’ what we say, we ‘are’ what we say and do. In these terms we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies.

Larson (2010, p.209) suggests that discourses provide contrary experiences – they are both ‘enabling’ – in that they offer us ‘frames, definitions, and structures’ to make sense of the world – and yet are also ‘constraining’ as our understanding of the world can be limited to the discourses that are ‘official’, normalised, and legitimised. There are dominant discourses, often promoted by those who carry influence and power, that some may use to construct their understanding of social life and then identify as ‘truths’ (as suggested by Craske referred to above). Arguably those with power and influence can become ‘gate-keepers’, manipulating the direction of discourse, ensuring their agendas are centre stage whilst those of less influential groups are marginalised. An example of this related to education policy would be the representatives in the education sector who are chosen to be included in the government ‘think-tanks’ or ‘focus groups’ to allegedly ensure wide representation and consultation as part of policy formation and implementation. These are not open forums but made up of carefully selected individuals to ensure the management and direction of discourse. A recent example of this is the ‘expert’ panel for the recent Market Review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in England which comprised of just five people with only one representative from the ITT sector (DfE 2021a). That is not, of course, to undermine the contributions of these individuals, who may well offer opposition and challenge, but this perhaps also serves a distinct purpose – the inclusion of a very small number of dissenting voices may well give further kudos to a process that is ultimately weighted towards the government agenda. Ball (2008) refers to ‘policy intellectuals’ who play a key role in ‘establishing credibility and truthfulness’. He suggests that particularly in periods of ‘crisis’ these intellectuals serve to ‘provide ways of thinking and talking about policies that make them sound reasonable and sensible as solutions to social and economic problems’ (p.7). In the case of the Market Review of ITT this credibility was perhaps undermined by the ‘expert’ group having minimal engagement with the sector which was also compromised by the tight control of any online meetings – opportunities for feedback or discourse was avoided by the disabling of both chat function and speech facility in the online meetings that I attended, and participants were required to submit any questions prior to the meeting, thus removing any opportunity to respond to information shared in real time. This speaks volumes around who did and did not have power and influence during this process.

However, others like Bacchi (2000, p.55) suggest there is an 'over-emphasis' on those with power and influence as the 'makers and users' of discourse – there are those without power and influence who have agency to 'contest representations that uphold the power relations they want to challenge'. As Ball (1993, p.14) suggests 'we are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows'. Gee (1999, p.21) agrees, suggesting that Discourse (with a capital D) is so much more than use of language (which discourse with a 'little' d refers to) and more broadly involves 'combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing'. Thus Gale (2006, p.395) suggests that policy discourse is like a 'double-hinged door …it is both productive of text and interpretive of it'.

2.2.4 From policy alignment to policy adhocery

As indicated in the section above Savage (2021, p.2) considers that the technical approach to policy is ever present, outlining this in his discussions around what he refers to as 'policy alignment' and 'alignment thinking'. Policy alignment refers to an attempt to order or re-order policy to be more coherent, usually in an attempt to meet set goals. An example of this might be drawn from English education policy that over the years has sought to develop common policies and practice in areas like the structure and organisation of schools, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, the structure and models of teacher education – to create an order, a conformity across the country. Alignment thinking reflects this policy in that it

> assumes progress will come through re-arranging diverse people,
> ideas and practices in line with common and apparently more
> efficient approaches, based on evidence of 'what works' (p.2)

As such organisations and governments seek rational and technical order by supposedly underpinning policy with data and 'evidence'. They are then able to justify that policy is based on what is known to work – it is evidence based. Using this approach across a specific area of social life, for example education, they are then able to 'align' a range of policies into something that may appear standardised and coherent. Critically, such policy 'assemblages' might well be considered as some 'grand design' that seeks to homogenise practice and reduce diversity. The advantages of such policy alignment are framed in a way that seems logical, for example, inconsistencies are reduced, bureaucracy is reduced, effective practice can be shared through national and international 'case studies' – all in order to ensure improved pupil outcomes which is central to the rationale.

Over the last ten years the English education system has seen a raft of reforms in schools – in terms of structure and organisation, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and the way teachers are trained and educated. The government rhetoric surrounding these changes is that they are based on evidence and wholly necessary to increase the standards of achievement of pupils in our classrooms – they suggest that we only have to look at the national and international league tables to see that there is a problem that needs to be fixed (DfE 2010, 2016). And of course, this 'crisis' narrative is often accepted as truth by many actors involved as it is supported by 'evidence' and data. Larsen (2010) and Ball (1993) might suggest this is the kind of discourse that offers a believable and common sense 'truth' whilst an alternative discourse might be around the very nature and construction of league tables as flawed, and dependent on such a narrow set of criteria, that preclude them as a valid source of evidence.

An example of this is exemplified by the recent imposition of both a Core Content Framework (CCF) within initial teacher 'training' (DfE 2019a) and Early Career Framework (DfE 2019b) for early career teachers. The CCF suggests that 'key evidence statements….have been drawn from current high-quality evidence from the UK and overseas', and that the professional support from initial teacher training into early career 'is underpinned by the evidence of what makes great teaching' (p.4). The government is attempting to draw a 'golden thread' between initial teacher training to early career in what might seem to be a logical progression offered by two frameworks that are intended to align. However, there is a paucity of information on the origins and value of the stated evidence within these frameworks and, given these frameworks have only just been introduced there is little data from the sector that might attest to whether or not the focus on this specific evidence is improving the quality of teachers or teaching. Biesta (2020) raises questions about this government preoccupation with 'what works' and their view of evidence-based practice, arguing that the view of knowledge inherent in this perspective is problematic – the connection between research and practice is much more complex and cannot be applied in such a technical way.

A more critical perspective of the 'grand design' of policy is that it is more ideologically based. Savage (2021) suggests that it is important to consider how some policies come into being and some 'do not see the light of day' – this might be determined by factors like time, place, agency, and power. He argues that policy assemblage is a social process – it results from 'complex interactions between people and things which are embedded within the existing conditions of possibility' (p.3). As such policy assemblage and policy alignment do not exclude the opportunity for negotiation and resistance – reflecting Ball's notions of adhocery and discourse that are described in the section above.

2.2.5 From policy singularity to policy as multi-scale ensembles

Policy operates at different scales including the departmental, the institutional, the regional, the sectoral, the national and the global. Whilst many policies might seem independent of others, or singular, this is rarely the case – those policies emerging in the same time period for example will all likely be influenced by a particular set of social, cultural and economic contexts including regional, national and global.

It must be acknowledged therefore that, just like education policy cannot be viewed in isolation from other national policies in a social, cultural or economic context neither can the multitude of education policies be seen in isolation from each other – hence the plethora of policies at any one time might complement or indeed disrupt the enactment of others and different players may prioritise discussion and enactment of some over others.

An example of this can be seen from the Braun et al study where it was interesting to note the number of policy 'texts' found within the four schools in their sample, exceeded 170. Even accounting for duplication of some (for example where similar 'type' of policies are named differently) this may explain the difference in approach when a new policy is introduced. In this case study one school adopted a 'policy layering' approach subsuming a new policy into what already existed in order to acknowledge it – rather than adding to the policy load – whereas in another school there was ‘considerable re-organisation of lessons and time investments’ (2010, p.553).

Looking more globally there is no doubt that international policy and practice is influencing education policy in England (DfE 2010, 2016). As Robertson (2012, p.4) suggests,

> Education activity and its governance has been reallocated across geographical scales, from the local to the global, and now involve a new array of actors.

With the heralding of the fourth industrial revolution – the digital age – much of the world is characterised by new technology and innovations and in essence the world has become a smaller place with immediate access to information, policies, and practices in all fields, readily available for international audiences. Singh (2015, p.367) refers to the ‘compression of space and time with globally networked technologies’ which means that ‘ideas and information flow rapidly within and across borders’. This has invariably led to international comparisons, not least in the field of education where, for example, the Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) surveys undertaken by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) have essentially led to an international league table (Sellar et al 2017). In what might be considered as an attempt to ‘take control’ in this global environment the government in England, over the last ten years, have based national education policy (DfE White Papers 2010, 2016) on their perceived need to ‘improve’ standing in these league tables, resulting in both centralising and decentralising agendas that will be discussed in later chapters. With such focus on international practice, they have invariably introduced more ‘actors’ into the policy analysis process and as Singh suggests, given the multitude of external factors influencing education policy and practice, the ‘state’s control over curriculum and pedagogy is increasingly undermined’. This might be considered when looking at policy in England that seeks to tightly control what is taught and how things are taught our schools and within teacher ‘training’, where a push for a mandated curriculum secures a centralised and technical approach but undermines the autonomy of the sector to respond to local and regional demands.

Ball (1993, p.14) suggests it is important to ‘appreciate the way which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of “truth” and “knowledge” as discourses‘. This is reflected further in the notion of policy alignment

(Savage 2021) and the view that a coherent set of polices – a policy assemblage – might or might not be underpinned by a 'grand design'. An example of this might be the discourse surrounding the plethora of education policies in recent years related to performance management systems in England. Over the years school staff have become accustomed to, for example, appraisals related to pay scales, baseline targets for school examination results, the focus on 'value-added' in pupil progress – the list goes on. Considered in isolation these policies provide insight into a particular issue and the influence of the different 'actors' involved. However, taken as an *ensemble* of policies these provide a more encompassing discourse related to the notion of performativity and illuminate the power and influence of key actors. As Foucault might suggest they become a 'regime of truth' – processes are embedded and become 'known', the 'positions' of different actors (with their associated power and influence) – those who have benefitted from policies and those who haven't – become accepted and key processes and terminology become normalised and part of a shared language. This becomes part of how different 'players' make sense of their experiences.

To exemplify this more clearly the typical structure of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)[10] might be considered. These organisations have developed across England as a result of education policy in the last decade which has sought to devolve much of the decision making to schools and headteachers by extending the academisation of schools – removing them from local authority control – and then encouraging academies to join together forming a MAT. This has occurred across the country with some MATs having control over large numbers of schools – arguably undermining the rationale for their own existence as they become like local authorities themselves. As Wilkins (2017, p.172), indicates 'there is evidence of new forms of monopoly taking shape, albeit realised through the interests and practices of actors and organisations drawn from business and philanthropy'. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 on school structures and organisation.

A simplified structure of schools within a MAT can be seen in figure 1 below (which does not include other elements of MATs like governing bodies/trust committees etc). In this structure there might be several clusters of academies whose headteachers are led by an Executive Headteacher who are in turn controlled by the Chief Executive and strategic board of the MAT. Across a MAT there are generally agreed 'ensembles' of policies and procedures that every school in the MAT will be expected to adhere to. Whilst all stakeholders in the MAT may well be 'consulted' on specific polices there will undoubtedly be some 'actors' who exert more influence and power than others with associated dominant discourse in the policy interpretation and enactment process. Teachers and staff in each school will thus experience a specific interpretation of policy and through a shared 'community of practice' these policies and procedures are more likely to be reinforced, accepted and normalised. The ensemble of policies become the 'truth', legitimatised throughout the whole organisation, with little opportunity or space for any dissenting voice or alternative discourse.

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[10] A MAT is a group of academy schools that have formed a charitable company and have a single board of trustee responsible for the governance of the schools.

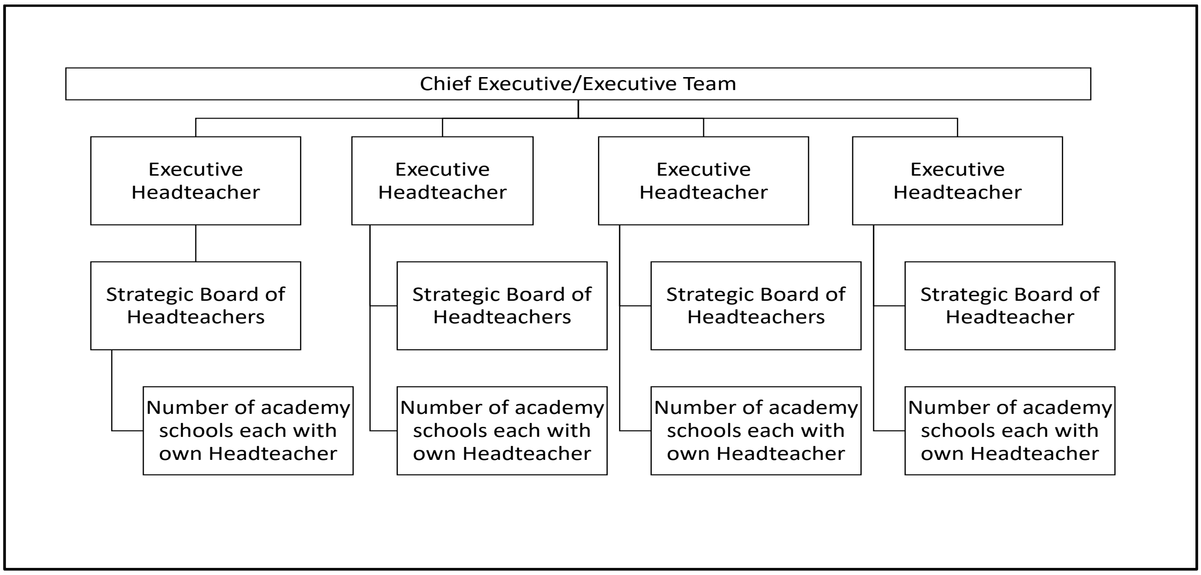
Chief Executive/Executive Team
Executive Headteacher
Executive Headteacher
Executive Headteacher
Executive Headteacher
Strategic Board of Headteachers
Strategic Board of Headteachers
Strategic Board of Headteachers
Strategic Board of Headteacher
Number of academy schools each with own Headteacher
Number of academy schools each with own Headteacher
Number of academy schools each with own Headteacher
Number of academy schools each with own Headteacher

Figure 1 - Structure of Multi-Academy Trust

2.2.6 From policy as solution to policy as problematization

The pervading perception of policy is that it is provides a 'fix' and enables the solving of problems. It is common for an identified problem or issue to be dealt with by the introduction of another policy that aims to be the panacea. Yet, another aspect in the complexity of policy is the idea that policy creates the very problems that it then positions itself as the means to solve. Typically, policy is framed as a response to a problem or an intervention into an area that needs to be improved. In the example above national and international league tables have provided ‘evidence’ that many school children in England are underperforming in relation to their peers at home and abroad and hence reforms in key areas of education – curriculum, assessment, school organisation and teacher training and education – have been deemed to be essential.

Bacchi (2000, p.48) suggests

> it is inappropriate to see governments as responding to ‘problems’ that exist ‘out there’ in the community. Rather ‘problems’ are ‘created’ or ‘given shape’ in the very policy proposals that are offered as responses.

Goodwin (1996, p.67) suggests that discourse might frame policy ‘not as a response to existing conditions and problems, but more as a discourse in which both problems and solutions are created’. As such there is acknowledgement that policy is not simply a response – a solution – to a perceived problem but that it creates problems too. Edelman (1988, p.16) suggests that problems are rarely solved anyway though they might be ‘purged from common discourse or discussed in changed legal, social, or political terms as though they were different problems’. This is interesting as it might well provide a rationale for the ‘boomerang’ nature of education policy that sees things moving off the agenda and then coming back on the agenda, just framed in a different way. An example of this might be in the nature of the curriculum that over time has shifted from knowledge based to skills based, back to knowledge based.

The English government (DfE 2010, 2016) have argued that greater national consistency or alignment is needed in these areas of education in order to solve this problem and raise the achievement of our young people. This is linked to values of social justice and equality with consistent reference to supporting the more ‘disadvantaged’ pupils and talk of ‘closing the gap’ or ‘levelling up’[11]. This has been highly prevalent in the narrative and discourse surrounding the ‘recovery’ curriculum and the focus on those children and young people who have been more adversely affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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[11] Levelling up refers to government policy that aims to reduce the imbalances, primarily economic, between areas and social groups across the United Kingdom. It has become a contested slogan that suggests the conditions of the disadvantaged can be improved at no cost to the already advantaged, that is, with no redistribution of wealth or income, or impact on the status quo

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has served to illuminate how the government policy that seeks to support disadvantaged pupils does in fact contribute to disadvantage. Issues related to for example, free school meals, access to technology and resources and living conditions have highlighted the disparities between children and the access they have to basic essentials that impact on their ability to access learning opportunities. The education system does not operate outside of wider society but rather is part of it and the pandemic has brought transparency to the broader issues that impact on learning and achievement. Thus the ‘recovery curriculum’ might be seen as an example of policy intended to provide a solution, which conveniently masks the real causes of the problems.

2.2.7 From policy as ideas to policy as ideology

Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.8) suggest that policy texts and policy ensembles are ‘framed by discourses that we need to understand in order to better grasp the actual policy text’ whilst Ball highlights the need to analyse the existence of ‘dominant’ discourses within policy. Some voices are heard as ‘meaningful and authoritative’ and other voices are simply not heard. Gale (1999) suggests that this leads to the need to consider ideology within the realm of both policy-making and analysis. Thus the ‘why’ (ideology) of policy would be inter-related to the ‘what’ of policy (the text) and the ‘how’ of policy (the discourse). He goes on to argue that ‘discourses produce texts as well as interpreting them and they appeal to ideologies whilst also being informed by them’ (p.397). Ball (1994, p.15) observes that ideology, discourse, and text are ‘implicit in each other’ – they are interconnected.

Garratt and Forrester, meanwhile, (2012, p.7) argue that

> education cannot be regarded as a neutral concept; it is paramount, when exploring education, to examine the relationship between policy and ideology.

Ideology is a term that has meant different things at different times but the use in this study refers to what Garratt and Forrester suggest is ‘a set of ideas and concepts about the social world in addition to the influence of important social and historical structures’. Bacchi (2000, p.53) however, referring to a more historic definition of ideology that relates to the Marxist notion of false consciousness, suggests some people want to ‘be able to identify an enemy, a focus for attack’. The idea of false consciousness reflects the notion that individuals are ‘duped’ into believing a narrative that does not serve their own interests, for example a belief that those in government ‘know best’ and have their interests at heart.

In terms of education policy this is evident in looking at the policies of different political parties. The current government are often criticised for policy that reflects a neo-liberalism ideology, underpinned for example by competition – as evidenced by a focus on exam league tables and performativity. Yet many might believe the government are acting in their best interests, given the evidence provided of poor performance in league tables – perhaps demonstrating that people recognise *ideas* rather than the ideology they might reflect.

Foucault (cited in Rabinow, 1991, p.73) however, rejects the notion of ideology in favour of an emphasis on discourse as establishing a form of truth.

> Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true

Discourse, according to Foucault, allows for enactment of agency and power in a way that adherence to ideology does not. For him power ‘circulates through a society rather than being owned by one group’ (Mills 2004, p.34). As such Foucault considers ideology to be unhelpful in that ‘it stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth’. In Foucault’s view,

> the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which are neither true nor false’ (p.60).

This resonates with what I seek to do in this study, to problematize discourses around the four areas of education policy, considering how these were constructed and how some have become dominant over others.

2.2.8 From policy history to policy genealogy

When examining policy, it also needs to be recognised that policy development is not linear and does not necessarily build on previous iterations of similar policy – whilst there might be some elements of continuity there will also likely be discontinuities and total departures. This might depend on the government in power and their ideological platform, and of course the power and influence that some voices have over others in the policy-making process. This study takes a genealogical approach (outlined in Chapter 3) which Bevir (2008, p.263) describes as ‘a historical narrative that explains an aspect of human life by showing how it came into being’. Bevir (2008, p.265-266) believes this definition ‘arose in the context of nineteenth century historicism’ which was ‘almost always developmental’. This might suggest policy is linear and progressive. However, Foucault’s approach to genealogy (building on the work of Nietzsche) is based on the concept of problematization – the idea that history is not linear but is characterised by interruptions, dislocations, and contingency – and as such policy can be seen as complex and not something that simply develops progressively over time. Bevir (2008, p.267-268) describes this as ‘radical historicism’ – the notion that history does not have a set of fixed principles and content but rather it is a contingent process where ‘people reinterpret, modify, or transform an inherited tradition in response to novel circumstances or other dilemmas’. Koopman (2013) supports this notion, arguing it is Foucault’s focus on problematization that makes genealogy distinct from traditional and developmental history. For this study this enables education policy development to be considered through a different lens – rather than seeing current policy as emergent from a linear historical process of development, it can be questioned and problematized and considered as contingent on a specific set of factors and actors that, if different, could have led to a different present. Bevir (2008, p.272) suggests

> genealogists may deploy a concept of power in order to suggest that the present arose not as a necessary unity but rather out of struggles among diverse possibilities…. Genealogy opens novel spaces for personal and social transformation precisely because it loosens the hold on us of entrenched ideas and institutions; it frees us to imagine other possibilities.

It is perhaps taken for granted that current policy has simply developed over time and is based on historical truths but taking Foucault’s genealogical approach it is possible to problematize and question this. Ritenburg (2010, p.72) suggests that Foucauldian genealogy ‘considers how a concept emerges in multiple unrelated contexts situated historically through the power relations of discourse’ and that it ‘examines the relationship between knowledge as truth – or what passes for truth – and power’. In relation to this study this can be interpreted to suggest that our current education policy is contingent and based on those who were able to dominate discourse and those who did and did not have the power to affect policy decisions at any point in history. Anderson (2013, p.4) has argued questioning the ‘assumptions upon which contemporary practice rests’ strengthens critique. In contrast to a simplistic developmental version of history, Foucault’s genealogy deals with ‘subjugated knowledges and practices’ – the things that have been forgotten or excluded from history, that haven’t fit in with a particular narrative of the time. She suggests

> What is presented as natural, timeless, self-evident, new, true or necessary ways of seeing, knowing and acting at present is approached by the genealogists as something to be problematized through historical investigation

As such, in looking at education policy through this approach to genealogy – rather than the traditional development view of history – it is possible to consider how current policy is contingent on particular voices and how it might have been different had other voices (for example, women’s voices) been more prevalent and powerful. Anderson goes on to suggest that the role of history in genealogy is therefore

> not to reassure us of the necessity and virtue of current thinking, policy and practice, but as a tool of critique to disrupt and undermine it. In so doing, these present ways of thinking and acting require rethinking as their accepted necessity is challenged (2013, p.5)

Furthermore, recognising that our current education policy is contingent provides opportunities for problematizing and critiquing current policy and discourse – identifying continuities and discontinuities – and to consider alternative future possibilities. This is particularly pertinent to this study given the focus on women’s voices in future policy - making. As Oksala (2007, p.10) has suggested

> By showing how things that we take for granted ….have in fact emerged out of a network of contingent human practices, philosophy makes possible….concrete change: transforming ways of life, power relations and identities.

It is recognised that whilst the problematization inherent in Foucault’s genealogy provides for consideration of alternative possibilities these possibilities are not limitless. Hoy (2005, p.232) suggests that whilst ‘Foucault prefers possibilities to be open-ended, this is not to say anything goes’ – like any other time and context the possibilities available in current contexts are determined by those very contexts. As such the possibilities for future education policy are determined by those who are able to dominate discourse, those with the freedoms, power, and influence to make policy in any given time – as Hoy indicates ‘possibilities are always limited and situated’. However, this approach to genealogy does create the potential for alternative possibilities as opposed to a tacit acceptance of the status quo. As Hoy (2005, p.238) suggests

> Genealogy contributes the initial condition for possible change by freeing agents from the fatalistic assumption that the given oppressive social arrangement is eternal

The genealogical approach taken in this study is explained in more depth in Chapter 3, where I explain how Koopman’s three core elements of genealogy as problematization – critique, contingency and complexity – are used to examine aspects of education policy to inform the ‘historical present’.

2.2.9 Concluding comments on policy

The writing above serves to outline the complexity of policy in terms of the development and emergence of policy, the dissemination of policy and the implementation or ‘enactment’ of it. The many nuances of this have been considered from the idea of policy as a process, to policy as text and discourse to attempts at alignment of policy, the acknowledgment of policy ‘adhocery’ – put simply policy is messy. The idea that one area of policy, for example education, cannot emerge in isolation from other areas has also been considered with the importance of acknowledging the social, cultural and economic context that determines policy in any given time. It is clear that policy is not only dependent on such contexts locally and nationally but also globally and that the agency of different ‘actors’ in all these contexts is also integral to discussing or analysing policy. Likewise, policy text and discourses cannot be separated from ideas and ideologies – and the potential of policy to be part of a ‘grand design’, or not. Neither can policy be considered as developmental or linear but rather it is punctuated with disruptions and discontinuities. Whilst these policy complexities are associated with all fields of policy, it is education policy that is the focus of this thesis. As such, this writing on policy will be drawn upon as the four areas of education policy are interrogated, considering the complexities of policy inherent in each of the four time periods in order to trace continuities and discontinuities, the dominant actors of those times and centralising and decentralising agendas.

This study also considers women's voices in terms of policy and in particular the opportunities women have had over the four time periods to be involved in policy discourse and development. Lemke and Rogers (2022) argue that women's voices in the policy process is critical here – the inclusion and participation of women is essential if issues affecting them are to be 'understood, prioritized, and championed' (p.12). Hence the next section of this chapter examines the complexity of the term/notion of feminism, as an understanding of feminism and the opportunities that women have had to be included in the policy process over the four periods is integral to the architecture of this thesis.

2.3 Feminism and the rise of women's voices – traces and tensions

2.3.1 Introduction

This thesis is underpinned by a feminist genealogy approach with four key areas of education policy being dissected across four time periods, tracing back through time to consider the continuities and discontinuities in policy, through a feminist lens.

Before defining feminism, to the extent that this is possible, it is important to note that this study has a specific focus on women's voices rather than being a study in gender – though it is acknowledged that feminism and gender are inextricably linked. This is an important distinction to mark the confines of this study and to not overclaim the reach of this research. This is further explained in Chapter 3 in the section on feminist genealogy. Thus, the purpose of this section on feminism is to contextualise some broad issues that relate to this study and that can be drawn upon in the analytic chapters on the four areas of education policy.

Feminist genealogy aligns with Foucault's work (Sawicki 1991, 1998), through a focus on the historically and politically situated decision making, with particular consideration given to how gender shapes the policy process, within the social and cultural context of that time. However, like the complexities related to policy, outlined in the section above, there are many tensions around the notion and meaning of feminism. This needs to be unpacked and considered in order to understand how education policy in each of the time periods studied here, might have been influenced and informed, or not, by women's perspectives.

A feminist might be described as someone who believes in the principles of feminism. But feminism cannot be simplistically defined, as evidenced by the wealth of literature devoted to this field. Feminism means different things to different people in different contexts – locally, nationally, and globally, and has evolved in different ways and times through history, within these contexts. In keeping with the feminist genealogical approach of this study it is important to recognise that feminism has not developed in a linear way over time but is underpinned by problematizations, continuities and discontinuities. Feminism cannot be considered in a vacuum either – it is not simply a case of looking at women in terms of their sex but other factors that intersect with being a woman, for example, social class and race. The term intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (1989) as she discussed the marginalization of Black women, in the context of criticism that feminism was dominated by white middle class women. Crenshaw argued that understanding intersectionality is crucial in considering the development and progression of women and feminism.

Hence, it is important to consider what feminism is and examine the complexities inherent in this. For Malinowska (2020, p.1) it is an 'umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena related to the ever-deteriorating situation of women under the patriarchal status quo'. These 'phenomena' relate to social, political, and economic rights and the struggle for women to have the same rights and opportunities as men. As Solnit (2014) argues these rights should be available to all humans and not the sole privilege of one gender.

It is argued though, that definitions like this relate more to feminism in the western world and have little resonance to the focus of feminists more globally. For example, Walters (2005, p.118) outlines how Brazilian women have argued that feminism is 'Eurocentric'; whilst political and economic rights might be a key feature of feminism in the west there are more urgent issues for Latin American women such as racial violence and health issues. In some countries today women are still fighting for basic freedoms as highlighted in events in Iran (Armitstead 2022). However, Solnit (2014, p.10-11) argues that whatever the issues women have their fight on two fronts,

> one for whatever the putative topic is and one simply for the right to speak, to have ideas, to be acknowledged to be in possession of facts and truths, to have value, to be a human being.

Different lived experiences through different periods of time have led to tensions around how women identify as feminists and indeed how feminism is perceived – the idea of some sort of global sisterhood is idealistic. As Audre Lorde argued, feminism glosses over

> difference of race, sexuality, class and age….Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives (2018, p.17-18)

Whilst there are tensions between feminists nationally and internationally around the meaning and motivations of feminism, there are of course wider societal attitudes that influence thinking about feminism. To some people the notion of feminism in England conjures up images of women marching with placards, chaining themselves to railings or ritualistically burning bras in order to achieve social, political and economic rights, rather than focussing on the critical debate surrounding those rights. Historically it has been common to caricature and trivialise women's voices and calls for change by focussing on what is perceived as radical action and thus foregrounding the sensationalised images of women behaving in a certain way, whilst simultaneously reducing the substance of their argument. Malinowska (2020, p.1) concurs with this arguing that the media have 'discredited the importance of the feminist fight by offering antagonistic portrayals of feminists'.

In addition, the discourse about women as 'the weaker sex' (particularly predicated on psychological studies in the 19th century) and subservient to men in all regards has been perpetuated by many across centuries and generations and as such the changes brought about in recent decades are still stained by reverberations of the past, with the continuation of patriarchal attitudes. Solnit (2014, p.110) acknowledges this in her definition of feminism that acknowledges the importance of the continuing struggle, which in turn relates to this study and the importance of women's voices in relation to education policy.

> Feminism is an endeavour to change something very old, widespread, and deeply rooted in many, perhaps most, cultures around the world, innumerable institutions, and most households on Earth – and in our minds, where it all begins and ends. That so much change has been

> made in four or five decades is amazing; that everything is not permanently, definitively, irrevocably changed is not a sign of failure. A woman goes walking down a thousand-mile road. Twenty minutes after she steps forth, they proclaim that she still has nine hundred ninety-nine miles to go and will never get anywhere. It takes time.

Whilst this study focusses on the influence of women and feminism in England in relation to education policy over time, it is important to consider feminism in a wider context and also to acknowledge the differences between and amongst feminists. Tong and Fernandes Botts (2017, p.1) argue that there are ‘real challenges’ in trying to ‘define and categorise the thought of an incredibly diverse and large array of feminist thinkers’ though over time a range of labels have tried to do just that as feminists have been labelled, for example, as liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist, global, postcolonial, post structural, postmodern and queer. And then there are the different ‘waves’ of feminism which many of these ‘types’ of feminist may inhabit. For example, liberal feminism might have its roots in what is referred to as ‘first wave’ feminism but it developed, transformed and restructured during subsequent waves. Tong and Fernandes Botts suggest that whilst such labels can be contested, they do provide perspectives that have been used to offer explanations for the issues facing women and proposed solutions to eradicating them.

Focussing on waves of feminism – commonly identified as first, second, third and fourth wave feminism – can be considered problematic and open to critique. The wave metaphor might suggest the rise and fall of one wave and succession by another but it is not always clear when one wave ends and another begins – a wave might be considered a discrete entity or part of a wider movement. As such it is important to look at what might have continued across waves of feminism or discontinued, and what has been problematized. The use of the wave metaphor applies boundaries related to time periods and age brackets and it has been argued this is not helpful and ignores the divergent perspectives of those within and across those groups (Purvis 2004, Evans and Chamberlain 2015). As Nicholson (2010, p.35) suggests, the waves metaphor ‘obscures the differences in the ideas that have motivated different groups of people to pursue different kinds of political goals at different moments in time’. In addition, the identification of ‘waves’ has been critiqued for being Eurocentric and focussed on the issues of white middle class women (as discussed above), ignoring the intersectionality referred to by many (e.g., Crenshaw 1989, Walters 2005). MacLeavy, Fannin and Larner (2021, p.1560) argue that such a ‘white-centric’ feminism 'ignores the practices of gendered resistance by black and indigenous women' in each period. Thus, feminism is recognised as a complex field.

However, the waves metaphor does provide a useful tool to look at the development of feminism as part of this study and the waves align broadly to the four time periods being focussed on, as indicated in the figure below. This provides the opportunity to consider the potential women had in each wave of feminism to influence the education system. Furthermore, it enables analysis of education policy in each period (in the analytic chapters of this thesis) to be viewed through the lens of each wave of feminism, considering the continuities and discontinuities over time bringing us to our historical present. Whilst this will now be considered in more depth it is acknowledged that the following sections provide a mere summary of the complexities inherent within each period and represent a selection of information that is relevant to this thesis.

Four time periods of this study	**Alignment with Waves of Feminism**
1945 - 1979: Post-war Settlement 1979 - 1997: The Thatcher Revolution	First-wave feminism 19th century to around the 1950s
	Second-wave feminism Early 1960s to 1980s
1997 - 2010: New Labour	Third-wave feminism 1990s to circa 2010
Post 2010: Coalition into conservatism	Fourth-wave feminism Circa 2012 onwards

Figure 2 - Time periods and waves of feminism

2.3.2 First Wave Feminism

Whilst this study is not focussing on the 19th and early 20th centuries it is important to trace the development of feminism back to this period as later 'waves' of feminism arguably emerged and developed as a result of the successes and challenges of women during this period, that is considered as first wave feminism. Malinowska (2020) suggests that this first wave centred around challenging the notion of femininity that had been imposed by men. It was arguably the women in this period who laid the foundations of activism for later generations of women – to challenge the patriarchy that underpinned English society and that was reflected in the infrastructure and superstructures of the country, including education. Through organised activity these women provided a history of antagonisms and achievements, providing a blue-print of sorts for other women to rise to face the challenges of their generation. However, it must be noted that previous to this period it is clear that many women did engage in struggle against the accepted gender norms of the time with famous examples being Boudicca of the Iceni tribe in first century England, and Joan of Arc in 15th century France – both who paid dearly for their actions – and of course in the late 1700s women like Mary Wollstonecraft was important as a key English author on the rights of women. Some less famous women were also able to debate publicly on issues, particularly related to church involvement and this was also often met with great criticism. Walters (2005, p.11) refers to examples of women in the 17th century who dared to criticise or question accepted thinking being described as 'bold impudent housewives....without all womanly modesty who take upon them……to prate…most directly contrary to the apostles's inhibition'. And of course, many women speaking out during this time could be tried for witchcraft or simply dismissed as mentally unsound. Hence the importance of organised and intentional activity that perhaps provided safety in numbers.

Griffin (2017) suggests that first wave feminism was characterised initially by women's struggle for property ownership, inheritance rights and the right to vote – campaigned for by famous women such as the Pankhurst's and the Women's Social and Political Union – with other issues emerging such as women's rights over their bodies, including fertility control (fought for by women like Annie Besant and Marie Stopes) and the right to divorce. Nicholson (2010) notes that many of those considered first wave feminists were only interested in the vote and not wider equality and once this was achieved their activism halted. It is easy to understand the claim here referred to by Walter (2005) that waves of feminism were focussed on white middle class women, as many women around the world were struggling for basic needs like personal safety and healthcare. Malinowksa (2020) argues this period was also about the limited rights for employment and social agency. Women's demands for education and to have access to, for example, the medical profession was also a feature of this period (Harris and White, 2018) with pioneers like Elizabeth Garrett

Anderson demonstrating their ability to qualify in this field. These issues were of course priorities for some women but not all – in countries like Brazil for example (mentioned above) women were facing different issues and priorities. Whilst this study is about education policy in England and women's voices in relation to this – and hence a focus on the development of feminism in England – it is important to acknowledge the wider context.

As achieving the right to the vote became central to feminist demands in this period, this first wave feminism was thus associated with the women's suffrage movement in England and the activism that underpinned this. Whilst the vote may have eventually been achieved for many women during this period – giving women some influence on who was elected to make policy – the progress made in other areas, for example equality in employment and education, was much slower. Whilst in 1919 the first woman was elected as member of parliament (MP) in England – Nancy Astor – a hundred years later women are still under-represented in parliament and hence have less potential of being involved in discourse around education policy at this level compared to men. Struggles have since continued to remove the barriers that many women have faced – the very barriers that have impacted on their choice to be fully engaged in social, economic, and political activity. Furthermore, whilst first wave feminism might be considered international (Europe, North America, Egypt, Iran, India for example) it was most prevalent in the United States and Western Europe, and it has already been acknowledged that the issues facing other women around the world were not at the forefront of debates. Yet even in the United States and Western Europe the voices of many women were marginalised, for example, black women (Malinowska, 2020) and working-class women. As such the experiences of women in this period were not homogenous – in relation to this study it is important to acknowledge that some women had voices and others didn't – and the very notion of some sort of global sisterhood could indeed be considered idealistic. According to Oksala (2016, p.145) this became 'a crucial concept for the political aims of the second wave feminist movement' and this is considered in the section below.

2.3.3 Second Wave Feminism

Whilst the idea of sisterhood might have been an aspiration of second wave feminism Oksala argued that this quickly became problematic – the idea that women had commonalities of experience, that might promote camaraderie and solidarity, was tempered by the level of complacency and lack of acknowledgement from some women to the different experiences of their 'sisters' related to social class and race, for example. Oksala (2016, p.37) argues that

> The acute political problem with the idea of a collective female experience was its exclusivity; white, middle-class feminists considered their experiences to be the prototypical female experiences that defines feminism and its central goals

Oksala acknowledges that even today 'while some of us are still feminists, we are no longer sisters' (2016, p.145). The shift towards deeper understanding around intersectionality came more into play during third wave feminism, with attempts to forge more inclusive alliances. However, second wave feminism (early 1960s up to the late 1980s) served to consider the structure of 'womanhood' and woman's lived experience – particularly in relation to work (equal pay, equal education, equal opportunities), family (childcare) and body (contraception, abortion) – and the differences in lived experiences for different women was to become very apparent.

Before examining this, it is important to consider why second wave feminism in particular is significant to consider as part of this study. It was during this period that I went to school and into further and higher education – the social, political, cultural and economic context I was exposed to no doubt influenced the development of my ideas and perspectives during the 1970s and 1980s, and hence my positionality in this study. It was also a period where, as indicated above, the lived experiences of women were very different – whilst in theory there were more opportunities for women in higher paid professions in practice only some women (white middle class) were able to capitalise on these opportunities and the expectations for many girls and women reflected traditional patriarchal attitudes. Again, this links back to my personal reflections in Chapter 1, particularly in relation to expectations of me as a working-class girl in school and the sometimes subliminal – and sometimes very direct – messages delivered via family, the education system and other influences like the media.

Referring back to the idea of womanhood during this period, Simone De Beauvoir had been writing extensively on such issues. In particular her view that 'one is not born a woman but becomes one' (Beauvoir 1949/1956, p.273) reflected her belief that it was important to forefront being a human first and foremost, because to champion women as having special qualities by virtue of their sex only served to keep women oppressed. She believed the ideal of feminine or womanly virtues was simply a notion developed by men – focussing on what women represent rather than who they are – and to support this was to collude with patriarchal standards. Other writers during this period of second wave feminism (Greer 1970, Orbach 1981, Wolf 1990) also focussed on representations of women, for example the focus on external appearance and body shape, arguing that these issues affect all women. As such Beauvoir and others were critical of traditional feminism that might capitalise on such qualities and virtues, thus distinguishing between men and women and what each might be capable of. This non-binary perspective that Beauvoir supported has further developed and gathered momentum in more recent years (third and fourth wave feminism) with much discussion on gender and what it means. Whilst this study is not focussed on this specific area it is acknowledged here as it is such an important current issue in the arena of feminism.

In terms of social class and the different experiences of women, bell hooks has written extensively. Whilst much of this is in reference to experiences of women in America her arguments are very relevant to the UK and to this study. She suggests that a feminist perspective of a 'common oppression' in at attempt at 'building solidarity' (1984, p.6) simply denied the reality of experiences of women and served to promote class interests.

> Middle class white women were able to make their interests the primary focus of feminist movement and employ a rhetoric of commonality that made their condition synonymous with 'oppression' (1984, p.6)

For example, in relation to employment it may have been possible for women to work in different professions but it was most definitely not an equal playing field, either in comparison to men or to some other women. Typically, at this time women were in low paid occupations and as hooks suggests (2014, p.48), 'low wages did not liberate poor and working-class women from male domination'. Those 'privileged' women who had on the face of things become successful in achieving professional or higher paid jobs were still likely to be paid much less than their male counterparts for doing exactly the same work, having much less power and influence than men, but more than their working-class female counterparts. The role of women in the media is an example that serves to support this – in relation to their employment in the media and portrayal within it during this period.

A slight detour into the role of media – television specifically – is relevant here as the way women were portrayed resonates deeply with my own experience of how women were perceived during this period, and the expectations of many women within their families, as outlined in Chapter 1, which subsequently impacts on educational experiences, career choices and the ability to be involved in such arenas as the policy process.

Representation of men and women in the media gained more importance in this period as televisions became common in households and provided a vehicle for the transmission of news and government business, as well as entertainment. Malinowska suggests that

> From the very beginning, the male dominated environment of television recreated the social functions of gender, mostly by eliminating women from authority positions, and reducing them to technical, organisational, administrative, or entertaining roles (2020, p.4)

This is important to consider for this study and resonates with experiences outlined in my personal reflection in Chapter 1. For example, the popular TV shows during this period included On the Buses (1969-73), Bless This House (1971-76), Love Thy Neighbour (1972-1976), Are You Being Served (1972 – 85) and Fawlty Towers (1975-79) to name just a few. Whilst considered popular 'prime time' entertainment these programmes also served to reinforce gender, class and racial stereotypes. Whilst other genres of TV were available, the very popularity of these programmes compounded the patriarchal nature of society and indeed the more serious news programmes did little to counteract these. Research into the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) top grades in 1985 found that '159 were men while only 6 were women' (Calvert et al 2008, p.300) – if women were in such a minority, as in other industries, it is not surprising they would have had much less power or influence on decision making.

hooks suggests that whilst more women were acquiring 'prestige, fame, or money from feminist writings or from gains from feminist movement for equality in the work force, individual opportunism undermined appeals for collective struggle' (1984, p.7). This was as true in England as in the USA, which hooks wrote about, reflecting the shift in society during this period from a post war state-organised capitalism (for example, state organised welfare structures and nationalization of key industries) to neoliberalism, with an emphasis on privatization, deregulation, and individualism (Fraser 2013). Hence the experiences of women were very different, dependent on, for example, their social class or race, and the priority of some women was perhaps more individualistic. This is all relevant to this study –

whilst the focus is on education policy over the four time periods it also considers women's voices in relation to this. It is clear during this period that only some women from particular social and cultural backgrounds were likely to be in positions to influence education policy, and any influence they had might not have reflected the interests and experiences of all women. Hence it is important to consider that the discourses of women in these positions may have reflected their social class as well as, or rather than, their gender, with perhaps limited challenge to the patriarchal attitudes of this time. As hooks asserts 'the exclusionary practices of women who dominate feminist discourse have made it practically impossible for new and varied theories to emerge' (1984, p.9). Even the women's groups at this time that were involved in what Sarachild (1978, p.144) referred to as 'consciousness raising' (women sharing their own experiences to understand wider contexts and political implications) were criticised for more suiting educated, middle- or upper-class women who may best be able to articulate their ideas – often leading to disagreements and division as some voices were excluded. This relates to Foucault and theories of power and also resonates with my personal reflection of my own experiences in the education system (outlined in Chapter 1), where many teachers in school –responsible for implementing policy – reinforced class and gender expectations, as opposed to challenging them.

2.3.3.1 Women in politics – second wave and beyond

Whilst looking at the role of women in the media is relevant, the focus of this study is education policy and women's voices in relation to this. Hence, it is interesting to review the number of women involved in politics in this period of second wave feminism – those who were in positions to be involved in discourse around education policy and the development and implementation of government policies. During this period there were a growing number of women Members of Parliament (MPs), albeit still relatively small. Cracknell and Tunnicliffe (2022) outlined that in 1979 there were only 19 women elected to be MPs which amounted to just 3 per cent of all MPs. This figure increased to 23 by 1983 (4%) and to 41 by the 1987 election (6%). This is in comparison to 616 male MPs in 1979, 627 in 1983 and 609 in 1987. Hence during the time of second wave feminism there were still a very small minority of women in direct policy-making positions. Those in ministerial positions were even fewer and it is important to note for this study that of the 12 Secretaries of State for Education in this period only two were women – Margaret Thatcher 1970-1974

(Conservative) and Shirley Williams 1976-1979 (Labour). It should be acknowledged for this study that whilst there were few female MPs during this time, women might also have been represented in non-elected positions in local government and other professional positions with education. These women may also have had some potential to influence the development and implementation of education policy, though as noted above they were not representative of all women and their voices may not have been heard above the power of the patriarchal bellow.

The number of female MPs went on to increase further during third and fourth wave feminism which roughly align to the latter two time periods in this study (1990s to current). It is relevant to include this here to provide clear comparison with the second wave. By 2010 there were 143 women MPs (22%) and 507 male MPs and by 2019 there were 220 female MPs (34%) compared to 430 men (Cracknell and Tunnicliffe 2022). During this time out of the 20 Secretaries of State for Education only 7 were women as follows:

- Gillian Shephard 1994-1997 (Conservative)
- Estelle Morris 2001-2002 (Labour)
- Ruth Kelly 2004-2006 (Labour)
- Nicky Morgan 2014-2016 (Conservative)
- Justine Greening 2016-2018 (Conservative)
- Michelle Donelan (Conservative) who was in the role for just two days in July 2022
- Gillian Keegan (Conservative) from 25 October 2022

Whilst this is much improved, it must be noted that women are still under-represented as a reflection of the UK population, where women make up 50.6% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2022), and hence parliament is still dominated by men.

However, whilst the number of women in politics was increasing the number of working-class people in politics declined. As Heath (2018, p.1056) indicates,

> Whereas the political representation of women and ethnic minorities in parliament has been on the increase in Britain over the last few years, the representation of other social groups, particularly the working classes, has been declining.

This is important to look at for this study in terms of intersectionality – to consider the social class of women who were in positions to influence education policy.

Whereas in 1964 over 37 per cent of Labour MPs came from manual occupational backgrounds, by 2010 this had fallen to just under 10 per cent (Heath 2018, p.1063). Together with data about the number of privately educated MPs in this time period (up to late 1980s) this demonstrates how skewed parliament was in favour of specific sectors of society – the middle and upper class – and this applied to both male and female MPs. This is still the case as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Looking at school background is an indicator of social class, as a report published by the Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission (2019, p.12) has stated,

> The type of school someone attends is both a proxy for socio-economic background and is also in and of itself an important part of someone's background, which can have a substantial impact on where they end up in life.

Looking at the two main political parties' data suggests that in 1979 73% of Conservative MPs and 18% of Labour MPs went to fee-paying schools (in comparison to around 7% of the general population) and 49% of Conservatives attended either Oxford or Cambridge University (Oxbridge) compared with 21% of Labour MPs (with only 1% of the population graduating from Oxbridge). By 1987 the number of MPs who had gone to a fee-paying school had decreased slightly – 68% of Conservative MPs and 14% of Labour MPs – and Oxbridge attendance stood at 45% and 15% respectively (Cracknell and Tunnicliffe 2022). Thus, the reality is that whilst there were some changes during this period like the inclusion of some women and ethnic minorities in politics, society in all its diversity was not well represented.

The number of MPs going to fee paying schools during the latter two time periods being studied here (which align to third and fourth wave feminism) has remained similar for Labour MPs standing at 15% in 2019 whilst for Conservative MPs there was a more significant reduction to 45%. In terms of university education, 88% of MPs have attended university with 54% attending Russell Group universities, a group of 24 universities that are considered prestigious, including Oxford and Cambridge (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019). Thus, a significant number of our MPs are still privately educated and have very different backgrounds and experiences from the majority they represent. Just 7% of the UK population attend private fee-paying schools (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019, Independent Schools Council Census and Annual Report 2022) and the majority of these attend without financial support. Whilst some do have assistance with fees the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019, p.12) reported that

> According to the Independent Schools Council, just 1 per cent of private school pupils currently have all their fees paid for, and just 4 per cent have more than half their fees covered.

Hence the vast majority of those attending private fee-paying schools are from very affluent backgrounds – these people are massively over-represented in parliament (and the people leading on education policy) as well as in other occupations. For example, 65% of senior judges attended independent fee-paying schools as did 59% of permanent secretaries, 57% of Lords, 52% of junior ministers, 49% of the armed forces, 44% of news columnists. Yet in terms of women, they are still under-represented across top professions, for example only 24% are senior judges and 16% local government leaders (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019).

In terms of the government and who is in the cabinet it is worth noting that all Prime Ministers across the four time periods of this study, with the exception of three (James Callaghan, Gordon Brown and Liz Truss) went to either independent schools or selective grammar schools. Published data on recent cabinet ministers (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019) indicates that 100% attended university with 87% attending Russell Group universities.

Looking at government Ministers with responsibility for school education over the four time periods of this study – currently named Secretaries of State for Education but previously titled differently – at the time of writing only 11 out of 40 were women (28%) and thus in positions to lead on education policy. Broken down across the two main political parties there were 25 Secretaries of State for Education (or similarly named) for the Conservative Party with just 7 of these being women (28%) and 15 for the Labour Party with 4 being women (27%). Fifteen out of the 18 male Conservative Secretaries of State for Education attended independent schools (83%), one attended a selective grammar school (6%) and 12 attended Oxbridge (67%). Of the 7 Conservative women 2 attended independent schools (29%), one attended a selective grammar (14%) and 3 went to the University of Oxford (43%). Hence, 17 of the 25 Conservative Secretaries of State for Education (68%) attended independent schools with a further 2 (8%) attending a selective grammar, and 15 out of 25 went on to Oxbridge (60%). In comparison, for Labour, 7 out of the 11 male Secretaries of State for Education attended independent schools (64%), one attended a selective grammar (9%) and 5 attended Oxbridge (45%). Of the 4 women in this high ministerial position, 2 attended independent schools (50%) and 2 went on to the University of Oxford (50%). Hence, 9 of the 15 Labour Secretaries of State for Education (56%) attended independent schools, one attended a selective grammar (7%) and 7 out of the 15 went on to Oxbridge (47%).

In summary, only around a quarter of those holding this prestigious position in government since 1945 – with the power to influence education policy – have been women. The men holding this position are far more likely than their women counterparts to have been to an independent or selective school as well as Oxbridge. In general, MPs in the Conservative Party are more likely to have been to independent schools and Oxbridge than their peers in the Labour Party. As indicated earlier, the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019) reflecting on 2019 election date, outline that in the Conservative party, just under half (45%) of MPs attended an independent school, compared to 15% in the Labour party. Furthermore, Cracknell and Tunnicliffe (2022) noted that following the 2019 election the Conservative Party had only 24% of female MPs compared to the Labour Party who had 51% female MPs.

This informs this study as it reinforces the importance of recognising intersectionality and knowing the limited pool of society that policy makers have emerged from – social class is still a key issue standing in the way of equality. Parliament is still dominated by men and still dominated by those of a particular social class, and this is the context in which education polices have been conceived and developed.

2.3.4 Third Wave Feminism

The premise of a third wave of feminism (1990s to 2010) aligning closely with the third time period in this study (1997-2010) has been questioned by many – as indeed has the entire wave metaphor. Bailey (1997, p.17) for example argued that ‘if there is actually a third wave of feminism, it is too close to the second wave for its definition to be clear and uncontroversial’. Boundaries between these waves are not clear cut, especially given that those feminists identified as second wave were still alive in the time of third wave feminism. Bailey offered an explanation to distinguish between them suggesting that

> The second wave is so named primarily as a means of emphasizing continuity with earlier feminist activities and ideas. By contrast, the third wave …..seem to identify itself as such largely as a means of distancing itself from earlier feminism stressing what are perceived as discontinuities with earlier feminist thought and activity (1997, p.17-18)

The term *third wave* was coined by Rebecca Walker (who has written extensively about issues related to gender, race and social justice) in response to a view that second wavers were focussed on conforming to a particular identity, morality and value system. Walker (1995, p.xxxiv) offered an alternative view about female empowerment that involved 'self-possession, self-determination, and an endless array of non-dichotomous possibilities'. Bailey (1997) suggested this less than positive characterisation of second wave feminists reflected media stereotypes – they were portrayed as angry, dour, unbothered by their appearance and wedded to political correctness – in contrast to third wavers who focussed on the right to follow a more individualistic and hedonistic lifestyle. As Allyn suggested,

> I felt part of a new generation of feminists. We wanted to make room for play in our lives – dyeing our hair, shaving our legs, dressing in ways that made us happy – without sacrificing a commitment to political activism (Allyn and Allyn 1995, p.144)

Findlen (1995, p.xv) reflected this perspective, acknowledging the 'stereotypes and distortions that still abound' and suggesting that 'if something or someone is appealing, fun or popular, it or she can't be feminist'. Levy (2005) referred to the 'raunch culture' associated with third wavers which essentially saw some women engage in behaviours that had previously been considered the domain of men (for example heavy drinking and partying) whilst Finlayson (2016, p.200-201) suggested that this notion of being liberated to 'adjust to their new freedoms and learn to enjoy them like men.…is not a wave of feminism at all'. She went on to argue that the third wave and 'new feminism' was underpinned by a kind of 'aggressive upbeat-ness – simultaneously coerced and coercive' and that attempts to detract from stereotypes of feminism as 'all seriousness and no glamour' were in fact more attempts to get away from feminism itself (Finlayson (2016, p.222). More recently, Malinowska (2020, p.5) has outlined how popular TV programmes reflected this, suggesting the female lead characters in programmes like Sex and the City, Bridget Jones Diary, and Ally McBeal ridiculed traditional feminist ideals 'but this time from a position of power'. This perspective was also reflected in Valenti's 2009 book (Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters) which intended to capture third wave feminism and be a 'guide' for young women on why feminism matters. However, this has been criticised by some, like Power (2009) who argued it promoted a kind of feminism that has a 'total lack of structural analysis, genuine outrage or collective demand' (2009, p.30). It was considered by some, like Power (2009) to be a superficial and vacuous model of individualistic 'consumer' feminism reflective of capitalist society that Finlayson (2016, p.225) associated with the continued oppression of women and inherent patriarchy, stating that 'the co-option of feminism by capitalism often looks very much like the co-option of feminism by patriarchy itself'.

Finlayson (2016, p.223) also referred to 'corporate feminism' as part of third wave feminism. This is the notion that the liberation for women was about being successful – praised, valued, and rewarded for displaying typically masculine characteristics/traits in the workplace in order to compete on the same terms as men to get to the top, often resulting in criticisms that their success might be at the expense of others, including women, who might be trampled on in this process. However, this perspective is problematic in my view as it feeds a negative stereotype of successful women, suggesting that only by adopting male traits did they achieve such positions, whilst simultaneously building a deficit model for other women who are not deemed successful or who adopt different strategies for success.

Overall, these divisions are clearly problematic for women in both time periods as they are based on stereotypes of both second and third wavers and as such undermine the voices of all these women. Arguably being pitted against each other in this way potentially may have resulted in a distraction from their involvement in addressing key issues, like education – and this might well be a reflection of the capitalist society we live in, that seems to value such individualism and competition. Nicholson (2010) and Bailey (1997) caution against such a clear-cut distinctions between these waves and also suggest there were some continuities. Nicholson argued that during this suggested third wave many issues from the second wave were becoming embedded in what she refers to as the 'long walk through the institutions' (2010, p.36), for example, women's studies programmes were created, rape crisis centres set up and shelters for domestic abuse victims were established. Bailey suggests some second wavers had engaged with issues like racism and sexuality and to assume they hadn't would be incorrect and as such the third wave was not as distinct as suggested.

However, the shift towards deeper understanding around intersectionality came more into play during third wave feminism. Bailey (1997) suggested that despite the efforts of some second wave feminists it was very clear that racism within feminism was still prevalent and the younger, third wavers sought to continue to address this. Finlayson (2016, p.201) suggests that third wave feminism might indeed be interpreted as

> more inclusive of queer identities and more accommodating of 'intersectional' perspectives, as well as of certain groups (such as sex workers) which have found themselves alienated by the traditional feminist tendency to problematize their activities and occupations

To others this represented a shift in the focus of political struggles from social issues like the division of labour to more cultural issues like identity and representation. Fraser (2013, p.160) refers to this shift as a move from 'the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition'.

During this time, it is not surprising perhaps that women became more aware of global issues affecting other women. Like Nicholson (2010), Walters (2005) suggests increased awareness was due to a growth of academic feminist programmes and research

> Academic theses, scholarly articles and texts, as well as conferences, have all helped disseminate important information about feminism across the world (Walters 2005, p.139)

During this time these programmes proliferated beyond isolated 'liberal arts schools' into 'law schools, medical schools, and schools of architecture and journalism' and also recognised 'how phenomena such as gender, race and class intersect in constituting an individual's social identity' (Nicholson 2010, p.36-37). In terms of this study, the consciousness raised through these programmes may well have influenced women to become more active in areas like politics and education, where they may have had opportunities to influence policy. Dissemination of feminist studies and research was further enabled by the advances in technology and communication, supported by the growth of the internet and world wide web (Berners-Lee et al 1999) which impacted on the speed with which global news and information was distributed. Malinowska (2020) argues that these advances in technology also supported women getting their voices heard in different ways – there was a 'new consciousness of women's role in technological evolution' and 'emancipatory potential behind new information and communication technologies' (2020, p.4). Women were able to network in a different way using social media platforms – this is important perhaps in developing confidence in the power of their voices.

However, Walters suggests this has also been counterproductive as younger generations of women see feminism as an academic subject and not something they are experiencing or discovering for themselves and as such are less engaged and 'uninterested in feminism' (2005, p.140). Previous generations of women made significant social, economic and political gains and hence women in this period and beyond needed to re-invent feminism to have meaning for themselves. Nicholson (2010, p.34) argued that feminism did not die in the early 1990s but rather was a 'younger form of feminism that looked different to earlier forms' as highlighted by Walker (1995), Allyn (1995) and Findlen (1995). It is noted however, that despite the attempts by Walker and others to promote intersectionality in feminism there were others like hooks (2014) who felt the 'third wave quickly became synonymous with white, young, well-educated women' (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, p.397). In relation to this study this is significant in considering the women who might have had the potential to be involved in the development and enactment of education policy as indicated in the above section on the women who were likely to be involved in politics.

2.3.5 Fourth Wave Feminism

The idea of a fourth wave of feminism might be considered premature given that the notion of a third wave is still being grappled with. If the fourth wave started around 2010 it surely cannot be easily distinguished from its predecessor which was indeed a short wave. Finlayson (2016, p.201) suggests there is less clarity on the fourth wave than there was on the third and that it refers to

> a kind of upbeat campaigning to improve the public image of women: to resist the cruder forms of objectification, whilst finding ways to 'celebrate' women – and especially 'great' women.

Recent publications lend weight to this perspective. For example, in 2019 Yvette Cooper, a Labour Member of Parliament (MP), published *She Speaks,* a book about the great speeches of women through time. In the same year Rachel Reeves, also a Labour MP, published

Women of Westminster, which is essentially the stories of women MPs since Nancy Astor was elected as the first woman MP in 1919. More recently in 2022, *Warrior Queens & Quiet Revolutionaries: How Women (Also) Built the World* was published by Kate Mosse, touted as a 'celebration of unheard and under-heard women's history'.

However, whilst celebrating the achievements of women thus far, there are continuing issues to address in terms of equality related to gender, race, and class, for example, the balance of those in top jobs and the continuation of wage gaps. As the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019, p.70) outline,

> Many individual women, despite a large amount of talent and hard work, are not able to reach the top of their professions at the same rate as their equally qualified male counterparts……And if women do get to the top, those from less advantaged backgrounds face a double pay gap, both for their gender, and for their socio-economic background

These issues are not limited to professions but to all types of work. The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019, p.73) suggest that women born to parents in low-income backgrounds are less likely than men to improve their situation due to costs of childcare and attitudes related to the 'interaction of both sexist as well as classist attitudes around professional success and leadership'. In terms of education the number of women in top jobs is variable. Marren and Bazeley (2022) reported on data collected for the Fawcett Society (between September and December 2021) to inform the biennial UK Sex and Power 2022 Report, finding that women make up only 31% of Vice Chancellors, 28% of university professors and 40% of Secondary Headteachers. The latter figure a much more positive shift though does not reflect the 65% of secondary school teachers that are women.

Continuing inequality has been exhibited widely and publicly with the rapid advances in technology in recent years, making the world seem a smaller place – and in particular there has been a massive growth of social media platforms that have been utilised by women to voice their views and ideas (for example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). These platforms are used regularly by MPs and other vested parties, for example in the field of education Twitter has been utilised by the many – teachers, university academics, MPs, the public – giving women power to voice their views on policy as well as local and national issues. Women are able to contribute in these forums and indeed out of the seven women interviewed as part of this study, four are prolific on Twitter.

Whilst social media has been used positively to put across views and opinions it has also been used as a vehicle for abuse, prejudice, and discrimination to undermine the discourse of women. This has affected many women in recent years who have been subjected to rape threats and violence for simply putting their views forward. Lynch, Sherlock and Bradshaw (2022, p.1) reporting for the BBC – following analysis of three million tweets over a six-week period – indicated that around one in 20 tweets were classed as toxic (defined as rude, disrespectful or unreasonable) and 'female MPs were more likely to be called "thick" and "ignorant" and be subject to sexualised language than their male counterparts'. There are many other examples that could be used but the point here is not to outline these but rather to make the point that these are attempts to silence women's voices – despite the passing of decades of feminism and a raft of legislation there remains serious attempts to undermine and exclude the voices of women. Cochrane (2013) argues this fourth wave of feminism, with increased feminist activity, is in response to continuing issues, discrimination and violence affecting women. She cites issues ranging from feeling unsafe in public, men jeering and making inappropriate comments to women, threats of rape and violence for speaking out, domestic violence, to the pressures young women feel to meet particular beauty standards, and of course there is the very current and seemingly growing anti-abortion rhetoric that threatens to undermine the very rights that 'second wavers' fought so hard to achieve. This has been further aggravated by the recent over-ruling of the 1973 Roe versus Wade decision that gave all women in the USA the right to have an abortion, instigating further protest in other parts of the world, like England, where even an influential politician (Jacob-Rees-Mogg[12]) has stated on national TV that he is against abortion in any circumstance (BBC 2017). Peroni and Rodak (2020, p.4) argue that 'the renewed banning on abortion in several western countries show how the government of women's body is still central to the construction of the contemporary state', suggesting this is reflective of continuing patriarchal norms.

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[12] As per the discussion above on how many MPs are unrepresentative of the general population, it is noted that Jacob Rees-Mogg has an extreme elite background, educated at Eton and Oxford University with an estimated fortune of over £100 million.

These issues, characteristic of second wave feminism, demonstrate the continuing threats and struggles for women's rights, with Cochrane (2013) suggesting they have led to campaigns like the Everyday Sexism Project and more recently #MeToo and #NoMore and #TimessUP for example. Peroni and Rodak (2020, p.5) refer to this as 'hashtag feminism' that they consider as 'intersectional, intergenerational and transnational'. They consider fourth wave feminism as progressive, encompassing the diverse experiences of all individuals, whilst Evans and Chamberlain (2015) have argued the expansion to include trans-activists and men has not been without controversy amongst some feminists. This is important to acknowledge though not a focus for this study. In addition, as indicated above, technology enables real time reporting of issues around the world including issues related to women and hence some level of 'sisterhood' is possible as common issues are so easily identified – what Sarachild (1978) referred to as 'consciousness -raising' in second wave feminism can shift beyond face-to-face groups to national and international interaction and organisation. Peroni and Rodak (2020, p.8) argue this provides women with direct access to other women without the filter of a 'patriarchal lens' but others like Evans and Chamberlain (2015, p.406) add a cautionary note here, suggesting that technology does not provide the answer to inclusion as many women do not have the technology available to them or the education to 'engage with its possibilities'. However, Malinowska (2020, p.5) has argued that the use of social media has indeed been a 'catalyst' in fighting women's issues and more importantly perhaps it demonstrates the continuation of issues that have affected generations of women. Malinowska (2020, p. 5-6) suggests

> The fourth wave shows interest in essential feminist values and as such welcomes a transgeneration dialogue in which women in different feminist periods (late second, third and fourth wavers) share experiences for a common goal

Whilst not directly related to education policy these issues and trends provide intelligence on the opportunities of women to fully participate and engage in all areas of life including policy-making.

2.4 Concluding comments on Feminism

The above writing on feminism is highly relevant to this research as it is looking at women's voices in education policy over time and the power they had to influence and be heard.

Hence the need to look at the perspectives, opportunities, technologies and tools that were characteristic of each period, and the emerging perspectives that may influence policy of the future. The extent to which women were included, invested and engaged in the issues like education policy in terms of this study, or indeed excluded, is at the heart of this, hence the importance of considering these waves of feminism, albeit briefly, to give social, political and cultural context that can be drawn upon in the analytic chapters on the four areas of education policy.

The above sections demonstrate that feminism is a complex notion and means different things to different people – an argument made also in terms of policy in section 2.2. In relation to the Foucauldian genealogical nature of this study the development of feminism and the rights of women – which relates to their ability to contribute to educational policy development – has not occurred in a linear way but rather there have been continuities and discontinuities over time, with problematizations and punctuations along the way. This reflects the view of Koopman (2013) that genealogies are distinct from traditional histories with a focus on deep, submerged problems. Koopman believes it is Foucault's focus on problematization that separates genealogy from traditional histories, arguing that critique, contingency and complexity are core elements inherent in this. It is evident that each wave of feminism has been problematized. The debate on *what is feminism* is underpinned by critique and issues of power; the present state of feminism is contingent on the specific events and issues of the past (and could have been quite different if other contingent factors had been at play), and the complexity of feminism has been outlined, for example, in terms of understanding the problems of generational boundaries posed by the wave model as well as issues around intersectionality. These tensions, continuities and discontinuities inform us of how we arrived at our historical present.

Evans and Chamberlain (2015, p.397) indicated the importance of continuity for feminism but acknowledged that 'the act of renewal does not equate to a disavowal of that which has gone before'. Hence the identification of four separate waves that appear 'generational' does not negate the areas of continuity between them. They stated that,

> Progressive social and political movements do not make advances simply by negating multiplicity of thought and action – particularly when they are driven by the same ultimate aim (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, p.398)

Bailey (1997) argued that whilst the second wave of feminism might be considered a continuation of first wave feminism there were elements that distinguished it as different, with more of a focus on issues like equal pay, childcare and abortion. And of course, second wave feminism is considered problematic as issues focussed on the priorities of some women over others, ignoring issues related to class and race for example. Also problematic was the idea that third wave feminists sought to distance themselves from second wave feminism, marking a shift and discontinuity as indicated above. Bailey suggests that

> for younger feminists to ignore the work of earlier feminists is not only to fail to wrap their hands around valuable tools, it is to join their shovels to the backlash forces that would bury the history and significance of feminism (1997, p.27)

The voices of women should not be dismissed whatever wave or type of feminism that they align themselves with – there are continuities and discontinuities, connections and differences that have marked the history and development of feminism and that have been contingent to our ‘historical present’. Looking at future possibilities, Hogeland (2001, p.117) suggested, ‘notions of generational rupture or divides work effectively to prevent us from seeing the powerful persistence of political beliefs, of specific women's issues, and of strategies for change’, whilst Evans and Chamberlain (2015, p. 406) have called for feminists to reject ‘oppositional discourse and crude characterisations of each wave’ and ‘emphasise continuity, inclusivity and multiplicity within feminist identity’. More recently, Malinowska (2020) has advised there is an opportunity currently for all women – late second, third and fourth wavers – to unite on issues that are continuing to impact on women and their potential to participate in life and public life on the same terms as men. This resonates strongly with me, given my own exposure to second, third and fourth wave feminism, and the metaphor of a kaleidoscope that Nicholson (2010, p.39) suggests reflects this notion – it is complex with distinct colours and patterns and ‘with a turn of the kaleidoscope, some of these colours and patterns become more pronounced, others less so, and new patterns and colours have emerged’.

Whatever ‘shape’ feminism takes in the future there are continuing issues to address. Finlayson (2016) has argued that despite people recognising such inequalities and oppression some are unwilling to describe or label themselves as feminists. She suggests that the public face of feminism is ‘patchy, fickle, and changeable in its expressions’ (2016, p.200) but this surface provides a camouflage for the rich and diverse reality of feminism. This reflects the notion of Nicholson's kaleidoscope and the scope this provides for encompassing possible feminist discourse that is liberated from the implicit boundaries of specific waves or paradigms. As Purvis (2004, p.112) proposes,

> A vision of the future unencumbered by paradigmatic closure is an ambitious aim, but perhaps we should reimagine, reconceptualise, or resituate this existing site of tension as we simultaneously work towards radical openness.

This potential for radical openness is in part what this study aims to investigate – to consider how women's voices might be used as a lens to reframe the possibilities of future education policy – where women's voices are not silenced, overlooked or absent and where women are equally represented in key areas related to policy-making and development, like government, think tanks and 'expert' advisory groups.

2.4.1 Conclusion of the literature review

This chapter has outlined the complex nature of policy – in terms of the development and emergence of policy, the dissemination of policy and the implementation or 'enactment' of it. The many nuances of policy have been considered and the chapter has also sought to demonstrate that policy reflects social, cultural and economic contexts in any given time as well as local, national and global contexts. Whilst these policy complexities are associated with all fields of policy it is education policy that is the focus of this thesis. The study also considers women's voices in terms of policy and hence examines the complexity of the term/notion of feminism, as an understanding of both policy and feminism are integral to the architecture of this thesis. The next chapter builds on these understandings to explain and justify how the research has been designed.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design for the study. It establishes the empirical and conceptual research framework, explaining and justifying methodology, implementation and data analysis. This includes the ontological considerations and epistemological location of the thesis and the decisions made about theory, approach, and strategies of data collection and analysis and also the ethical considerations that underpin all elements of the research.

This study uses a feminist genealogical approach to dissect four areas of education policy – school organisation and structure, curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education - across four time periods as follows, as also indicated in Chapter 1:

- post second world war (1945-1979)
- the Thatcher years (1979-1997)
- the New Labour years (1997-2010)
- post 2010 to present.

These four areas have been at the forefront of education policy in England over many decades as well as being of long-term interest to me, as indicated in the personal reflection in Chapter 1. The rationale for focussing on these four areas across these specific time periods is that they reflect particular political, social and cultural contexts that provide opportunity to identify continuities and discontinuities over time, from a feminist genealogical perspective. Whilst each period might not be entirely comparable, it is the policy that emerged in those periods that is pertinent to focus on as this reflected the wider societal and cultural changes and provides evidence of both centralising and decentralising agendas. For example, the second and third periods are characterised by significant global advancements in technology and communication that have led to the world feeling ‘smaller’ and more accessible. This has enabled greater scrutiny of international educational policies that have influenced government policy makers in England, as international league tables in education have become a perceived marker for demonstrating success. However, rather than comparison, this genealogical study aims more to identify continuities and discontinuities, addressing particularly the complexities and contingency of policy.

The nature of a study invariably influences the methodological and theoretical perspectives that the researcher employs and this is the case with this research. As Walshaw (2012, p.62) asserts:

> Designs do not simply arrive out of thin air. They are built on theoretical foundations which we will broadly name here as positivist, interpretivist or emancipatory.

As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) point out these theoretical foundations or traditions provide an enquiry with 'assumptions, limit conditions and tactical tools' to locate the research within a tradition that best supports its intentions and focus. This genealogical study resists a positivist stance, which assumes the social world to be objective and value-free – the world is measurable and there is a focus on facts and 'truths' established through scientific enquiry. Rather, this study is guided by an interpretivist framework which sees the world as socially constructed and subjective – it is meanings, understandings and interpretations of social contexts that matter most and are frequently captured by qualitative data. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) qualitative research is characterised by four dimensions – epistemologies, theories, approaches and strategies. These dimensions are broadly reflected by other philosophers for example Crotty (1998), who refers to epistemologies, theories, methodology and method. Crotty suggests these dimensions are interrelated – the choice of methods will be influenced by research methodology, which in turn is influenced by the theoretical perspective, which in turn is influenced by the researchers' epistemological stance. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.13) make a similar assertion,

> When designing and conducting research, one should work hard to develop principled alignments between and among epistemological positions, relevant theoretical frameworks, approaches to research, and strategies for collecting and analysing and interpreting data.

It is noted that Kamberelis and Dimitriadis find the term 'methodology' typically used in discussions of research design problematic, as it is often used as an all-encompassing term to refer to overarching theories, approaches and strategies which they imply undermines the requirement to define specific dimensions of research.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.26), extend their framework to include four chronotopes which they consider provide tools for

> understanding some of the different ways in which qualitative inquiry is typically framed and how different frameworks predispose researchers to embrace different epistemologies, theories, approaches, and strategies.

The term chronotope means time and space and draws from the work of Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist. Bakhtin (1981, p.425-426) suggested that chronotopes are like ‘x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring’. They signify particular ways to understand context and the actions, agents, events, and practices that constitute those contexts.

The four chronotopes that Kamberelis and Dimitriadis identify (outlined in the figure overleaf) provide further information on where this study is located. These chronotopes are not fixed entities but rather there is a degree of fluidity between each of them and hence it is possible for the research to be aligned to more than one chronotope. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.59) assert,

> Seldom is a researcher ever really located within a single chronotope. Additionally, depending upon their values and goals, two different researchers might choose to locate ostensibly the same research project within different chronotopes

Whilst Chronotope One suggests an objectivist/positivist epistemological stance, and hence is not a consideration for this study, the other three chronotopes are grounded in versions of social constructionist epistemology and are therefore more reflective of this study. Chronotope Three for example reflects an emancipatory/social justice agenda that aligns to discussion on the impact of educational policy in terms of social class and gender, whereas Chronotope Four reflects the genealogical approach of the study and interest in the complex workings of power as articulated by the writings of Foucault. Interviews are used as part of the data collection for this study (discussed in the section 3.5 below) and when analysing these the hermeneutic cycle[13] inherent in Chronotope Two is drawn upon linking to the theoretical idea of ‘gestalt’, which also considers the relationship of individual parts to the whole. By problematizing qualitative research, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis assert, ‘we have tried to show that no single episteme lines up with any single epistemology, theory, or methodology' (p.58).

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[13] Text analysis through the hermeneutic cycle refers to the idea that understanding text as a whole emerges from analysing individual parts and one's understanding of each individual part is supported by reference to the whole.

	Chronotope:	Broad link to epistemology:
1.	Objectivism and Representation	Objectivist epistemology. Knowledge is a mirror of nature.
2.	Reading and Interpretation	Social constructionist epistemology. Knowledge is socially constructed but value neutral
3.	Skeptiscism, Conscientisation, and Praxis	Social constructionist epistemology. Knowledge is socially constructed and inextricably linked to power relations
4.	Power/Knowledge and Defamiliarisation	Social constructionist epistemology. Knowledge is an effect of existent power relations

Figure 3 - Four chronotopes and links to epistemology

Whilst a review of chronotopes support the understanding of where this study is 'located', it is the four dimensions of qualitative research that Kamberelis and Dimitriadis reference that will be considered here to provide in depth explanation of the decisions made that underpin the framework of this study. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis indicate the importance of unpacking the meaning of these four dimensions – hence in each section there is a brief explanation of the meaning of the dimension as well as the decisions made within each dimension that supported the design of this research.

3.2 Dimension one: Epistemologies

Epistemology is a part of philosophy that is concerned with knowledge – the theory, nature and scope of knowledge and how people acquire knowledge. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.15) consider objectivism and constructionism as the two 'grand' epistemologies and consider 'where one locates oneself epistemologically has important consequences for what one sees and how one explains what one sees' (p.59).

However, it is difficult to consider the epistemological dimension of a study without first considering a researcher's ontological assumptions. Ontology refers to the nature of existence or reality, whereas epistemology relates to knowledge – what we know and how we come to know things, in particular how we come to believe that knowledge is true. Gray (2009, p.17) suggests that epistemology provides 'a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate'. Thus, as ontology examines the nature of reality and epistemology is concerned with how that reality is known, the two are interrelated.

This study is guided by an interpretivist framework which sees the world as socially constructed and subjective. Social constructionists believe that meanings and theories are generated through social interactions and this reflects the nature of this study. As indicated, the purpose of this study is to analyse four specific areas of education policy over four distinct time periods. It attempts to explain how current policy in these areas can be 'problematized' by considering how such policy developed over time and gained 'legitimacy and power', considering the continuities and discontinuities between policies in these areas across these time periods and the tension of both centralising and decentralising agendas. Together with a focus on women's voices the study considers how these policies might be disrupted to re-imagine the future of education. This involves the examination of multiple interpretations in terms of the development, dissemination and implementation of policy and analysis of the accounts of the participants in this study – hence the ontological assumptions underpinning this study are rooted in social constructivist epistemology.

3.3 Dimension two: theory

If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants (Newton in Turnbull 1959)

Theories can be considered 'abstract sets of assumptions and assertions' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2005, p.15) that provide the researcher with tools to utilise in their attempts to examine new ideas, problems or questions and in turn develop new theories and knowledge. As such the above quotation from Isaac Newton seems very pertinent to this perspective.

Positivism and interpretivism are considered two key social theories that researchers might ground their work in, and these align with objectivism and constructivism epistemologies respectively. Whilst positivists argue that reality can only come to be known through empirical observations and 'a logic of verification' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2005, p.16) – the idea that results of experiments or observations are quantifiable and can be verified to become a 'universal truth' – interpretivism supports qualitative based research, and rather than attempting to understand the world and reality through what can be scientifically measured, it focusses on understanding, interpreting and explaining the complex nature of social reality. It attempts to consider the rich and nuanced texture of society and those within it and the meaning they assign to practices and phenomena.

Theories are essentially processes that can be used to make sense of 'phenomena of interest' and it is in this regard that the works of Foucault are drawn upon, particularly his ideas around the relationship between power and knowledge which he describes thus,

> Power produces knowledge … [and] power and knowledge directly imply one another; … there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (1995, p.27)

As such this study is situated within the theoretical foundation of interpretivism – critiquing education policy and examining the power relations of players involved in this, and considering the contingency and complexity of policy, drawing on Foucault's concept of genealogy as interpreted and rearticulated by Koopman. It is underpinned by a qualitative framework, which as Walshaw (2012, p.63) suggests includes a focus on 'exploring how separate parts and their interconnections contribute to a cohesive entity'. This is particularly pertinent for this study in investigating the fragmented nature of the education system in England with numerous policies that focus on separate parts, potentially more easily manipulated, as opposed to a focus on the whole – the sum of those parts. This draws to some extent on the idea of 'gestalt', a term derived from the German word for 'whole' or 'pattern' with Gestalt Theory described by Wertheimer (1924) as follows,

> There are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole.

This has a particular resonance for this genealogical study which is firmly rooted in a qualitative design favouring 'explorations of cultures, people and individuals' and looking in depth at 'what is going on holistically' and rejecting a focus on 'facts, numbers and measurements' that is characteristic of positivist or quantitative research designs (Walshaw 2012, p.63).

3.4 Dimension three: approach

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis argue that the approach taken provides the 'guiding assumptions, strategies and techniques' required to undertake the research. Whilst much of the literature (for example, Crotty 1998) use the term methodology rather than approach to research the two in this instance refer to the overriding structure and design of a study. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.17-18) prefer the latter suggesting that the former implies a more 'rigid template' or 'sets of techniques' with which to structure research. From the types of approaches commonly used in research – ethnography, grounded theory, narrative enquiry, actions research, genealogy, discourse analysis – it is genealogy that is most appropriate to support the structure of this study.

The following section offers a detailed discussion on genealogy as it relates to these three dimensions and chronotopes.

3.4.1 Genealogy

Genealogy is a complex term with varied interpretations. In everyday parlance it refers to the practice of tracing family and ancestors. In the social sciences and the humanities, however, it has quite a distinct if related meaning. For Bevir (2008, p.263), it is simply 'a historical narrative that explains an aspect of human life by showing how it came into being' whilst for Tamboukou (2003a, p.6) it offers both a means of reflecting on the 'nature and development of modern power' as well as providing a theoretical tool for research. It is a term associated closely with Foucault and his work, arguably embracing epistemology, theory and approach. Dean (1994, p.35-36) suggests,

> Genealogy is a way of linking historical contents into organized and ordered trajectories that are neither the simple unfolding of their origins nor the necessary realization of their ends. It is a way of organizing multiple, open-ended, heterogeneous trajectories of discourses, practices, and events, and of establishing their patterned relationships, without recourse to regimes of truth that claim pseudo-naturalistic laws or global necessities.

In other words, genealogy is messy and disruptive – it is not a straightforward or linear travail into history. Building on Nietzsche, Foucault's work on genealogies emerged from his belief that to write 'traditional histories' was problematic as the links between past and present are not simplistic. Bevir (2008, p.266-267) concurs with this suggesting that before this brand of genealogy there was an emphasis on ‘developmental historicism’, where history was conceived of as guided, structured and progressive. Foucault’s genealogies in contrast reflect the disconnect and schism between past and present – there are continuities and also discontinuities. Bevir indicates this is typical of what he calls ‘radical historicism’ whilst Foucault (1984, p.88) outlines his approach as follows,

> Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.

Koopman (2013, p.5-6) further contributes to the debate on genealogy by arguing that genealogy has become ‘trendy’ and is ‘widely misunderstood and malappropriated’. He questions how some apparent genealogies are distinct from traditional histories as,

> they have very little to do with the methods, styles, and ideas at work in the philosophical tradition of genealogy as represented by Foucault, Nietzsche, Williams, and others.

This is echoed by Bevir (2008, p.267) who suggests that ‘teleological narratives of developmental historicism’ are rejected by those favouring Foucault’s approach where history is revealed as discontinuous and contingent. This approach ‘seeks the surfaces of events, focussing on micropractices, tracing minor shifts, demonstrating discontinuities and recurrences’ (Tamboukou 2003a, p.8).

Allen (2016) suggests that there are three different modes of genealogical inquiry: subversive, vindicatory and problematizing. Foucault’s genealogical approach is characterised by the focus on ‘problematization’ and this distinguishes his approach from those adopted by Bernard Williams (vindicatory genealogy) and Nietzsche (subversive genealogy), both of which attempt to evaluate the present using history. Koopman (2013, p.18) suggests that Williams and Nietzsche used genealogy ‘to cast judgements on certain concepts’, whereas Foucault’s use of ‘problematization’ was to

> make manifest the constitutive and regulative conditions of the present as a material for thought and action that we would need to work on if we are to transform that present.

Koopman suggests that genealogies are not just about articulating problems but focus on 'submerged' problems and he believes it is Foucault's focus on 'problematization' that separates genealogy from traditional history. Thus, Koopman (2013, p.2) reflects Foucault's view indicated above, claiming that 'genealogy at its best involves a practice of critique in the form of historical problematization of the present'. Koopman rejects the criticism (Fraser, 1989) that Foucault's approach leads to normative judgements, arguing that 'the force of Foucault is not to assert a normative judgement, so much as to provoke a critical questioning' (2013, p.91) – to 'clarify and intensify the dangers of the present' (2013, p.81). As Tamboukou (2003a, p.6) indicates, Foucault's genealogy offers an alternative to simply asking which types of discourse we should believe and rather involves the posing of questions around 'which kinds of practices, linked to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure'. In other words, we might consider our present selves – including our knowledge, understanding and beliefs – and practices – as resulting from one set of practices and conditions that are contingent rather than necessary.

This is what interests me in this approach – the idea that problematization of current policy offers a lens to see things differently to how I had hitherto considered – to question policy by looking at how and why we got to this point and how current policy is contingent on what may or may not have been a factor in the time periods that preceded it. Whereas Nietzsche and Williams might have sought to ultimately condemn or congratulate in their genealogical endeavours, Foucault 'sought conditions of possibility' by analysing and diagnosing practices 'in a way that reveals the problematizations enabling them' which 'condition our possibilities for acting, thinking and being in the present' (p.93). Koopman outlines his commitment to the view that 'genealogy is primarily a methodological, or analytical, or diagnostic, toolkit' (2013, p.6), asserting that Foucault was concerned with 'undertaking inquiry' as opposed to 'doing theory'. Furthermore, he asserts that

> If we are to reconstruct our present so that it may yield better futures, we first need a grip on the materials out of which our present has been constructed in the past (2013, p.12)

That is what this study aims to do and why drawing upon Foucauldian principles as an approach is relevant. This study aims to not only contextualise the current education 'crisis' in the four key areas identified by considering the continuities and discontinuities in education policy over the four time periods and 'problematizing' the past, but also aims to offer some perspectives, particularly women's perspectives, on re-envisioning the nature and purpose of education for today and the future.

Foucault described his approach in a 1983 lecture – reproduced in a later edited publication (Foucault and Joseph Pearson, 2001)

> I am trying to analyze the way institutions, practices, habits and behaviour become a problem…..The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and 'silent', out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions

Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge will thus be drawn upon to examine the four areas of education policy over the four time periods. This is not without challenges as the very policies that have emerged over time are products of the specific time they were created in and rather than representing a historical 'truth', they simply reflect a version of truth that particular key players, or agents, of that time established. As Foucault (1978, p.2) stated, the analysis of the mechanisms of power,

> simply involves investigating where and how, between whom, between what points, according to what processes, and with what effects, power is applied.

The idea that there might be a 'golden thread' that links the different time periods in this study – leading to a path of illuminating insights on the future of education – is problematic as this is not what Foucault's approach to genealogy is about. As such there is a need to be cautious, particularly with my own background in history, to ensure I investigate and challenge such notions and rather look for the continuities and discontinuities that might challenge and disrupt contemporary policy; as Koopman (2013, p.17) asserts 'the diagnostic procedures' of genealogy are best seen as 'problematizations of our present'.

This study thus attempts a 'history of the present' – a critical enquiry into the problems of the present through examining and problematizing aspects of educational policy of the past. The aim is to draw upon Koopman's three core elements of genealogy as problematization – critique, contingency and complexity – to examine aspects of policy to inform the 'historical present'. Koopman (2019) indicates that genealogy as a practice of *critique* is not about standing in judgement or pontificating on all that is wrong in the world but rather about 'exploring the limits of what we can do in the present' (p.23) – genealogy is about the conditions of possibility and what is and is not possible. According to Koopman (2013, p.21) this particular Foucauldian approach 'invites reconstruction' – this is where new perspectives and new knowledge might emerge to inform contemporary and future policy. As an example, Foucault sought to examine the penal systems, not to criticise or judge them as per Nietzsche's 'subversive' approach of genealogy, but rather to problematize – to understand how and why certain 'assumptions' had resulted in conditions of practice, with a vision that only by examining how such things were 'composed' would it be possible to transform or reconstruct those practices for the present and future. Similarly, this study aims to adopt that method to examine and critique aspects of education policy with a view of considering how current and future policy might be reconstructed.

Koopman (2019) also argues that genealogy is *contingent* in that looking back in history from the present we can examine what happened and how it happened, not only recognising that our present practices are contingent as opposed to necessary but *how* they contingently emerged – and also perhaps consider what did not emerge and why. He suggests that

> Focusing on conditions that just so happen to constrain our possibilities for action in the present, genealogy makes no claim that everything is contingent (or that nothing is necessary), but rather only focuses our attention on that which is contingent (p.23-24)

This study thus attempts to challenge the assumptions that aspects of educational policy were 'constrained by necessity' rather than merely contingent. Bevir (2008, p.268) argues that this focus on contingency leads us to consider a multitude of ways that an 'action, practice or tradition' can be 'reinterpreted, transformed or overpowered'. As such a focus on contemporary policy via the lens of contingency offers room for review and re-imagining of such policy.

Koopman's third core idea is that genealogy is underpinned by *complexity* and involves 'the rejection of simplifying explanations that would deduce from some single cause the conditions bearing on the present' (2019, p.24). Whilst the present is contingent on the past it should be recognised that along the way there have been compromises and power struggles which are 'never simple, never easy, and never innocent' and these have shaped our perspective of the present. As Koopman asserts,

> The limits of who we can be, and the boundaries that we find the we must remain within, are always the result of partial settlements that may come to be unsettled again (2019, p.24)

Hence this study aims to problematize/critique the four aspects of contemporary education policy by examining the contingencies and complexities of each area and considering what might be 'unsettled' or 're-envisioned' in the present if other contingent factors are recognised and acknowledged – like the perspectives of those who might not have been represented in the policy-making process.

Genealogy is not, however, without its critics. Fraser (1989, p.20) indicates that Foucault's approach to looking at power typically includes 'the valorization of some statement forms and the concomitant devaluation of others'. Moreover, she argues that 'normative justification' is problematic here and questions Foucault's suggested absence of this. Foucault believes that power is not imposed in a top-down fashion but is 'everywhere and in everyone' (Fraser 1989, p.25) and 'circulates through a society rather than being owed by one group' (Mills 2004). Fraser asserts this belies the view that there are state or economic powerhouses that might capitalise on their influence, for example in the policy-making process, or present dominant voices – a normative judgement that is typically considered as the liberal framework in modern power relations. Foucault rejects the suggestion that power is driven by a particular ideology and suggests rather that it is discourse that allows for the enactment of agency and power.

Koopman reinforces that genealogy as problematization is critical and not judgemental – it opens up problems and questions these as part of a process of critical inquiry. He suggests that a problem should not necessarily be seen as a 'wrong' that might be inherently value laden and open to judgement rather simply a problem to query and examine and as such can be free from normative judgements. Bevir (2008, p.271) supports this view suggesting that this approach to genealogy 'denaturalizes' social norms and ways of life as these are questioned and critiqued, and as such 'arose out of contingent historical contests'. People today think and behave in a way that has been made possible by the emergence of a variety of contingent factors and if another set of alternative contingent factors had 'won out' or emerged than people today may behave and think differently. Thus, we can examine how contingent factors came to be and consider that what actually came to be is not the result of what was ‘necessary’ at all but rather because of *which* particular possibilities at that time prevailed.

Related to this is how the use of power and control might have been exerted in those times that resulted in what we have today being the product of a particular set of contingencies. This then opens up the opportunity for transformation by seeing it is the result of only one set of possibilities that prevailed, freeing us up to consider other possibilities. Fraser might respond by suggesting the very nature of this approach undermines its validity – a genealogy study is itself contingent and thus should surely be critiqued as like any other problematization. Bevir’s (2008, p.270) perspective below offers a response to this,

> Genealogists may question their own narratives, and accept that the genealogical stance is a particular one that arose historically, without thereby rejecting their narratives or the genealogical stance.

Whilst this critique is considered it is acknowledged that this study does not claim to represent a Foucauldian genealogy in itself – rather it utilizes some of the tools of Foucault’s approach like problematization to consider how contemporary policy can be disrupted.

As I attempt to problematize certain areas of education policy I aim to examine how all the different factors managed to contingently intersect in the past to give rise to the policy we have in the present. Thus, as indicated above there is no ‘golden thread’ leading from one time period to the next in a neat and aligned manner, but rather a potential myriad of factors that demonstrate how the present is conditioned by policy history that is complex and contingent. As Koopman asserts, ‘Possibilities for thinking and doing in the present are conditioned by what has been thought and done in the past’ (2013. p.118). As such it is important to examine contemporary policy through this lens of critique and consider the extent to which current policy and practices might be the result of uncontested assumptions and thoughts.

Whilst looking at the critique of genealogy it is important to summarise the value of this approach for this study. Foucault’s aim of genealogy was not only to historically problematize the present but to do this with a view to exposing the conditions that needed to be worked on to help create a better future – to see *how* the present has been constructed thus enabling a different present and future to be constructed or reconstructed. Thus, genealogy as an instrument of critique looks both backwards into history and forwards into the future and this is a further rationale for the choice of this approach for this study. By looking at how things came about – in the case of this study the four areas of education policy over the four time periods – and the problematizations inherent we can also examine how things might be reconstructed, how policy might be reshaped for the advancement of education. Bevir (2008, p.268) suggests that change can only occur contingently as people 'reinterpret, modify, or transform an inherited tradition in response to novel circumstances or other dilemmas' and Koopman (2013, p.130) reinforces this asserting that,

> Pragmatic reconstruction requires a genealogical problematization that would equip the work of reconstruction with a sense of how the problematization that is being reworked was itself constructed.

Whilst this approach is drawn upon to support this study a key consideration is how this will be enacted to examine each of the four areas of policy this study is focused on. As indicated above the three core ideas of genealogy as identified by Koopman – critique, contingency and complexity – are used to examine aspects of policy to inform the 'historical present'. In addition, the questions posed in the work of Rabinow (1999) – who based his work on his understanding of Foucault following interviews with him – are also adapted for this study. Rabinow (1999, p.12) suggested the following questions might be considered as part of genealogy,

> What forms are emerging? What practices are embedding and embodying them? What shape are the political struggles taking? What spaces of ethics is present?

The first three of these questions are pertinent to this study and provide a framework for critical inquiry into the four areas of education policy over the four time periods, supporting the examination of contingency and complexity in these areas. In addition, I pose a further question which relates to reconstruction and re-imagining education policy for the future – how do contemporary women's voices in a post COVID pandemic contribute to a re-imagining of education policy?

3.4.2 Feminist Genealogy

This study, as indicated above, attempts a critical enquiry into the problems of the present by problematizing educational policy of the past, drawing upon Koopmans three core ideas of genealogy as problematization – critique, contingency and complexity. In the following section, however, I will aim to situate women's voices as a further lens through which to consider the contingency of educational policy.

Feminism is defined within section 2.3 above, though it is appropriate to revisit this here and also important to note that this study has a focus on women's voices rather than being a study in gender – though it is acknowledged that feminism and gender are inextricably linked. For the purposes of this study *woman* refers to a person who identifies as such and whose lived experience is as a woman. This is important to point out, given the theoretical developments around sex and gender and acknowledgement that rather than these being fixed entities, there is more of a focus today on multiple gender identities and gender fluidity. As such it seems quite paradoxical to attempt such definitions but is important in order to mark the confines of this study and to not overclaim the reach of this study. Ferguson (1991, p.322) considers that women's voices or feminist viewpoints are about identifying the differences between male and female experiences in order to 'critique the power of the former and valorise the alternative residing in the latter'. It is about challenging patriarchal perspectives by offering alternative ways of thinking, which this study aims to do.

I draw on the work of Pillow (2015), who has sought to build on Foucault's approach to genealogy to define what is feminist genealogy. Pillow suggests that genealogy is useful for those examining policy as it provides an approach to examine policy 'with a focus always upon tracing complex movements of power and bodies, by attending to the discourses, techniques, practices and investments embedded in policy' (2015, p.137) and 'incessantly questions the conditions under which policy is produced' (2004, p.9). She suggests that feminist genealogy builds upon Foucault's work in that it analyses 'historically and culturally situated decision making' – it pays attention to 'messy realities' by 'ongoing critique and questioning of discourses (re)inscribing power, body, knowledge relationships. (2003, p.150). Whilst Pillow has a focus on feminist genealogy as 'critique within the body' (2003, p.147) arguing that policies are about and for bodies, her work is appropriate to draw upon as the body is not distinct from the mind and overall human experience. Fay (1987, p.146) supports this perspective, arguing that 'oppression leaves its traces not just in people's minds, but in their muscles and skeletons as well'. As such bodies are marked by our culture and the practices and policies of those cultures.

By focusing on the set of conditions that existed as the policy was produced the emphasis of critique shifts from the subject of the policy to *how* it is produced and enacted and thus opens up space to re-imagine that policy should different power and influences have been present. As such Pillow (2004, p.9) suggests that feminist genealogy promotes analysis of policy that,

> is not simply resistant but is meticulous in its search for the discursive strategies of power as they are camouflaged in the assumptive discourses and practices of policy theory, implementation and evaluation

Thus, feminist genealogy reflects a commitment to critique and analysis in a way that examines the agency, involvement and influence – or lack of it – of women in the policy development and enactment process. It traces and scrutinizes both the presences and absences of women in policy discourse and 'identifies constraints, limitations' of women (2015, p.142). Germon (2010, p.14) further suggests that genealogy aims to offer 'what appears to be the truth is but an interpretation or series of interpretations' of the truth. This supports this approach to genealogy as recognising that our present is entirely contingent. In terms of gender, Germon goes on to suggest that this approach 'seeks not to discover any truth in gender, but rather to unsettle and disrupt assumptions of a continuity of meaning and, moreover, to disrupt the idea of fixed essences'. Pillow also makes the important point that identifying an 'absence' of a voice does not mean that we can subsequently claim that voice or influence would have held truth or been any more valid than that which prevailed. However, it does inform the 'problematization' of current policy in that it is contingent and offers insights to other possibilities that might and could emerge.

Whilst this study uses Koopman's (2013) three Cs – critique, contingency, complexity – to examine and problematize the four areas of education policy in the four time periods, Pillow (2015, p.137) poses some questions inherent in her use of feminist genealogy that are also employed here:

- Why this policy and why now?
- In whose interest?
- For whose needs?
- What is being contained or produced?
- What ideologies, constructions and discourses are proliferated?

- What is visible and what is made absent in these constructions?

Like the questions posed by Rabinow (1999), these questions provide a framework to critique current and historic policy to gain understanding on continuities and discontinuities and reflect on our current conditions of possibility.

It is also important to note that whilst perhaps unable to identify specific female influence at the micro-level in terms of educational policy and documentation analysis in each of the four time periods for this study, it is possible to contextualise this on a macro-level – focussing on the social, political and cultural context of each time and considering potential influences of women as well as their exclusion in the policy process. Dillard (2000, p.661) suggests that when we look at 'culturally explained explanations of being human' and focus on the origins of how knowledge has been constructed we discover 'that what constitutes knowledge depends profoundly on the consensus and ethos of the community in which is grounded'. Thus, by focusing on the social, political and cultural context of each time period we can see how policy is dependent on this context and might have been different in alternative contexts.

Educational policy does not emerge or operate within a vacuum and hence what was going on in society during each time period provides intelligence on the status of women and the potential for their influence in all areas of life, including education policy. For example, the 1970 Equal Pay Act and 1975 Sex Discrimination Act provided legal leverage for women to be considered on the same footing as men and marked a shift in the journey to improve the rights of women, in legal terms but not perhaps so much in social and cultural terms at that time. A feminist genealogy allows for a reframing of what might be considered as an essentially patriarchal context.

In addition, my own experiences and reflections as a woman living through these periods is important to consider, not least as I need to be conscious that this might influence my interpretation and understanding of the areas I study. In the personal reflection that foregrounds this study I have outlined parts of my own journey as I developed as a feminist and educator, and the recognition that whilst laws may change at a certain point in time it does not follow that society does. The process of change and development is not so linear and as indicated in the above section on genealogy it is contingent on one set of prevailing practices over other possibilities.

3.5 Dimension four: strategy/method

The final dimension as outlined by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis is strategies. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005, p.17) define these strategies as ‘the specific practices and procedures that researchers deploy to collect and analyze data and to report their findings’. The decisions made about the type of strategies to use is aligned to the type of research been undertaken. For example, in positivist-based research the researcher might collect data via scientific observation or experiment that can be quantified and analysed to arrive at ‘truths’. This study employs policy and documentation analysis and includes the collection of primary data through interviews – the following sections will explain and justify these choices.

3.5.1 Policy documentation and literature review

Adopting a feminist genealogical approach, this study aims to identify continuities and discontinuities across the four different time frames in the four key areas of the study – school structure and organisation, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education. This involves interrogating key literature, policies and documents related to these areas as well as investigation of the social, cultural and political contexts of each period.

The use of literature and documentation analysis is used widely in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.199) suggest this is an ‘unobtrusive’ method of data collection as opposed to ‘obtrusive’ methods where other people are present as data is collected (for example as in interviews). This study largely draws upon policy documents, academic texts and media reports with key policies (related to the four areas of education) being examined in relation to contemporary policy.

Whilst existing literature and documentation has the advantage of been readily available the drawbacks also need to be considered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it can be unrepresentative, selective and lack objectivity. For this study that is exactly why I am examining such documentation, looking at the idea that policy is selective and contingent upon a set of contextual factors – social, cultural and political – where some factors have not been considered, some voices have gone unheard or been excluded and where the policy might have been different had they not.

Such focus on literature related to policy and policy documentation itself can provide insights into

> change and continuity over time, including the contestation and negotiation that is involved in these and the broader social, political, economic and other forms of context within which they take place (McCulloch 2011, p.248)

In addition, by examining such documentation McCulloch (2011) suggests that the ‘origins of the present’ can be considered to see how the current ‘structures, relationships and behaviours’ may have emerged. Of course, from a genealogical perspective this cannot be seen as a straight trajectory or linear process as Bevir (2008) has suggested genealogy is not about simple developmental historicism.

McCulloch (2011) identifies broad distinctions that can be made between different types of documents – for example those created by private individuals or families versus those produced by the authorities and printed documents versus electronic. There is also the common distinction between primary sources of information (documents produced by witnesses or participants in an event for example, diaries, journals, government records) and secondary documentation, that is generally formed by interpreting and analysing primary documentation (for example, an academic text on an event that the writer was not involved in). These dichotomies are simplistic but should be acknowledged as there are issues with examining all these types of documentation. A personal diary may be highly valuable in providing a real voice from the time of an event but is also just that writers perspective and may not include important factors a researcher may have found useful. An academic text may have the benefit of drawing on a range of sources about an event with the benefit of hindsight but might also favour one perspective or ideological view over another. As McCulloch suggests (2011, p.250), ‘the assumptions and arguments of the authors of such works need to be critically scrutinized rather than being accepted at their face value’. In a historical study in Canada of the success of textbooks in schools, Clark (2009, p.702) found that

> While textbooks are instruments of pedagogy, in the era examined here, political gain and financial expediency neatly trumped pedagogical elements. Textbooks sit at the centre of a web of political and economic factors that are invisible to many

Whilst this may not be completely true today this does sound a bell of caution to be considered as any academic text has been written and published by those who may have messages they want to promote. Policy documents, whilst potentially 'original' documents also reflect only the outcome of the contributors perspectives and exclude other views or voices that may have been useful. Scott (2000, p.8-11) suggests many factors must be considered in looking at a range of texts. For example, news reports are 'temporally framed' and constructed under tight deadlines and thus may not involve the 'deep reflection' that may be more evident in a research article that has developed over a period of time. Some texts are produced for specific audiences or multiple audiences and this may impact on what is included and what is not. Texts are written for different purposes and motives and thus will be constructed in different ways. They are often underpinned by different ideological frameworks which might be 'concealed or overt' and of course a text is dependent on the level of knowledge of the writer and the resources at their disposal.

Hence there are factors to take into consideration when examining any written documentation. McCulloch (2011, p.253) suggests initially ascertaining the authenticity of a document or text and identifying 'underlying values and assumptions of the author'. He also reinforces the importance of focussing on the context of documentation which includes 'taking account of broad educational, social, political, economic and other relationships that help explain the contemporary meaning of the documents'. McCulloch identifies three key aspects to consider in examining texts and documents as follows,

1. Authorship and origins
2. Audience
3. Outcomes

These are useful considerations for this study and support the framework adopted in this study. As outlined previously, the 3 Cs provided by Koopman (2013) – critique, contingency and complexity – will be used to examine the literature and aspects of policy. Together with the questions posed by Rabinow (1999, p.12), myself and Pillow (2015, p.137), outlined below, this provides the framework for the documentation review, to critique current and historic policy to gain understanding on continuities and discontinuities and reflect on our current contingent policy.

Key Questions – Q1- Q3 Rabinow (1999, p.12), Q4 my addition:

1. What forms are emerging?
2. What practices are embedding and embodying them?
3. What shape are the political struggles taking?
4. How do contemporary women's voices in a post COVID pandemic contribute to a re-imagining of education policy?

Supporting Questions – Pillow (2015, p.137):

- Why this policy and why now?
- In whose interest?
- For whose needs?
- What is being contained or produced?
- What ideologies, constructions and discourses are proliferated?
- What is visible and what is made absent in these constructions?

This method reflects the interpretive tradition of research and social constructivist epistemology that this study is informed by. It also reflects a critical approach in that Foucault's focus on power and control is considered. Related to this is consideration of the documentation and educational policy from a feminist perspective. Purvis (1992) highlights some concerns with government policy and reports that are integral to this study. She outlines the fact that many of these government documents are the result of committees that are made up of so called 'experts' in the particular field, often those whose views are 'palatable to the government and who have attained a "respectable" position in society' (p.280). She suggests that more 'radical' voices are not invited to participate and hence there is an inherent bias in the way the 'problem' has been investigated, evidenced and reported on,

> it is assumed that committee members can give, receive and assess a variety of evidence and synthesise it into a single authoritative view…. we are never told how this 'official' view is arrived at, and especially what happens to evidence that does not conform to it (1992, p.281)

Whilst Purvis wrote this thirty years ago it is still highly evident in contemporary policy-making, as demonstrated by recent events in the initial teacher education (ITE) sector.

Whilst this will be addressed more fully in Chapter 7 it is worth noting here that the committee that investigated the sector as part of a market review of ITT (initial teacher training)[14] was made up of just 5 people who were termed an ‘expert advisory panel’ – with only one from the ITE sector who seems to have been identified by the DfE as a voice of reason, given that she is chosen to sit on other committees, to the exclusion of other experts within the field. The ramifications of this policy decision will be examined in Chapter 7, but the example serves here to support the view of Purvis that such a narrow make up of committees leads to decisions that are not representative and might have been very different if they had embraced a range of different voices.

It is therefore important to consider the individuals and groups involved in policy formation and the context of such activity. Purvis (1992, p.279) also outlines the importance of language in historical texts and policies, in particular the lack of reference to girls and women. She considers this problematic,

> not least because of the common practice of subsuming the female sex within such masculine nouns and pronouns as 'he', 'men' and 'his' or within supposedly gender-neutral terms such as 'the people', 'the middle classes', 'the working classes'

Thus, when examining literature and documentation it is often difficult to ascertain if women’s voices were present and ‘subsumed’ or in fact were excluded and overlooked. Therefore, I wanted to ensure this study included interviews specifically with women to ensure that contemporary women’s voices are included.

3.5.2 Interviews

I am supplementing my feminist genealogy with semi-structured interviews. Drawing on the writing of others (Rubin & Rubin 2012, Warren & Karner 2015) Creswell and Poth conclude that the interview is essentially ‘a social interaction based on a conversation’ (p.163) whereas Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p.4) view it also as an opportunity where ‘knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee’. This interaction between interviewer and interviewee is important and ideally a rapport is established that facilitates a positive discussion and fruitful interview experience. As deMarrais (2003, p.53) outlines, the importance of participants being able to ‘engage in the process more freely without merely responding to researcher-generated questions’ is key. As such whilst there was a schedule of questions that framed the interviews for this study it was also important to enable the interviewee opportunities to converse in an informal way. I was concerned that to adhere rigidly to a set of questions would deny the opportunity for those interviewed to really talk about the areas of education I had selected them for, undermining the purpose of the interviews for this study. I was also cognisant of my own position as interviewer and careful to avoid overly ‘managing’ the discussion and being careful to actively listen. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) outline the importance of an interview protocol – a guide to ensure the interview runs smoothly and appropriately. The latter recommend five to seven open-ended questions as part of this. Whilst I had a schedule of questions I was aware that the richness of discussion and knowledge of participants should not be constrained by this.

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[14] Refer to page 3 of the report at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/999621/ITT_market_review_report.pdf

In addition, the interviews were undertaken online using Microsoft Teams and consideration needed to be given to the issues this might present. James and Busher (2009) indicate that strategies that might support increased access, like online interviews, do require participants to be confident to manage the technology and be confident of online interactions. Given that these interviews took place during the COVID pandemic all participants acknowledged they had experienced the necessity of communicating via online platforms and this mitigated this potential issue. However, there were some initial technological issues that interrupted the start of two of the interviews – these were quickly resolved and even served to build a rapport as we were able to share our frustration of technology challenges that had been exacerbated through increased use during the COVID pandemic.

3.5.3 Sampling

As indicated above, the decisions made around sampling are fundamental to the quality of the research. When considering who to recruit to interview as part of this study I was interested in selecting women who are calling for change in education policy and might be regarded as ‘change-makers’ – those with ‘strong’ voices who are currently, or have previously, spoken out about education and education policy. This is intended to provide a contrast with dominant male voices in the history of education policy and provides a link to the feminist genealogy approach. It also reflects the growing call for change in the education system in response to issues identified by COVID 19 which can be regarded as pivotal. I thus identified several women to approach from key fields like government, education and media. According to LeCompte & Preissle (1993) and Roulston (2010), who outline the importance of distinguishing between selection and sampling, this reflects the selection – the ‘type’ of women who I wanted to characterise the focus of the study as I am using criteria like work settings and activities they are involved in. Sampling refers to finding women that fit this selection criteria to actually participate in the study.

Teddlie & Yu (2007) and Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009, p.174) identify ‘reputational case sampling’ as a type of purposive sampling in which samples are selected because the researcher is aware of their characteristics. This relates to how I chose the sample of women I interviewed as I had specific criteria that they should know about education and current/past policy. It is acknowledged that this sampling approach has the associated issue of not been representative of the general population. But the point of the interviews in this study was to hear the voices of those who might have something different to say – who might disrupt rather than regurgitate current perspectives and who may offer alternative views on the future of education policy to those that are contingent on current or past players within the policy process.

In summary I identified a number of women who had the criteria identified in the selection stage to be part of the sample and to potentially interview. These women were emailed to request participation with basic information about the study and expectations for their involvement outlined. Whilst not all those I contacted responded or agreed to be involved I did secure seven women to interview that met the selection criteria and became the sample.

3.5.4 Participants

The participants for the interviews for this study were seven high profile[15] women from the fields of politics, education and the media, all of whom have strong voices on education and education policy. This is a qualitative study and whilst this is a small sample the intention of the interviews was to elicit quality, in-depth data from women who are vocal about education and have potentially alternative views that could offer fresh perspectives on the four key areas of education policy being examined. Appendix 10.1 offers brief biographical information on each woman to underline their experience and expertise that was relevant to this study.

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[15] Defined for this study as women who currently play or have played a leading role in the national commentary about education

All participants were sent an information sheet which included a summary of interview questions and a consent form to complete, as per ethical protocols. One of the key questions asked as part of the consent form related to identification. As can be seen from the below table there was a mixed response here and hence in the interests of consistency I have anonymised all responses and given each participant a pseudonym.

Participant	**Area of key role**	**Agreed to be identified**
Anna	Media – journalist who reports on education	Yes
Beatrice	Education – Deputy Director of a local authority	No
Charlotte	Education – Chief Executive of Multi Academy Trust	Yes
Darlene	Education – Author and Professor of Education	Yes
Elizabeth	Politics – Ex-Government Minister	No
Fran	Media – journalist who reports on education	Yes
Grace	Education – high level official	Yes

Figure 4 - Interview participants

3.5.5 Ethical Considerations

This study is underpinned by adherence to ethical conventions which permeate all aspects of the research from the planning stage to implementation and data collection through to the analysis of the data and generation of new knowledge.

Whilst ethical considerations might be seen to pertain mostly to the research involving participants, for example the interviews conducted as part of this study, it is acknowledged that ethical conventions must also be adhered to when there is no involvement of human participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.254) suggest that there is ‘a temptation to overlook ethical issues’ in documentary research because it does not involve social interaction, but ethical issues can arise, such as some documents being favoured over others to tell a particular story. Hence during the examination and critique of policy documentation and literature undertaken as part of this study there were ethical issues to comply with –

using document-based data sources with integrity, avoiding bias and subjective interpretation and ensuring findings were not manipulated to distort the research.

There are of course ethical implications for the interviews that were conducted as part of this study. Essential here is achieving ethical approval prior to research being undertaken. This was sought and achieved through the University Ethics Committee (appendix 10.2), whose policies are underpinned by the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2019) and the UK Research Integrity Office's (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research (2021). These policies provide both principles and commitment to ensure that research within UK universities is underpinned by high standards of rigour and integrity and adheres to ethical, legal and professional frameworks. In addition to this, the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2018) informed this study and supports the framework to structure this section and explain how I approached ethical issues within this research. These policies and guidelines together with literature around ethics (e.g. Howe and Moses 1999, Gilbert 2008, Gray 2009, Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, Brinkmann and Kvale 2018) outline key areas that are essential to consider, particularly in relation to the interviews, including consent and right to withdraw, transparency and deception, harm, privacy/confidentiality and data storage. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.442) suggest interviews in particular have an ethical dimension as they involve personal interaction and give 'information on the human condition'. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, p. 28) concur with this view,

> The human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues

The approach taken in this study to these key moral and ethical issues is discussed in the sections below. Brinkmann and Kvale term these as 'micro-ethics' (2018, p. 35), concerning the potential consequences of the research for individual participants, and distinct from 'macro-ethics' that relate to wider social consequences.

3.5.6 Consent and right to withdraw

Informed consent has long been considered the cornerstone of ethical behaviour (Howe and Moses 1999, Gilbert 2008, Gray 2009, Denscombe 2010, Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, Brinkmann and Kvale 2018) as it ensures that individuals are able to exercise control and make their own decisions. Diener and Crandall (1978, p.57) define informed consent as

> the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions

Furthermore, Cohen, Manion and Morrison suggest participants have the right 'to freedom and self-determination' (2011, p.77) to assess the potential risks and benefits to their involvement. The researcher should ensure that participants are competent to make such a decision (particularly if they might be considered vulnerable) and do so voluntarily in light of the information provided and checks on their understanding of this. In this study all participants who agreed to take part in the study following an initial email request were considered competent to make such a decision and were asked to give their informed consent to be interviewed, and assured that they could withdraw their consent at any time and without explanation. As well as the consent form they were provided with an information sheet that outlined key information about the nature and purpose of the research and what would be required of them if they agreed to participate, in order to support their decision making. In addition, at the start of each online interview the participants were given an opportunity to discuss this consent and ask any further questions, and were given reassurance that they could withdraw consent for their involvement at any point.

3.5.7 Transparency/Deception

Transparency in the research process, particularly via interviews, is essential in building trust and confidence with the participants. Any attempt to withhold or misrepresent the nature of the study or use of information would be deceptive and a breach of ethical conventions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest that deception can occur by not telling the truth about the nature of the research or use of data, and can have harmful consequences. There was full transparency with participants about the nature and purpose of this study, and this was explicitly outlined in the information briefing document and reiterated at the start of each interview. Denscombe (2010, p.336) suggests such integrity should not just be applied to the conduct of research but also in the 'fair and unbiased interpretation of findings' and I was particularly mindful of this during the analysis of the research data.

3.5.8 Harm

In qualitative research where interviews are employed it is important to consider any harmful consequences on participants (Brinkman and Kvale 2018). Whilst the nature of this study did not require the participants to give sensitive information about themselves, they were asked to discuss their views and perspectives on aspects of education, and this could be considered exposing and thus potentially harmful. For example, if they disclosed information they might later regret. Hence, care was taken to ensure the end of the interview included a debriefing and opportunity for the participant to either add any further information or indeed retract anything. This debriefing also provided the opportunity to reassure participants about how their information would be used, how privacy and confidentiality would be maintained and how the security of the interview data would be managed.

3.5.9 Privacy/confidentiality and data storage

All seven participants who agreed to be interviewed are high profile women – locally and nationally – in the field of education. As such the ethical obligation to consider privacy issues and confidentiality was critical. All participants were informed during the consent process that all information about them and their contribution to the research would be treated in the strictest confidence and anonymised, unless they requested their names be attributed to their responses. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) note that in some situations participants may want to be credited with their name and Parker (2005) argues that anonymity protects the researcher, giving them control over the information, whilst denying the voice of the participants. Parker suggests this can be remedied by directly discussing this with participants, which is the approach I adopted. Whilst some of this sample did respond positively to the question about their name being used in the study they were not insistent upon it, and there were some who wanted to remain anonymous. Hence in the interests of consistency the identity of all participants has been protected – pseudonyms have been used and contributions have been anonymised.

As this study involved the collection of data via interviews there were ethical issues to address in terms of the security and storage of interview data. Following the University guidance related to data protection, the recordings and transcripts of the interviews were stored on the University networked drive (OneDrive) that is secure and virus protected and will be deleted on completion of the PhD programme. All work relating to the research was undertaken on computers that had up to date virus protection.

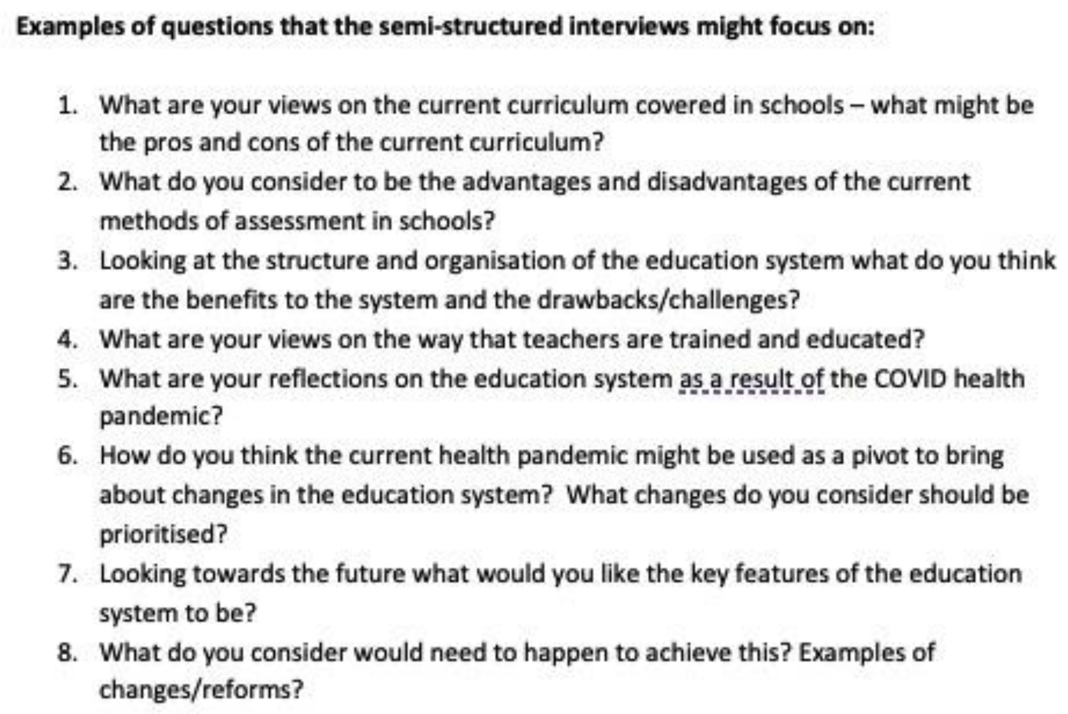
3.5.10 The Interview Schedule

The importance of developing an interview protocol is recommended (e.g. Lincoln and Guba 1985, Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) to ensure the smooth running of the interview process and maximise the potential for higher quality interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, p.56) suggest interviewing should not require a stringent method 'following explicit rules' but rather be considered 'pragmatically as a craft, where the quality of knowledge produced through the interview rests upon the subject matter knowledge and craftmanship of the interviewer'.

In my experience of conducting interviews, it is not just the first minutes of the interview that are important (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018) but the communication and lead up to the interview is also crucial. The initial contact with the participant informs them of your communication style and level of organisation and this can inspire trust and confidence in the transparency of the process. The briefing information document and consent form not only ensure adherence to ethical conventions but also serve to arm the participant with the information they need in order to prepare for the interview. The participant is more likely to arrive at the interview feeling equipped with some understanding and the interviewer is able to capitalise on that to put the participant at ease – actively listening and showing interest – and thus building rapport.

The way an interview is finished is as important as how it starts, contributing to how the participant might view the success of the interview and also ensuring they have had the opportunity to give responses. Brinkman and Kvale suggest the value of providing additional opportunity for the participants to raise any issues they might not have already addressed or to clarify any responses they may be 'thinking or worrying about during the interview' (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018, p.63).

These points were all considered as part of the planning and execution of the interviews for this study. Whilst the schedule of example questions was covered (as outlined below) I was aware that the richness of discussion and knowledge of participants should not be constrained by these and thus participants were given ample opportunity to talk as I adopted an active listening approach. It should be noted here that all seven of the women interviewed hold high profile roles and are adept at both being interviewed and interviewing. This also supported the process.



Examples of questions that the semi-structured interviews might focus on:

1. What are your views on the current curriculum covered in schools – what might be the pros and cons of the current curriculum?
2. What do you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of the current methods of assessment in schools?
3. Looking at the structure and organisation of the education system what do you think are the benefits to the system and the drawbacks/challenges?
4. What are your views on the way that teachers are trained and educated?
5. What are your reflections on the education system as a result of the COVID health pandemic?
6. How do you think the current health pandemic might be used as a pivot to bring about changes in the education system? What changes do you consider should be prioritised?
7. Looking towards the future what would you like the key features of the education system to be?
8. What do you consider would need to happen to achieve this? Examples of changes/reforms?

The questions reflected the four key areas of education that this study focuses on, to inform those chapters with the perspectives of these knowledgeable women, thus reflecting Brinkmann and Kvales suggestion of using a thematic approach, and also served to delve into their expertise in the field of education to offer their views on future educational reform.

3.5.11 Analysis

There are a range of tools and strategies that can be used to analyse research data, once it has been collected, in order to work out what the data might mean.

Brinkmann (2013) offers a distinction between inductive, deductive and abductive analysis. He suggests that *inductive* analysis 'serves to identify patterns and formulate potential explanations of these patterns (2013, p.62) whilst Pascale (2011, p.53) considers it to be 'the systematic examination of similarities within and across cases to develop concepts, ideas, or theories'. This approach is typical of grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as this uses data-driven coding for knowledge and theory development. *Deductive* analysis offers a more top-down approach that involves the use of a hypothesis as a vehicle to analyse data and generate theory and finally *abductive* analysis 'works from breakdowns in the understanding of the analyst' with the researcher seeking 'breaks and contradictions and other matters that somehow "disturb" the common understanding or convention' (Brinkmann, 2013, p.65). Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.170) posit that 'abduction refers to an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence'. They suggest that abduction 'reflects the process of creatively inferencing and double checking these inferences with more data' (2012, p.168). In other words, it is an iterative process, going 'back and forth between research data and theory'. As such Timmermans and Tavory believe abductive analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach that supports the building of theory – new knowledge and theory emerge following an iterative process moving between the data and theory, building on understanding as each is revisited. They suggest this abductive process is common in daily life as people shift their expectations and understanding in light of new experiences or unexpected events – these might challenge current perspectives and lead individuals to infer new meaning – and this is a continuous process. Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.172) suggest 'abduction should be understood as a continuous process of conjecturing about the world' that is shaped by the solutions a researcher has ready to hand'.

Timmermans and Tavory suggest that a problem with this process is not about generating new theories or hypothesis but rather to choose which one to pursue out of the different possibilities.

This abductive approach to analysis thus aligns with the overall approach to this study which draws on Foucauldian feminist genealogy and the concept of problematization – examining continuities, discontinuities and disruptions in educational policy, with the view that current policy is contingent on varied possibilities from the past. It also fits with the genealogical perspective that everything, including data findings can be problematized and are always contingent – thus never finalised. Brinkmann (2013, p.56) suggests that

> From the abductive angle, research is never finished, as the human world itself is never finished, but constantly in the making. Designing interview studies abductively thus means designing for dialoguing with an evolving reality of persons in conversation rather than attempting to formulate theories that are universally true.

It is also noted that this approach – like others which rely on the researcher's use and interpretation of data – carries inherent risks and is open to critique of researcher bias. Thus, Brinkmann argues it is 'imperative to justify and check the interpretive conjectures that are voiced by the researcher' (2013, p.56).

It is acknowledged that discourse analysis might have been considered an appropriate analysis tool for this study – given the fact that the theory and approach underpinning the study relate to Foucault – but an abductive approach to analysis is also appropriate as justified above and offers the opportunity to identify continuities and discontinuities in the analysis of both documentation and policy and the interviews.

Thus, the process of analysing the interviews became iterative – engagement with the transcripts was followed by engagement with the literature and theory and then a return to the transcripts – a motion of back and forth (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). This process is important as the more data is revisited the more likely it is that different things are identified. This might also mitigate against the potential for subjectivity if the data is reconsidered regularly. In this way the interview data was used to identify potential lines of enquiry in relation to the 'four horsemen' of the education system referred to in this study – school organisation and structure, the curriculum, assessment and performativity and teacher education – foregrounding the voices of the women interviewed and using their perspectives to seek 'breaks and contradictions' (Brinkmann 2013, p.65) in relation to education policy, literature, and theory.

More specifically, the first stage of this iterative approach involved initial analysis of each of the transcribed interviews and identification of potential lines of enquiry. Once all the interviews had been initially analysed the second stage was to compare the findings from the seven women interviewed. It was perhaps not surprising that there was some commonality in the emerging lines of enquiry between the women interviewed because, as indicated in section 3.5.3, the women who were interviewed for this study were identified using 'reputational case sampling' (Teddlie & Yu 2007, Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009) – they were chosen specifically because they might offer alternative views on education policy that might disturb and disrupt current policy and thinking. These common lines of enquiry were then focussed on to consider and further analyse in relation to existing education policy, literature, and theory. The subsequent stages using this iterative process then involved what Tracy (2018, p.63) refers to as tagging 'back and forth between 1) consulting existing theories and predefined questions and 2) examining emergent qualitative findings'.

Through this approach several key alternative discourses emerged in relation to the 'four horsemen' of education policy and these supported the organisation and development of each analytic chapter. As such the voices of the seven women interviewed were integral to the architecture of the study and the iterative process of analysis supported the development of themes and understandings that provided insights into new ways of thinking and doing.

3.5.12 Positionality

In qualitative research the position of the researcher must be considered. Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.172) suggest that 'much is made of the fact that the researcher is part of the world of the people studied' within an abductive approach to analysis. It provokes questions around impartiality and interpretation for example. The personal reflection included in this thesis (Chapter 1) outlines my influences and journey in the education system and together with my current role as an academic involved in teacher education this could lead to claims that the deeply engrained views of the world and of education might interfere with the objectivity of the study. Whilst this certainly needs to be acknowledged and considered it should not undermine the knowledge and understanding brought to the study by these experiences in education. As Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.173) suggest,

> We may see through gendered and racialized eyes, but we also see through the theoretical lenses of the training we went through, the theories we read, the political allegiances we may have fostered.

As such they suggest that abduction 'depends on the researcher's cultivated position' – it is the researcher's very position (background and biography) as well as their wider theoretical understanding that determines their ability to recognize the unanticipated and unexpected phenomena that might lead to new perspectives and theories. As Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.174) conclude, 'abductive analysis specifically aims at generating novel theoretical insights that reframe empirical findings in contrast to existing theories'.

Instead of attempting to ignore or strike out existing knowledge and understanding in order to claim objectivity in abductive analysis researchers are encouraged to maximise the use of the 'deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process' (p.180). This approach thus connects to my own narrative history – the existing knowledge I hold and development of this – as outlined in the personal reflection in Chapter 1.

3.6 Conclusion

In summary the overall design for this study explained in the above sections is further summarised in the table below to provide an overview of the pathway taken in this study.

	Abstract →			Concrete
Four dimensions of qualitative research →	Epistemology	Theoretical Perspective	Approach/ Methodology	Strategies/ Methods
Applications for this study →	Constructionism ↓ Social constructionism	Interpretivism ↓ Foucault and power	Feminist Genealogy	Policy and documentation analysis Semi-structured interviews

Figure 5 - Overview of the research design

The following analytic chapters examine education policy for each of the four key areas with each focusing on one of the specific time periods. Current policy is considered and problematized to consider the continuities and discontinuities that have emerged and centralising and decentralising agendas. Further to this the analysis of the data collected via the interviews contributes to understanding and offers a further lens to look at themes from the past that might have continued or discontinued, as per a genealogical approach – the inclusion of specific vignettes from the interviews are intended to disrupt the narrative and foreground women's voices.

These analytic chapters are framed around Koopman's (2013) three Cs – critique, contingency, complexity – to examine and problematize the four areas of education policy in the four time periods – and are also informed by the questions posed by Rabinow, Pillow and myself, outlined below:

Key Questions – Q1- Q3 Rabinow (1999, p.12), Q4 my addition:

1. What forms are emerging?
2. What practices are embedding and embodying them?
3. What shape are the political struggles taking?
4. How do contemporary women's voices in a post COVID pandemic contribute to a re-imagining of education policy?

Supporting Questions – Pillow (2015, p.137):

- Why this policy and why now?
- In whose interest?
- For whose needs?
- What is being contained or produced?
- What ideologies, constructions and discourses are proliferated?
- What is visible and what is made absent in these constructions?

Chapter 4: School Organisation and Structure: Discourses of Diversification, Selection and Competition

4.1 Introduction

> *The model of schooling that a nation chooses reflects the values of the leaders who construct it (Gann 2020, p.415)*

This chapter focuses on school organisation and structure as an area of education policy, which is examined through a feminist genealogy approach in order to foreground the inclusions and exclusions of a model of schooling built in the image of England's (male) rulers. To achieve this I draw on Koopman's (2013) three Cs of genealogy – critique, contingency and complexity – and with consideration of the questions posed by Rabinow (1999) and Pillow (2015) outlined in Chapter 3, I problematize current policy in this area through analysis of two main data sets. These include key policies, literature and documentation related to this area of education which are examined, and also the data gathered from interviews, which provides the perspectives from women who currently play, or have played, a leading role in education – in policy formation and enactment or the national commentary related to it. These perspectives are integrated throughout the chapter through vignettes intended to disrupt the narrative.

The two objects of analysis within state school organisation and structure, covered in this chapter are the grammar school system and the academisation of state-maintained schools.[16] Whilst other features of the English education system are referred to – indeed, the independent sector cannot be ignored, especially when (as outlined in section 2.3.3.1) the small number who attend these schools dominate the government and thus the policy process – the choice of these two objects of analysis rather than a more broad-brush approach ensures opportunity for in-depth analysis. In terms of the four time periods of this study, the main analysis for this chapter is situated in the first and last time periods (post-war 1945-1979 and 2010 onwards) because these periods were characterised with significant policy shifts related to the structure of schools.

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[16] Academisation refers to the government drive for state-maintained schools to become 'academies', schools that are independent of local authority control and directly accountable to the government, examined in section 4.3.3).

Both objects of analysis – grammar schools and academies – are part of the state school sector that is becoming increasingly diversified with a focus on selection and competition, reflective of a neoliberal policy agenda. This agenda is manifested in both objects of analysis, and both are complex and contentious, requiring problematization. I argue in this chapter that diversification and associated elements of selection and competition are serving to perpetuate inequalities rather than diminish them, as government discourse claims. In addition, there are alternative discourses that challenge the government justification for the unprecedented disruption in the state sector, imposed through the academisation policy. Successive governments since 2010 have claimed this radical overhaul of school structures has been necessary in order to manage a 'crisis' in the education system – in which children are 'falling behind' because of apparent poor standards – and that such diversification is the route to developing a 'world class' education system (DfE 2010, DfE 2016). However, alternative discourse points to this policy agenda as more ideologically motivated, promising increased autonomy for schools whilst actually seizing more power and control – reflecting both decentralising and centralising policy. I argue that this policy has led to the fragmentation of the state school system, creating winners and losers and increasing inequalities rather than reducing them. As Reay (2017) suggests this policy has essentially led to a level of privatisation of the state school system and I argue that the obvious influence of the independent sector on the development of academies demonstrates the enduring allegiance to the independent sector that many policy makers have experienced themselves, thus serving to maintain historic power structures. Discourses around these arguments are examined in the sections below.

Whilst there are opposing discourses around the diversification of the state school system, the purpose of this chapter is not to engage with these issues in a trench-like hand-to-hand combat, in a polemic wrestle between the different perspectives, but rather to offer a higher-level critique to expose and problematize the underlying assumptions and mechanisms that underpin education policy, considering the strategies those in power employ to legitimise such policy. This reflects Foucault's theory that the polemics engaged in warring viewpoints only ever operate within a general doctrinal framework which he considered to be 'sterilising', whereas problematization involves questioning and critiquing concrete problems, working within and beyond the established frameworks and theories that often claim to answer those problems' (Rabinow 1997, p.113).

As such education policy, in relation to grammar schools and academisation, can be problematized in relation to Koopman's 3 Cs of genealogy – it requires critique, it is contingent, and it is complex. Taking a moment to revisit these terms for clarity, Koopman (2019, p.23) explains that *critique* –as part of this genealogical approach – is not about standing in judgement of any object of analysis, but rather it 'explores the limits of what we can do in the present' and the 'conditions of possibility'. These conditions of possibility are *contingent* as opposed to necessary and hence did not have to be this way. As such our 'present' is the result of how and why things have happened throughout history to bring us to this point and may have been different if alternative events or discourses had been dominant. In other words, the conditions of possibility have emerged and we can see that what Foucault (1977a, p.30-31) refers to as our 'historical present', is both contingent and laden with a particular set of 'conditioning restraints' that further influence future possibilities. Furthermore, genealogy is 'committed to *complexity*' – it rejects 'simplifying' explanations that might suggest an evolutionary journey to the present and rather recognizes the complexity involved in the 'multitude of forces in struggle with one another' that have led to this particular 'historical present' (Koopman 2019, p.24).

Hence, instead of seeing education policy as based on truths or facts, it is important to consider it as a 'product' that has invariably been shaped by power, influence and interest over time. As such education policy is not neutral and neither is it something that has developed naturally and smoothly over the course of history. Rather, it is marked by both disruptions and continuities resulting from the dominant discourses at particular points throughout history – thus our 'historical present' is contingent on those dominant discourses and might have been different if alternative discourses had prevailed. As Gutting (2005, p.50) suggests, the intention of Foucauldian genealogy and problematization is 'not to understand the past in its own terms or for its own sake, but to understand and evaluate the present, particularly with a view to discrediting unjustified claims of authority'.

It is useful here to adopt the metaphor of a cliff face to further explain this. A cliff face, viewed from top to bottom is marked by *cracks* and *fissures* – these might be both vertical and horizontal, with some being short and others long and far-reaching – and over time particular conditions will have led to a level of *erosion* or *attrition.* Similarly, education policy can be viewed over time, as characterised by disruptions – cracks, fissures and erosions throughout history – that have interrupted discourse and the direction of policy. In addition, it is possible to see that some elements of current policy within our 'historical present' – the metaphorical top of the cliff – can be traced far back historically, exposing the perpetuation of dominant discourses. Joyce (2013, p.1) suggests that by considering 'things, people and places' we can understand the state better, and the same might be said for how we understand education policy and those who have had the power to influence it.

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to question and critique the underlying assumptions and discreet mechanisms that current education policy is contingent upon, considering not just who had the power to influence education policy but how that power came to be. In relation to this Joyce (2013, p.27) suggests,

> The question can be put like this: what are the powers of power itself? By what thoughts, practices and technologies are the powers that some possess and others do not assembled in the first place?

It is important to examine this, so that we can see how our historical present is contingent on the particular power structures that have developed over time – what has continued and what disruptions have there been to patriarchal society provoked for example by the waves of feminism outlined in Chapter 2. There are two key intertwined areas to consider here that impact on this thesis and are relevant here and to subsequent chapters – one is how public-school structures have served to 'assemble' power amongst an elite few to the extent that public school *males* have dominated government (and thus policy-making) over many decades, and the other relates to how public schools have continued to support the development and maintenance of patriarchy, which has seen women largely marginalised and excluded within society and in the policy process, until perhaps in more recent times. These require a level of problematization as per a genealogical approach through the three discursive constructs already referred to: diversification, selection, and competition. These are now examined in turn.

4.2 Diversification at all costs

A simplistic definition of the term *diversification* might be around difference and variety – something that is not homogenous. The notion of diversification can be applied to many different areas of education today and in particular to the unprecedented changes in state schools over the last decade that have seen the introduction of different types of schools, reflective of a neoliberal policy context. Fine and Saad-Filho (2017, p.687) suggest one aspect of neoliberalism in broader societal terms is that it 'fosters diversity and differentiation', and this definition is appropriate when looking at the types of schools that have emerged in recent years and the overall reorganisation and restructuring of the current state education system. Diversification is only one feature of neoliberalism with other aspects like competition and economic individualism considered further in section 4.4. My key argument here is that the government discourse claiming that diversification of the school sector has been essential to improve standards, serves a different purpose, concealing other motivations that are more about the perpetuation of power. This relates to the government agenda to preserve the power and influence of the independent sector and grammar schools – suggesting the claims to reduce inequalities for all children are empty promises – and to claw back power from the local authorities, under the illusion of giving schools increased autonomy, whilst actually putting themselves in a stronger position to control the state sector.

The highly diverse system of education in England today, representing our historical present, is, as Ball (2013a, p.10) suggests, reminiscent of over a century ago,

> We are moving back towards a 'system' of education that is messy, patchy and diverse, involving a variety of providers, as before 1870 – voluntary, philanthropic, faith, self-help (parents) and, on a small scale so far, private.

The diversity in types of schools has rapidly increased in what Courtney (2015, p.799) suggests has been a response to a 'neoliberal policy agenda aiming to expand choice of provision as a mechanism for raising educational standards'. This idea of choice (in particular parental choice), and the idea of raising educational standards, is inherent in government discourse (DfE 2010, DfE 2016), used as a tool to legitimize the diversification and marketisation of the state school sector (examined in section 4.2.3). Here, it is important to briefly acknowledge the level of diversification that has developed over the last 30 years (under Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments) and the reason for this. Courtney (2015) suggests that the growing negative discourse surrounding the comprehensive system of schooling was a key reason and enabled the justification of diversification, a hallmark of neoliberalism.

The comprehensive schools, with mixed-ability intakes, had been developed mainly from the 1960s onwards in response to growing criticism about the social class divisions inherent in the selective grammar schools and secondary modern schools (examined in section 4.2.2 below). However, their more egalitarian and child-centred teaching approaches (considered progressive), were soon challenged (Reay 2022). For example, between 1969 and 1977 the series of so-called Black Papers (named as alternatives to government White Papers) – edited by the academics Cox and Dyson at Manchester University – were highly critical, claiming that comprehensive schools were characterised by poor discipline, low expectations and declining educational standards. This was summarised as a *progressive collapse of education* (Wood 2020). This view was later, perhaps unwittingly, reflected in Prime Minister James Callaghan’s speech at Ruskin College in 1976 that focused on the erosion of standards in schools and, whilst he indicated that his remarks were ‘not a clarion call to Black Paper prejudices’ (Callaghan 1976), his comments were amplified in the media and ultimately provided ammunition that further undermined comprehensive schools. This growing criticism of comprehensives, and rhetoric around the quality of schools, ultimately led to diversification and the growth of a range of different state funded schools over the last 30 years, including for example, specialist schools[17] and faith schools. However, it is in the last decade that this diversification has intensified with the introduction of free schools[18] and growth of academies. In addition, this period has seen the continuation of state funded grammar schools and the independent sector.

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[17] Specialist schools from the 1990s taught the full curriculum but had a specific specialised subject area they were intended to become a centre of excellence in (e.g. Maths & Computing, Arts, Language etc). 96% of secondary schools were specialist schools by 2011. In 2011 funding for these schools changed with a new goal of turning every school into an academy or free school.

[18] Free schools were established in 2010 to give, for example, parents, charities, businesses, freedom to set up a new school. They are funded directly by the government, are outside of local authority control and have similar freedoms to academies

An examination of all these types of schools is not possible in the confines of this study, hence the objects of analysis here are the state funded grammar schools and academies. Before looking at these two objects of analysis is it important to briefly examine the independent sector to consider the influence of this on the diversification of state schools – the power structures that have developed in independent schools that have enabled them to endure and continue to serve a patriarchal society whilst also exercising influence upon the state sector to further legitimate their existence.

4.2.1 Who needs diversity?

Whilst new types of schools have emerged in the last 30 years, and particularly in the last decade, older types of school have continued. Referring back to the metaphorical cliff face the new types of schools have simply provided 'fresh layers' without 'obliterating older ones' and they might be 'discrete or overlapping' (Courtney 2015, p.802) – for example, many of the state funded grammar schools of the post-war period are now academies and outside of local authority control, yet still selective – a convergence of old and new. In addition, what has continued throughout history to the present day is the domination of the fee-paying independent schools (particularly the 'high end' elite public schools that include Eton, Winchester and Harrow)[19], with the associated practices and attitudes that have been assembled and maintained to preserve and legitimise the status quo.

Joyce (2013, p.264) makes the point that the nature of public schools is widely misunderstood, partly because the histories and current narratives of these schools have largely been produced by the people who attended them (many of whom have also been in positions to influence education policy) so that these schools have taken on a 'cult-like character in their own and the national imagination'. Green and Kynaston (2019, p.1) refer to the 'extreme social exclusivity' of public schools and hence over time (and currently) these alumni have been able to capitalise on their access to 'inside' knowledge, their power and the technologies and tools available to them, to perpetuate the beliefs and practices that secure the continuation and status of public schools. Joyce goes on to comment that public schools have

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[19] This study uses both terms. The term public school is used in reference to the highly elite fee-paying schools like Eton and Harrow, and the term independent schools is used to refer to other fee-paying schools

> mistakenly been viewed as coherent, stable and centralised organisational forms, each form, 'The School', being assumed to embody a distinct ethos and tradition, a unified will expressed over centuries in some cases. (2013, p.264)

As such, the real nature of these schools has perhaps been overlooked and the more 'mythical' elements like tradition, ethos and unity have been foregrounded resulting in both a national and international reputation that has encouraged emulation within the state sector. Joyce (2013, p.265) argues that elements of public schools – like tradition, ethos and unity – are the result of 'conscious and elaborate technological and material engineering' that can be traced back over time, as opposed to the end product of centuries of tradition, which might imply development and improvement within their evolution, leading to the perception of a time-tested model suitable for imitating. Those with such power to consciously engineer discourse and outcomes in this way are likely to utilise their technologies of power in other areas of policy which cannot therefore be considered as neutral and should be subject to problematization (further examined in Chapters 5-7).

Whilst some public schools were founded centuries ago for the sons of the wealthy (for example, Winchester 1382, Eton 1440, Harrow 1572) the records of these schools are largely from the 18th century onwards and hence it is possible to trace back how these schools have been organised, and males within them empowered, in order to develop, sustain and perpetuate the 'ruling' or 'elite' classes. It is possible to consider the fractures along the way, what has been disrupted, what has continued and how the historical present is contingent. This can be traced in particular through the environment within public schools that has arguably been consciously engineered to develop beliefs, mindsets, practices, and loyalties, intended to endure through life and serve to reproduce historical inequalities. These apparatus and technologies have been developed over time and have become a kind of 'regime' of public schools with elements of this regime being reflected in other key institutions like Oxbridge, private members clubs (generally all male) and indeed government offices that comprise 'the revolving doors' of establishment power and privilege in England to the present day (Jones 2015). Joyce (2013) suggests this apparatus has been developed historically through what he refers to as 'making mastery' and 'domus'. The former refers to the systems of authority, hierarchy and subordination that are 'features of the state' and reflected in public schools as 'miniature universes of the state' (p.265) while the latter refers in particular to the house system that was at the heart of public schools. Joyce argues that invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992) like the house system and systems for prefects and pastoral care were all designed to engender a shared identity and loyalty, not only building social capital but also social skills and social contacts. This has changed very little over time which is illuminating in itself as generally things only remain the same if the systems are serving the intended purpose and/or those wishing to disrupt or change things are marginalised or excluded, like women who were purposefully excluded as part of the public school system.

Other practices that have continued include the ordering of daily routines and rituals (for example, waking up time, lessons, meals, sports, 'prep' time, bedtime) as well as free time to attend various extra-curricular activities through various clubs and societies that also served to develop and reinforce the required characteristics of future leaders. These activities are not controversial in themselves; rather it is the content of these activities as well as the direct and hidden messages inherent within the organisation of the school systems, that have provided these boys and young men with particular thoughts, practices, and technologies, that have given them (or some of them) the power to be in power. Such timetabling essentially ensured that pupils were in certain places at certain times, undergoing particular 'engineered' activities. In Foucauldian terms (1979) this is referred to as *enclosure* and *partitioning,* used as part of his explanation of disciplinary power to organise people into space and time for particular purposes as part of producing 'docile bodies'. This is explained by Lynch (2011, p.28) as an 'endeavour to meticulously, exhaustively and continually control the activities of bodies so as to constitute them as bearers of a highly particular relationship between utility and docility'. However, Taylor (2011) points out that such disciplinary power was considered by Foucault to be both distinct (yet overlapping) or part of biopower, the power over life. This theory is relevant here in the formation of power as Taylor suggests

> Disciplinary power works primarily through institutions, while biopower works primarily through the state, however the state is also involved in many institutions (p.45)

This ‘engineering’ within public schools has also been reflected and reinforced in other institutions like the individual houses/colleges within Oxbridge where many public-school boys progressed to, and in the offices of government which historically have been populated and shaped by public school. Even the male only private club-structures might be seen as an attempt to reproduce and sustain the structures and practices they were so strongly socialised into within the regime of public schools. Thus, apparatus external to the public schools can be seen to provide a framework to further perpetuate and sustain the existing order with public school alumni being both subject to forms of disciplinary power and the architects of it.

> *I have always been very interested in architecture, if you go to these schools, although they have modern wings, they have that kind of architecture that reminds you of the House of Commons, that reminds you of the inner court, reminds you of Oxbridge colleges. And there is within the English psyche this idea that this is where our excellence and our greatness is and it’s also tied up with a deference to those born to rule and educated to rule and so on. (Anna)*

Hence, as Anna alludes to in the above extract from her interview, this ‘engineering’ and organisation within public schools reflects a complexity that has not only enabled the assembling of the apparatus of power for its male population but the enduring networks that support these men to exercise power and influence far beyond their school days, sustaining and perpetuating an elite in positions of power, including policy-making. Whilst Joyce (2013, p.308) suggests that the ‘degree of rupture’ between past and present in terms of institutions of the state is becoming ‘more marked’ (perhaps due to the changing status of women, technological changes and global influences), it is also noted that the continued existence and influence of public schools, and those who attend them, reflects the power still being wielded in order to maintain the status quo. Malik (2023, p.1) argues that ‘powerbroking in Britain has passed from the hands of the old landed gentry and colonial trading class to players of international finance’ – the ties between government and the financial centre (the City) are strong and whilst the nature of the network might have changed its purpose remains to ‘maintain power’ and ‘look after its own’. Ball (2013b, p.44), drawing upon the works of Foucault, suggests ‘the play of continuities and recurrences through the application of the techniques of power and the deployment of forms of knowledge “constantly carve out new objects”’. In his discussion on key institutions in England, Joyce (2013, p.309) sums this up, stating,

> The capacity to successfully reinvent themselves is one of the chief reasons why it has been so difficult to challenge and reshape the institutions of the British state, and thereby reshape British society.

One such 'reinvention' for independent schools has been through the notion that they create a level of public benefit, providing them with the opportunity to reinvent themselves as engines of social justice, and thus providing justification for their continued existence in the discourses of government and others with vested interests. In exchange for charitable status which brings financial benefits, including 80% relief on business rates and exemption from Value Added Tax on school fees, independent schools are required to demonstrate public benefit for example through bursaries and fee remissions for poorer pupils (Ryan 2023). However, alternative voices (like Darlene's below) challenge the reality of public benefit with the current Labour Party policy advocating to end this charitable status, arguing that taxpayer's money currently used to support independent schools and the wealthy (approximately £1.7 billion per year) could be better used for the state sector that educates 93% of the population.

But I mean I think we need to fight for a much fairer even playing field in the state sector. And we can't really have that until we have progressive change in relation to the private sector. So takeaway their protections, their subsidies but other protections as well and actually work on making the education system a much fairer but also a much better learning environment. And that would involve, as I say, children being happy, and they are learning. (Darlene)

Current government policy, articulated through the Secretary of State, Gillian Keegan, argues that ending tax breaks would result in reduced bursaries and scholarships for poorer pupils and reflects 'the policy of envy'. However, as Ryan (2023) suggests, this defence is 'paper thin' and the bid to end tax breaks is driven not by envy but by fairness and decency, whilst Henry (2018), drawing upon school census data from the independent schools, outlines that the majority of financial assistance goes to affluent middle-class families and not poorer children. Government defence of privilege-conferring policy offers an example of how the independent system, and the advantages it brings, is perpetuated, illustrating how the policy maker's rhetoric legitimates inequality, despite commitments to a 'levelling up' agenda. As Grace indicated when interviewed, this is unlikely to change.

> *I don't think either the Labour party and certainly not the Tory party are going to abolish grammar schools and they are certainly not going to abolish the independent sector, no (Grace).*

Thus, the contingency of current education policy is exposed, albeit a 'contingency that bears down upon us in a way that allows uncomfortably little space for transformation' (Koopman 2103, p.120). This is important to consider in the next section where I analyse policy on grammar schools and academies in an effort to expose the assumptions and motivations of the policy makers and the strategies they have used to legitimise the policy (often including exclusionary practices) that represents our historical present.

The independent sector overall has been held up as a model of success for state schools to aspire to. It is the public schools though, within the independent sector, that have become known as powerful and influential institutions. Indeed, Joyce (2013, p.283) refers to Eton as 'part of the very origins of centralised power and centralised state, part of the state machinery', with social, cultural and economic capital converging to assure success. Despite state schools having fewer facilities and resources at their disposal (Green and Kynaston suggest independent sector funding per child is typically three times what it is for state school children) some state schools like grammar schools, and more recently many academies, have sought to emulate public school practices. This demonstrates the continuing powerful influence of the independent sector resulting from the valorising discourse of policy makers over the decades (many of whom have attended independent schools themselves) and hence the reason for examining this sector of education here – it represents a deep 'submerged problem' that a genealogy approach is concerned with (Koopman 2013, p.2), exposing the reasons that real systemic change has been thwarted over time.

4.2.2 School diversity for a reconstructed society

Throughout history diversification in education has been linked with views about pre-determined socio-economic destination. As established, boys from wealthy families were educated to prepare them for their anticipated roles as leaders in, for example, politics, law or medicine, whilst their sister's education was often limited to developing attributes to attract and support/serve a wealthy husband. At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum children from poorer backgrounds received minimal and piecemeal schooling befitting the more menial labouring roles for which they were destined. In the post second world war reconstruction period the state school system that emerged served only to reinforce this pattern and whilst it provided for some ‘exceptions’ like ‘bright’ working class children, these really were considered ‘exceptions to the rule’, revealing the underlying assumption that most working-class children were ‘dull’ not ‘bright’. This was the context within which state education developed, as discussed further below, and I argue here that there is evidence of continuing social class divisions inherent in our current education system. This, in turn, undermines and belies the government’s apparent commitment to reducing inequality.

The 1870 Education Act introduced organised elementary schooling, for all children, limited in nature and extent, and in apparent response to the emerging requirement for a more fit and skilled workforce amid concerns around international economic competition. However, this might also demonstrate how those in power were able to legitimise the opportunities for social control this schooling provided, ensuring there was no real threat to the status quo – quality education (and the opportunities that provided) would remain the preserve of the upper and middle classes, whilst working people would be given the level of education required to fulfil more lowly occupations, as well as gender expectations, and the subliminal messages that encouraged them to be satisfied with their lot in life. Ball (2013b, p.44) suggests it is from this period where the ‘games of truth’ and ‘practices of power’ can be reconstructed, and we begin to see how the genealogical history of education policy has been closely related to ‘a history of classifications and exclusions’. He summarises this stating,

> the school became in many respects an expression of humanity and a demarcation of the limits to humanity – who was and was not educable, of value, worth investing in (2013b, p.48)

This classification is highly evident in the tripartite system of the 1944 Education Act, which introduced secondary level education for all with three types of school – grammar schools for the academic who were able to pass the 11-plus intelligence test, technical schools for those with practical abilities and secondary moderns for everyone else. Ball (2008, p.74) suggests the different types of school for different “types” of pupil with different “types of mind”, was clearly modelled on a class-divided vision of education.

Policy makers behind the tripartite system claimed it would ensure that all children would receive the education best fitted to their ‘abilities’ and needs (in a post war context that viewed education as part of a wider public reform agenda), but the reality was very different and this rhetoric can be viewed as simply a ‘tool’ of the policy makers, serving to legitimise the policy decision whilst, obscuring the actual agenda to maintain social class divisions. These divisions became obvious as grammar schools were populated by middle class children and secondary moderns were filled with the working classes. Tensions and *fissures* became evident with criticisms that the system disadvantaged working-class children and ensured they were destined for lower status occupations, whilst bestowing further advantage on the middle classes. This led to the subsequent shift towards comprehensive education from the 1960s, where the purpose of schooling was still related to social and economic endeavours but with perhaps more egalitarian principles – the suggestion was that achievement would be by merit not social status. Thus, the idea of a meritocracy was born which enabled policy makers to give the illusion that all children could succeed if they worked hard enough; another example of how policy makers are able to employ language and rhetoric as tools to convince the population they are acting in the public good whilst protecting and consolidating their own power and influence.

Looking at our ‘historical present’ there are currently 163 grammar schools in England mainly centred in 11 local authorities (though 35 local authorities have at least one grammar school) and catering for 5% of the secondary school population (Danechi, 2020). The name ‘grammar school’ has evolved from medieval times where the historic use of Latin in government (and religion) required the teaching of Latin grammar – thus the schools set up to do this were called ‘grammar schools’, reflecting the curriculum and inherent understanding that those receiving it were destined for the powerful roles that required it. The continued use of this name reflects the desire to be aligned with such historical status and is demonstrated in the rhetoric that a grammar school education secures social and academic advancement.

Whilst grammar schools existed historically as fee paying schools for the middle classes – with some free places for local children who were selected on the basis of their academic ability – it was following the second world war that these schools became established in the maintained state sector of education. In the post war drive for reconstruction and growth, education was considered as essential, and was also perceived as a means to address issues of equality of opportunity. The 1944 Education Act established 'a unified system of free, compulsory schooling' (Garratt and Forrester 2012) including secondary provision where children were sent to one of the three types of secondary school according to their level of 'ability' and determined by an examination taken at 11 years old (the 11-plus). Whilst in theory there were three school options (outlined above), in practice it became a *bipartite* system with children attending either the grammars or secondary moderns – even by 1958 only 4% of secondary age pupils attended technical schools (Chitty 2014). Whilst the rhetoric was that grammar schools would take around 20% of the 'most able' children, regardless of background to increase educational opportunities, the practice and reality was very much different and rather than addressing inequality the system reinforced it (Reay 2017). Dixon-Román (2017, p. xvi) suggest that this inequality is 'reproduced across generations' referring to the idea of *inheritance* as the means of social reproduction. Though this *inheritance* might describe the 'gifting or passing on of the material forms of wealth', it can also refer to inherited social and cultural resources such as language, dialect, dispositions and status. Whilst Dixon-Román argues that the nature/culture binary is not simplistic and requires investigation, it is relevant here to the beliefs and discourse around ability that underpinned the policy decisions inherent in the development of the tripartite system, considered in the following sections of this chapter.

Of the 163 grammar schools in England, 143 are now academy grammar schools (directly funded by government) and the remaining 20 remain under local authority control. Current policy (DfE 2022b, p.3) states that grammar schools 'are the only state-funded schools in England that are permitted to select their entire pupil intake by general academic ability' and that 'the government wants to ensure that grammar schools continue to play an important role within the communities that they serve' – thus reinforcing the government intention to maintain this level of selection on the basis of 'ability' within the state sector. Whilst there seems to be no attempt to increase the number of grammar schools – the current Conservative Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, has reportedly abandoned his campaign pledge to open up more grammar schools (Clarence-Smith and Lough 2022), as did the previous Prime Minister, Theresa May, in 2016 – there is a clear desire to expand the existing ones through the 'Selective schools expansion fund' (DfE 2019). Though the creation of new grammar schools had been restricted under the Schools Standards and

Framework Act 1998, and restated in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, there is no legal reason that existing grammar schools cannot expand.

Thus, this current policy will ensure the continuation of selection on the basis of a purported intelligence test (the very notion of which been problematised) – safeguarding what has become a privileged progression route for middle class and affluent families – and the simultaneous silencing of any opposing voices. It is important to consider what this tells us about the underlying assumptions of the current policy makers – what they believe about education and children, and how and why they have been able to marginalise alternative discourses to perpetuate and legitimise an outdated practice that has its roots in previous decades. One potential explanation here is that many policy makers have themselves experienced selective education (as outlined in section 4.3.1.) and acquired the tools and strategies – not least the power of language and rhetoric around choice and social mobility (examined in sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3) – that have enabled them to both legitimise policy whilst undermining opposing voices. Thus, they are able to distance themselves from tackling the real inequalities in society and avoiding what Ingram and Gamsu (2022, p.191) refer to as the 'bitter notion of redistribution'.

> *And within the state sector, oh what a mess, you know. The older divide of the post-war period up until about the seventies was grammar schools and secondary moderns and one of the most interesting moments was parental pressure leading to the large-scale replacement of that divide with comprehensives…… I think there are a hundred and sixty-five, and they affect the ecology of their system, so we still select. (Anna)*

However, tracing back in time as per this genealogical approach, it is clear that opposing voices to the grammar school system and 11-plus examination were evident from the conception of the tripartite system (Clark 1940, Giles 1946) continuing to the present day. Looking at the present day first, this is evidenced by the private members bill that the Labour peer, Baroness Blower, has introduced which is, at the time of writing, going through Parliament. This School (Reform of Pupil Selection) Bill seeks to

> prohibit state-funded schools from admitting students wholly or partially based on criteria relating to ability or aptitude…..introducing a phased plan to bring admission policies for England's remaining selective schools in line with every state-funded comprehensive secondary school (Waitzman 2022 p.1)

This is significant in that it represents an alternative discourse but also because the protagonist is a woman, marking a change from male dominated discourse of the post war period, and reflecting the increased role of women in politics as discussed in Chapter 2. It has also reignited the debate on grammar schools raising the profile of the issue that selecting on the basis of 'ability' is problematic. The Bill proposed by Baroness Blower has been supported by a new campaign called Time's Up for the Test (2022), which is a coalition of interested organisations and individuals, who are campaigning to end selection. Their mission statement states,

> Our aim is simple and direct. We want the remnants of the discredited secondary school system which dates back to the 1940s to be swept away. Nowhere in England should young children be divided on the basis of some ill-conceived perception of intelligence.

Thus, the critical debate and problematization of grammar schools is very current and continuing – the inherent premise of the 11-plus examination that intelligence is somehow fixed at this age and hence a justification to potentially 'determine future chances' (Stobart 2014, p.35) remains contested and as Pillow (2015) suggests, questioning dominant discourses and providing alternative ones opens up spaces to reimagine policy and consider different conditions of possibility.

The number of grammar schools reduced significantly from 1965 when the Labour government encouraged a shift to comprehensive schools. The then Secretary of State for Education and Science, Anthony Crossland, committed to abolishing academic selection, issued circular 10/65 (Department for Education and Science 1965) urging local authorities to shift to non-selective education. The circular stated, 'It is the Government's declared objective to end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education' and went on to indicate this had been endorsed in the House of Commons, which,

> Conscious of the need to raise educational standards at all levels, and regretting that the realisation of this objective is impeded by the separation of children into different types of secondary schools, notes with approval the efforts of local authorities to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines which will preserve all that is valuable in grammar school education for those children who now receive it and make it available to more children (DES 1965)

This did lead to the growth in all-ability comprehensive schools into the 1970s and 1980s but not the abolition of grammar schools, reflecting a mere *fissure* in policy as opposed to a full departure from it and exposing the persistent support for selective education amongst policy makers. Chitty (1989, p.28) argued that 'radical opinion was vocal but it was not widespread' – it would be a mistake to consider that members of the Labour Party were all committed to comprehensive education as many of them had themselves attended grammar schools. Thus, widespread opposition to grammar schools did not emerge in the Labour Party – the very place it would have most likely come from – leading to the continuity of a state selective education. Successive governments have enabled the selection process to continue and whilst only 5 per cent of children currently attend grammar schools there are a great many more affected by the 'eco' system – that is the 80% of children in grammar school catchment areas that 'fail' the 11-plus examination. Data from Comprehensive Futures (Bartley 2022) suggests that

> 19% of England's secondary school pupils are affected by academic selection, attending either a selective school or a de facto secondary modern.

This means that generations of children have been, and are being, affected by having their intelligence tested and labelled at the age of eleven, and being segregated accordingly, with no regard for alternative discourses, historically and currently, that have highlighted the inequalities of the system. As Anna suggests below these inequalities are overlooked or ignored.

> *It is the lack of historical memory and the lack in many cases, in some cases, with the clever and cannier political people, the deliberate blocking of historical memory and misrepresentation of what went on in the past. (Anna)*

By 2019, the remaining 163 grammar schools accommodated around 5% of all state-funded secondary pupils (176,000), with data suggesting that social and economic factors continue to influence success in gaining entry to grammar schools. As indicated above, evidence shows that grammar schools were, and are, populated by middle class children and those from affluent backgrounds, with less than 3% of those from disadvantaged backgrounds attending these schools (Cribb et al 2013, Danechi 2020), using entitlement to free school meals as a key indicator of deprivation. This compares to 22.5% receiving free school meals nationally (GOV.UK 2022). It is also interesting to note that 13% of children admitted to grammar schools are from non-state, fee paying independent preparatory schools (Major

2016), demonstrating that grammar schools are seen as a progression route for these children and perhaps a cheaper ‘selective’ alternative for parents than continuing to pay for private education. The next section looks at the academisation of schools that is also marked by selection processes (examined in sections 4.3.3 and 4.4.2), albeit less overt.

4.2.3 The 21st century drive for greater diversity

Over the last 30 years there has been a drive for greater diversity in the state education system, as outlined in section 4.3, and this is demonstrated currently through a government policy priority to academise all schools in England, which Raynor et al (2018, p.146) refer to as ‘the largest programme of systemic change in England since the introduction of comprehensive schools from the 1950s’, marking a significant *fissure* in the organization of education. My key argument here is that government discourse which claims this unprecedented upheaval of the state sector has been necessary to tackle ‘failing’ schools masks the real motivation to reduce the power of local authorities and centralise power in their own hands. Whilst the comprehensive nature of these schools has continued – in terms of pupil intake for example – the governance and control of them has changed. As Ball (2013a, p.11) indicates, ‘they are outside of LEA oversight and are intended to draw on the energies and ideas of the private and voluntary sectors’. They are funded directly by the government yet the ‘increase in educational providers serves to disguise how the state is becoming more, not less powerful’ (Courtney 2015, p.814-815) – providing an example of both a centralising and decentralising agenda – and indicative of what Ball (2013a, p10) refers to as a ‘re-agenting’ of education policy.

There have been two distinct phases to academisation, the process by which schools become academies, and both require explanation. Building on the City Technology College initiative introduced by the Conservative government in the 1980s (the initial foray into privatising state-maintained schools) the academy programme was intended to create schools that would be independent of local authority control and funded directly from the government – these schools would be called academies and would be ‘all-ability’. The first phase of academisation was under a Labour government and part of their strategy aimed at improving educational standards in disadvantaged communities – it reflected their continuing discourse around ‘failing schools’ that sought to justify the shift towards academisation (Ball 2008, p.135). It is noted that this was within the context of a growing culture of performativity, where some schools were labelled as under-performing against *threshold* standards related to GCSE examination results (examined within Chapter 6), as per my own experience in school outlined in section 1.2.3. The first academies opened in 2002 and, whilst funded directly from central government, had sponsors (for example, individual philanthropists, business, charities, faith groups, universities, local authorities) who were initially expected to contribute with significant investment in terms of capital costs, though this requirement was soon abolished for universities and high-performing schools that sponsored such academies. Academies were given more purported freedoms than other secondary schools maintained by local authorities – for example, they were able to establish their own pay and conditions and had flexibility in terms of curriculum, length of the school day and school governance – though in reality it is unclear how many of them have opted out of the existing practices of maintained schools.

This first phase of academies was not without controversy. By March 2010 there were 203 of these 'independent' schools within the state sector (across 83 local authorities) and there was criticism of the strategy related to, for example, levels of autonomy, unfair levels of government funding and the role and influence of sponsors. However, according to Long (2015) during this phase there was no plan for *all* secondary schools to become academies, nor any desire to dismantle the role of local authorities – rather local authorities were expected to be involved and consulted with in any discussions around the setting up of academies. The architect of the academy's initiative, Andrew Adonis, reportedly argued, 'I never set up a single academy in opposition to local authorities' though he acknowledged there was some level of persuasion involved if the local authority plans 'weren't going to produce transformational schools' (quoted in Brighouse and Waters 2021, p.140-141). Whilst the intention of the Labour government academy strategy seemed to be to raise educational standards in what they considered to be disadvantaged and under-performing areas – with schools that were reaching the threshold standards remaining under local authority control – this does seem at odds with the overall policy context of this New Labour government and the assumptions and beliefs that underpinned policy, which was perhaps influenced by having a Labour leader (Tony Blair) who was the product of an independent education himself. As Chitty (2014) indicates there was a drive to create greater diversity in the state system and indeed the Labour Party election manifesto in 2005 stated they wanted 'independent specialist schools with a strong ethos' (The Labour Party 2005, p.35). The manifesto reinforced this privatisation of state education and their support for the growing number of academy schools indicating that,

> Britain has a positive tradition of independent providers within the state system, including church and other faith schools. Where new educational providers can help boost standards and opportunities in a locality we will welcome them into the state system, subject to parental demand, fair funding and fair admissions (p.37)

In short, the Labour government took forward the Conservative initiative of City Technology Colleges and provided a blue-print for academies to be established. This represented a *shift* towards even greater diversity within the state sector – the baton was to be picked up by the Conservative led coalition government that came into power in 2010, heralding a new phase of academisation with a very different driving force and based on a different set of beliefs that both justified and legitimised such policy.

In the period from 2010 onwards the coalition government and the successive Conservative led governments have since sought to convert all schools into academies and remove power from local authorities in a restructuring process that simultaneously claimed schools would have greater autonomy – enabling them to meet the needs of their pupils which would subsequently impacts on levels of achievement – whilst establishing direct government control, thus marking a shift from a relatively decentralised to highly centralised policy approach. Recent data (GOV.UK 2022), indicates that 80% of secondary schools are now academies (including free schools) catering for 79% of the secondary school population. This phase of academisation has also impacted on primary schools with 39% now being academies, catering for 40% of the primary population. Many of these academies have become part of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) – groups of academies that have formed a charitable company and have a single board of trustees responsible for the governance of the schools – as per the government vision for ‘every school to be part of a family of schools in strong academy trusts’ (DfE 2012, p.6). The use of the term *family* is another example of how policy makers use particular language to legitimize policy direction, in this case not only creating the illusion of a family – which might conjure up notions of support, security and caring – but also masking the fact that headteachers of academies will now be controlled by the ‘MAT head office’ (Gunter and Hughes 2022, p.24) and not have the promised autonomy that was this policy was 'sold on'. Both Charlotte and Elizabeth pointed out issues with the MAT system during their interviews.

> *Where you feel you're part of a massive machine and you have no say, no autonomy, no decision making as a headteacher I think that probably becomes quite miserable. And you then probably say to yourself, "Why did we do this?" So, I think there are great trusts, I think some of them are wonderful. I think some of them just slightly got the model wrong and have taken the heart and soul out of leadership, actually for people. (Charlotte)*

Around 88% of all academies are now in MATs with 75% of trusts having fewer than 5 schools whilst around 1% of trusts have more than 30 schools (DfE 2021b). Some of these MATs are national in that they might have schools in different parts of the country with associated impact on local provision.

> *So he realized he had joined this multi-academy trust but they couldn't meet, and this was before we had all this, as good technology as we have got now, they were a long way away, so working with them was difficult…..I think locality is becoming more important, place based ideas are important, so we will have to see how that goes. (Elizabeth)*

The size of some MATs has required systems and structures to be put in place that have recreated the same bureaucratic structures and systems that the local authorities were criticised for (Wilkins 2017), which undermines the government rationale for shifting to this model and rather exposes the ideological basis for the policy.

> *Effectively what's been lost I suppose is a lot of the functions of a local authority. But without those functions existing, and with schools potentially being in isolation, an answer needs to be found. And I think that the MATs have become that answer. (Charlotte)*

In addition, continuing reports of poor leadership in these schools, financial mismanagement and questions around standards have further amplified discourse that academisation has not led to the benefits espoused by the dominant discourse of policy makers.

> *They thought that it was the independence from local authorities that made the difference and it's not, it was that leadership that was brought to those early academies, not the fact that we said you are now an independent state school without a formal relationship with a local authority. (Elizabeth)*

Reay (2017, p.48) indicates that 'between 2012 and 2016, 81% of local authority schools were found to be Good or Outstanding, as compared to 73% of academies' – thus using the government’s own instrument of evaluation (Ofsted ratings) this suggests that academies were not outperforming their local authority counterparts as per the policy promise, revealing perhaps that the discourse around ‘raising standards’ and ‘school improvement’ was use of the ‘technology’ of rhetoric that has served to conceal ideological motivations to privatise state schooling and remove local authority control. Both Darlene and Anna pointed to flaws in the new system during their interviews, as indicated below.

> *And I think schools in England in particular, but I think generally in the UK, are not engines for change. They are not, they don’t have transformatory capacities because Michael Gove and similar education ministers to him have ensured that they don’t, that they uphold the tradition…. That schooling there is to control and pacify, to contain, not educate and liberate. (Darlene)*
>
> *But the other thing I would say which is more optimistic, is in 2010 when Michael Gove came in it looked shiny and new, free schools, academisation, nobody thinks it’s shiny and new now. The evidence on free schools is that they certainly don’t achieve more than the maintained sector, academies is the same, people worry about the privatisation aspects, related party transaction, selling off of assets, head teachers earning twice the prime minister. There is a lot of things now that people see is not working in the system. (Anna)*

It is this second phase of academisation that requires further analysis, as this academisation strategy is part of a wider ensemble of policies that suggest ideological ‘policy alignment’ and ‘alignment thinking’ (Savage 2021, p.2) within education – as discussed in section 2.2.5 – that, in turn, reflects a growing centralising agenda that seems contradictory to Conservative government rhetoric of independence and autonomy. Hence the interest and motivation to analyse and problematize this current policy and the features inherent within it (section 4.4) and consider future possibilities.

4.3 Selection for sorting, sifting and classifying

A key argument for this section is that selection has become an enduring feature of our education system and undermines current government discourse that their policy imperative is to address inequalities – historical and current selection practices have seen the sorting, sifting and classifying of children and young people, serving to benefit some to the exclusion of others, maintaining inequalities and preserving the status quo. This can be seen through both the independent sector and state-funded grammar schools that rely on selection and thus serve to maintain social reproduction.

Independent schools, particularly the elite public schools, not only deploy specific technologies that 'select' for this type of school – historically this has been males from very privileged socio-economic backgrounds – but have been designed to be selective for future social reproduction and to perpetuate male-elite dominance. As many alumni of these schools have become government policy makers these technologies have been deployed to ensure that the state sector of schooling does not disrupt the status quo and rather serves to preserve it, using legitimising discourse around the construct of selection. Similarly, inherent in the grammar school system is the selection on the basis of perceived intelligence or 'ability' that has rather exposed categorisation in terms of social class. This requires problematization as per a feminist genealogical approach.

4.3.1 Selecting for elite-male control

Public schools in particular have served to equip boys and young men with the technologies of power that have, and still do, enable them to dominate government and sustain and perpetuate historic inequalities in relation to policy. As indicated in Chapter 2 the majority of Prime Ministers and government ministers, throughout history and in recent times, have experienced a public-school education (in a context where independent schools as a whole cater for just 7% of the population), and it is these, largely men, drawn from such a narrow section of the population, who have been and are responsible for policy. As such the education policy that is our historical present is contingent on their underlying assumptions and the mechanisms they have had available to dominate discourse, exclude alternative voices like those of women, and legitimise their policy agenda – it is this that needs to be exposed and problematized in order to understand how our current policy has come to be.

State schools, like grammar schools and academies, seem compelled to engage in 'imitation' of independent schools – to adopt the more obvious technologies – which includes the adoption of physical 'tools' like blazers as part of school uniform policy – typically the domain of public schools and intended to inspire identity and commitment to the school 'brand' – and also routines and practices like the prefect system and 'house' structures that are inherent in public schools. By emulating these practices pupils in state schools are encouraged to pledge allegiance and loyalty to that school and what it stands for (but without experiencing the real advantages and privileges of such schools) suggestive of competition with potential 'other' brands and reflective of the loyalties engendered within public schools. This relates to what Ball and Youdell (2008) refer to as endogenous privatisation – the marketisation of education that has seen schools operate as businesses, characterised by competition to attract pupils, parents as consumers, and teachers who must ‘perform’ against targets, examined in section 4.4.

It is this ‘engineering’ over time that needs to be exposed as it is this that provides clues to how many of those in power, as policy makers, have actually come to acquire such power and used it to perpetuate the system that has served them over such a long period of time. This was considered briefly in section 4.2.1. and whilst this might seem to be a deviation from the focus of this chapter it is important to consider the role of public schools and the formation of pupils (largely male) within them, given that such a high proportion of those attending have been and are in government with responsibility for education policy. Questioning how this has come to be, Joyce (2013) suggests that removing boys from their homes at such an early age (and from the influence of women within them) is significant, as in an all-male school environment boys could be moulded into the *shape* of the existing patriarchy without interference or exposure to alternative perspectives. In addition, through the house system and pastoral systems these boys learnt the rules of hierarchy, authority, and subordination – ‘the ties that bound the boy to his home were deliberately broken preparatory to learning submission, itself preparatory to learning domination’ (Joyce 2013, p.290). In addition, the bonds and loyalties formed through this ‘engineering’ have led to lasting and powerful alumni networks, seen particularly within government, where a minority of men are able to hold power and dominate discourse, whilst excluding or marginalizing opposing voices, including those of women.

4.3.2 Selecting for intelligence

Referring now to state-funded grammar schools which have selected pupils through the 11-plus examination, and tracing back to the 1944 Education Act that introduced the tripartite system, it is clear this was based on beliefs about inherent or natural ability, reminiscent of nineteenth century thinking on eugenics. For example, the eugenicist Francis Galton (1822-1911) considered that intelligence was genetic and inherited, and those from upper classes had more of it (Stobart 2014) – thus providing a rationale for why the upper and middle classes were destined to occupy positions of influence, including as policy makers. Cyril Burt (1883-1971), an eminent psychologist at the time, and considered an authority on the intelligence of children (as well as a eugenicist in the more broader meaning), supported this view, arguing that his own research supported the theory that a person's intelligence quotient (IQ) was fixed and unchangeable – stating that educational 'backwardness' in the majority of cases 'is a general inferiority of intellectual capacity, presumably inborn and frequently hereditary (1937, p.572). Chitty (2014, p.26) indicates that much of Burt's research was based on 'fraudulent data' while Edmonds (2019) notes Burt's research – related to undertaking IQ tests on separated twins to prove that nature was more significant than nurture – was discredited following a re-examination of his work in the early 1970's. However, Burt has had a significant influence that continues to this day and was highly involved in shaping policy that led to the tripartite system and 11-plus examination on the basis of that belief. One of the reasons perhaps that Burt was able to wield so much influence and power was because he was surrounded by other influential and 'respectable' thinkers of the time, like Julian Huxley, J.M. Keynes and William Beveridge, all of whom were on the Council of the Eugenics Society (Ball 2013b, p.89) and all who had attended independent schools and Oxbridge – reflecting perhaps the importance of the public school networks (outlined above) that enabled some to maintain such power.

Ball (2013b, p.95) indicates,

> The Norwood Report (1943) which recommended the tri-partite system, drew on eugenicist thinking, and established 'breaks' which were then translated into policy, in its confident assertion that the education system had 'thrown up' three 'rough groupings' of children with three different 'types of mind'

As such 'intelligent' children, who were able to pass the 11-plus would go to grammar schools to prepare for future higher status roles in society; those demonstrating 'technical' abilities would go to technical schools to prepare for future skilled vocational roles; and the remainder would go to secondary modern schools with expectations that they would fulfil more lowly roles. Such was the purpose of education to prepare children for the future based on their intelligence at the age of eleven. Drawing on the theories of Foucault around bio-power and regulation of populations, Ball (2013b, p. 58) suggests this also demonstrates how the 'school became one tactical locus for the management of urban populations', reflecting an enduring purpose of education as social control, as discussed in section 1.3 above. Thus, the tripartite system can be seen as a structure that continued to reflect this ‘management’ of the population, also exposing the underlying assumptions of policy makers and the strategies employed to legitimise policy – they used an ethical stance in their discourse, arguing the system would support children with different needs, rather than reveal their more sinister motivations to maintain power structures.

The extremely low number of children from working class backgrounds attending grammar schools reinforced Burt’s view that intelligence was related to social class (Chitty 2014) and justified why top jobs in society were filled by those from the independent sector or grammar schools (as discussed in section 2.3.3.1). Drawing on Foucault’s theories of power, Ball (2013b, p.75) argues that intelligence, testing and statistics as a ‘combinatory’ practice leads to a situation where,

> Individuality is created and recreated as sets and categories which describe and explain ‘the population’ which is then subject to bio-power, a power which takes hold of human life to ‘foster it’ or ‘disallow’. Statistically derived classifications demarcated the valuable and worthwhile, the productive and *the residual.*

In relation to Burt’s beliefs that informed the tripartite system, it was those mostly middle class and affluent children being ‘fostered’ in grammar schools and classified as valuable and worthwhile in society, whilst the remaining 80% of children were ‘disallowed’ and ‘residual’.

Burt and his like-minded peers did not consider other influences on ability to ‘pass’ intelligence tests because the social ‘sorting’ resulting from the 11-plus served to reinforce their beliefs and assumptions and perpetuate these. He didn’t acknowledge the flaws related to the 11-plus exam, the view that children mature at different stages, or that intelligence might be ‘affected by particular educational approaches’ (Chitty 2014, p.25). Evidence that did contradict Burt and his assumptions was the successes of many secondary modern pupils in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (O-Level) exams in the 1950s, which Chitty (2014, p.27) argued exposed the ‘fallability of the 11-plus selection process’ making it difficult to ‘sustain the argument that a child’s intellectual capacity was wholly, or mainly, the result of something as fixed as genetic endowment’.

The views of Burt and the policy makers who capitalised on his thinking were challenged with alternative discourses but as Ball (2013b, p.64) suggests, ‘the sciences of intelligence, constituted the historical conditions of modern education….and these conditions….remain as the foundations of education in the present' – whatever disruptions or *fissures* alternative discourses have presented over time, the fact is that policy makers, since 1944, have been able to continue to legitimise the continuation of selective education based on intelligence testing, albeit for a reduced number of grammar schools, demonstrating how our historical present is contingent on powerful, dominant, and male discourses in the past.

4.3.3 Selecting for social mobility

In this section I argue that the continuing government discourse that grammar schools support 'social mobility' for the working class is erroneous – rather the selection processes lead to increased disadvantage and the notion of social mobility can be contested Reay (2017, p.101) suggests that social mobility has 'an iconic place in English political discourse' and it is in 'the individual and collective consciousness'. Education policy reflects a simplistic (yet convenient) government understanding of social mobility – the notion that individuals can shift within or between social strata in society through academic achievement. Government discourse suggests that through a 'good' education those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who demonstrate academic ability will be able to progress – on the basis of merit – and achieve a level of success commensurate with any other pupil from any other background. Achieving good qualifications will give them access to university and then higher status jobs that are better paid, thus enabling them to move up the social strata achieving social mobility. This discourse on social mobility based on academic 'ability' requires problematizing as per this genealogical approach, and in particular the enduring government discourse that grammar schools are an engine for social mobility for 'bright' working class children. This discourse exposes how the government use their assembled powers, not least language and rhetoric, to maintain the status quo by offering what Reay (2017, p.102) suggests is an 'optimistic fantasy' – the government set unrealistic expectations for individuals and families, whilst ignoring wider social and economic barriers to success, and simultaneously legitimise the continuation of these schools when the evidence indicates they have largely been populated by the middle class since their introduction in 1944.

Opposition to the 1944 Education Act and the idea of segregation by 'ability' can be traced back to the discourse around the legislation itself and calls for multi-lateral schools. For example, the Labour Party Conference in 1942 gave official support for the idea of a common school for all (Chitty 1989) and as Todd (2015, p.225) indicates,

> By the end of the 1950s, some social investigators were suggesting that the eleven-plus was an insidious means of keeping most children at the bottom of the pile, rather than helping the talented rise to the top.

During the 1950s and 1960s government reports (for example, the Crowther Report 1959 and Early Leaving Report 1954) were expressing concerns around 'the waste of talent' produced by the divided system (Ball 2008, p.76). There continued to be a growing number of voices, for example Pedley (1964), expressing concerns about the 11-plus exam and the difficulty in distinguishing between what had been learned in the social and cultural environment and what was natural or inherited intelligence. Associated with the understanding that intelligence is learned was the acknowledgement that some children would have a distinct advantage over others in the 11-plus examination, as some children simply had more access to learning resources than others. This alternative discourse around selection and the growing body of evidence about the influence of *nurture* exposed some *fissures* and *cracks* in dominant discourse and the idea that the grammar schools would support social mobility for working class children.

For example, in the 1970s, Bourdieu developed the notion of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) – the notion that social 'assets' were determined by family background and environment – which would impact on, for example, vocabulary and language, and knowledge and intellect. Certain forms of capital were more highly valued than others and as such, those from middle class backgrounds, where the cultural capital developed reflected that of those in positions of authority/power, would invariably progress more than those who were from backgrounds where their forms of capital had low societal value. The argument held that middle class children would be equipped with the forms of cultural capital that would enable them to perform better in the examinations, like the 11-plus – that were written with language and vocabulary they were familiar with, in addition to them having the resources to better prepare for them. The idea of cultural capital might be criticised for valorising one set of social and cultural assets above another with Gilbert (2018, p.34) suggesting that

> The grammar school driven ‘middle classification’ of Britain’s poor was the process by which a select few of them could assimilate middle class values…..it was not so much about what they could bring to the classroom as what they could discard

The growing understanding that nurture is so significant in a child’s development exposed the misconception that intelligence and ability are inherent in nature and also revealed the advantages that some children would likely have over others. However, this did not lead to any significant interruption from policy in terms of selection at the age of 11 as might have been expected – this has been allowed to continue, reflecting the inherent beliefs around selection by those policy makers who have experienced the advantages of it, and also ensuring that very few working-class children attend grammar schools and have the associated opportunity for social mobility. Furthermore, understanding around cultural capital served the purposes of those in power as they assumed the ‘assets’ they had assembled were the right ones – the language of government, business and industry for example was *their* language, and indeed this ‘language’ was echoed by teachers in schools up until recent times (when such occupations became possible for the working class). Indeed, my own experiences in school and higher education outlined in Chapter 1 attest to some significance to cultural capital. It is also interesting to note the perpetuation of this notion in recent policy, for example, Michael Gove, whilst Secretary of State for Education, outlined his belief that the ‘accumulation of cultural capital – the acquisition of knowledge – is the key to social mobility’ (Walker 2013, p.1). This not only conflated a range of concepts but also demonstrated how those in power use language and rhetoric as a legitimising tool – in this case to justify an ideological shift towards a knowledge-based curriculum (examined in Chapter 5), suggesting a barrier to social mobility was lack of knowledge rather than wider inequalities in education and society.

It is important to consider how many children have been, and continue to be, affected by this selective system to put into context the extent of the consequences of this policy – the key consequence being that grammar schools mostly serve more affluent children giving them more choice and opportunities than those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and undermining the argument that grammar schools are engines of social mobility. Reay (2017, p.35) has suggested that whilst by the 1960s the working class made up 26% of grammar schools ‘children from unskilled manual working-class backgrounds represented only 0.3% of those who achieved two A-levels or more', which suggests that whilst some might have passed the 11-plus they did not do as well as their more affluent peers once in the grammar schools. Furthermore, Furlong and Lunt (2020, p.12) cite the work of Alice Sullivan, who, drawing on three major longitudinal data sets of 1946, 1958 and 1970 cohorts, suggested 'there is substantial robust data to suggest grammar schools have not acted as an engine for social mobility in Britain'. Thus, the claim made by policy makers that grammar schools support social mobility, presented 'through a production of "truth" and "knowledge" as discourses' (Ball 1993, p.14) can be seen as an example of how policy makers continue to exercise power and legitimise education policy that serves their interests.

Some working-class children did achieve academic success in grammar schools and might consider themselves socially mobile as a result, but Furlong and Lunt (2020) point out that increased social mobility in the 1960s and 1970s was more a result of structural changes in society that increased opportunities rather than a direct result of grammar schools. Whilst these individuals were held up as positive examples – largely to support the discourse around these schools as being engines of social mobility – many others have indicated that their experience of being in a grammar school reinforced class divisions with them experiencing 'insecurity, uncertainty and confusion' with loss of a 'sense of belonging' (Reay 2017).

The majority of the other pupils (around 75% of all secondary pupils) having 'failed' the 11-plus were sent to secondary modern schools. Whilst there are many studies and reports about the advantages of pupils attending grammar schools (particularly preparation for university and future roles) the experiences of those who 'failed' the 11-plus and went to secondary modern schools must also be considered. As Young (1994 p.5) stated, 'every selection of one is a rejection of many'. It was argued that being labelled as 'failures' from such a young age had consequences for those children, as would the recognition that mainly middle-class children went to the grammar schools, thus reinforcing social class divisions.

The absence of literature on the experiences of those attending secondary modern schools prompted Williams and Rosen to set up a blog in 2012 to collect their stories – whilst this can be problematic as it is difficult to assess the extent that contributions are representative, Williams and Rosen (2017, p.332) reported that

> It is clear from the testimonies ….. that a combination of failing the exam and the segregation that followed weighed heavily on many pupils. Further, that this sense of shame and failure has never left many of these people. To be clear, this shame was constructed within and by sibling relationships, nuclear families, wider families, localities and ultimately nationally. This was, after all, a national exam pursued for national objectives impacting on people as individuals.

Horrie (2017) supported this view arguing that,

> Between 1944 and 1976 around 30 million people took the test. More than 20 million of us failed. The nostalgia for grammar schools is confined to those who passed the exam, and felt it gave them a chance in life. But the experience of those who failed is rarely – if ever – heard first-hand, for the very good reason that hardly any of them went on to higher education or positions in life where they had any sort of voice at all.

It should also be considered that many who passed the 11-plus exam – historically and currently – have done so because of the advantages their socio-economic status afforded them. Affluent families have advantages in the resources they can deploy to support their children to prepare for and attend grammar schools. For example, Cribb et al (2013, p.3) found that

> almost a quarter of state school pupils receive private or home tuition, rising to 40% in London. Those who can afford to pay for such tuition gladly do so to give their children a head start in the grammar school admission tests

This was supported by a later report by the Sutton Trust where Major (2016) reports on a ‘booming industry in private tutoring over recent years’, and also by The Education Policy Institute which reported on grammar schools, indicating that tuition boosts the chances of pupils whose families can afford it (Johnes 2016) and thus poorer pupils are disadvantaged. This demonstrates that grammar schools provide a progression route for more affluent families – those that have resources and access to private tutoring – and are not the engine of so-called social mobility that the supporters of the system suggest, an argument used to justify the continued existence of grammar schools within the state sector.

Whilst Cribb et al (2013) recommended some strategies for supporting more disadvantaged children to gain entry into grammar schools so that there is fairer access to these schools – for example, reviewing tests for cultural bias, providing test preparation for all pupils, outreach work to encourage applications from those in disadvantaged communities, partnership development with primary schools – this is in itself problematic and warrants critique. Children would still be segregated at the age of eleven (with the associated issues of potentially being labelled a failure) on the basis of the 11-plus exam, and 80% of children would still be denied the opportunity for entrance to grammar schools, even if they only miss out by a very small percentage point, as there has to be a cut-off point. Furthermore, as in the post-war period there is little movement of children into or out of grammar schools following the 11-plus selection process – that is, if a child in a secondary modern school demonstrates high academic standards, they are not transferred to a grammar school. Their school place is fixed at 11 years old by an intelligence test.

Stobart (2014, p.19) argues there has been a shift in language to make this selection process more palatable today,

> In polite society we do not now talk much about IQ because of its historical baggage, yet we are happy to talk loosely about low and high ability

The literature and data collected for this study suggests this is what contemporary policy does, with a recent proposal on grammar schools citing the right to 'select by high general academic ability' (DfE 2022c, p.3), demonstrating the continuity and use of such a problematic concept. As Gillborn and Youdell (2000, p.212) suggest,

> The view of 'ability' that currently dominates education, from the heart of government through to individual classrooms, represents a victory for the hereditarian position without debate and without conscience.

Whilst the focus of this section has been on grammar schools thus far (because social segregation is so overt and these schools have been lauded as engines for social mobility), it is important to note that selection for social mobility is also present within academy schools – the second object of analysis for this chapter – as well as in other state funded schools. This has consequences for the 93% of children educated within the state sector and for so-called 'social mobility'. There are two key points related to social segregation here, firstly that academies serve different communities and hence academies within disadvantaged communities (for example council estates) will have a different social intake than an academy situated in the proverbial middle class leafy suburb. As well as this maintaining social segregation it is notable that some academies in disadvantaged areas have introduced ‘zero-tolerance’ discipline measures that Reay (2022) refers to as the ‘intensification of the current wave of authoritarianism’ (p.128) representative of a ‘new masculinised state, focusing on discipline and policing rather than caring and respect for those who are disadvantaged’ (p.132) – this arguably demonstrates the continuing role of education as a tool of social control (examined in section 1.3), albeit dressed up as necessary to ‘raise standards’. Secondly, many children are segregated *within* the school they attend through the process of setting by ability. This is something that has continued since the comprehensive school system – Coldron, Cripps and Shipton (2010, p.21) suggest, while the move to predominantly comprehensive schools reduced social segregation between schools ‘it did not necessarily disrupt pupils’ broadly segregated experience of schooling’, and neither has it for academies, resulting in what Brown (1990, p.75) has referred to as ‘social selection by stealth’. The governance and control of academy schools may now be different but the social structures of these schools have been reproduced, exposing perhaps the real motivation behind the policy makers drive for academies related to power and control, whilst they are able to deploy convincing and legitimising rhetoric around ‘raising standards’. Looking at segregation *within* schools there continues to be a trend towards ‘setting’, where pupils are placed in sets for some or all subjects on the basis of their ability. Policy discourse around this suggested this would support ‘personalisation’ – a term from New Labour education policy (DfES 2004) which in this respect refers to teaching and learning to the needs of the individual child, interpreted by many schools as best supported by the process of ‘setting’ into ability groups.

Boaler (2005, p.135) argues that the continued policy of ‘dividing’ into ability groups within some schools has continued the policy norm of segregation and led to ‘psychological prisons’ that ‘break ambition’ and ‘almost formally label kids as stupid’. Boaler (2005, p.137) states that ‘research on ability grouping has persistently shown high correlations between social class and setting’ which Gunter (2021, p.102) suggests reflects eugenicist ideology. As such whilst the number of grammar schools may have reduced (outlined in section 4.3.2) and more socially mixed schools like academies have emerged, the practice of division continues, reflecting the continuation of the ‘dividing practices’ of Foucauldian theory (Ball 2013b, p.127). Whilst education policy makers continue to espouse social mobility as an aspiration for all, there is evidence that undermines this view (Adams 2019a) and lends support to what Reay (2022, p.129) describes as a form of 'asset-stripping of working class', whilst simultaneously enabling the policy makers to 'divest themselves of responsibility for the vast majority of the working classes deemed to be too "dull" to be socially mobile'. It is an example of how those in positions of power are able to develop policy that serves their own interests to maintain the status quo, whilst framing it in a way that suggests it is best serving the interests of the population, bolstered further by the range of strategies that only give lip service to 'levelling up' rather than bringing about real structural change. In addition, as Beatrice pointed out in her interview, these changes are not based on quality research or in consultation with key stakeholders.

> *I have got a question mark with the current national framework, that they, particularly central government, invest in things that have very little research base and then very little evaluative framework around them…. Instead of just keep knee jerking and throwing money at things in this particular way it is standing back and starting to talk to the key stakeholders, from parents and carers, young people themselves and the educationalists, and that's right across the sectors, from HE, FE, into schools. And if you trust them they will actually develop systems that work at local level. But the over centralised approach has been shown to be creaking at the edges, it really has. (Beatrice)*

This section has sought to argue that rather than diminish inequalities, government policy serves to perpetuate them, providing evidence that contest their claims to be committed to all children having opportunity to experience social mobility. A historic and continuing allegiance to selection through the independent sector and state funded grammar schools demonstrates rather a policy commitment to exclusionary practices that support social reproduction (and the structures that support the maintenance of patriarchy) whilst unfairly tantalising the disadvantaged with the promise of 'social mobility'. Inherent in a neoliberal policy context is the focus on individual responsibility and as such blame for any lack of social mobility is apportioned to pupils, and the schools that support them, as opposed to the government, that is failing to tackle systemic inequalities that preserve privilege. The next section looks at the notion of individualism and competition as part of a neoliberal policy context and the impact this has on diminishing inequalities.

4.4 Competition

The final discourse that pervades school organisation relates to *competition* and the associated notion of *parental choice*. Both are consequences of the diversification and marketisation of schools, within a neo-liberal policy agenda, and manifested in the academisation programme of the last two decades. Hence it is largely through the second object of analysis of this chapter – academisation – that these two notions will be examined. My key argument here is that the government claim that academisation would lead to improved standards for all, as schools competed to attract pupils through parental choice, has not materialised, and this policy has instead led to fragmentation of the state sector, creating winners and losers. Increased disparities between schools have emerged with some parents exercising their capital advantage to game the system, resulting in further segregation and exclusion, examined below.

Neo-liberalism ideology gathered pace within education in the 1980s with the key features of free-markets, competition and economic individualism and was initially seen through, for example, the Local Management of Schools (LMS) and Grant Maintained Schools (GMS) initiatives – these gave schools more control over their budgets, staffing, marketing of their schools and enabled them to contract services outside of the local authority. This was made possible by the 1988 Education Reform Act which marked a significant *fault* or *fissure* with the post-war 'welfare' policy (Garratt and Forrester 2012, Chitty 2014) and was a pre-cursor to the largely complete separation from local authorities that the academies policy has led to. Neo-liberalism was in response to government concerns that the post war welfare state was expensive with apparent inefficient and bureaucratic public services, resulting in economic decline – these beliefs permeated policy maker discourse with the additional 'threat' around the ability of England to compete internationally in the emerging global markets (Ball 2008). Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.50) suggested that the arguments for neo-liberalism included the belief that competition would 'increase the efficiency of public sector organisations and offer individuals freedom of choice'. It was suggested that competition amongst schools would 'raise standards, improve quality, and provide accountability through the mechanism of market forces' (p.53). Such was the 'ensembles of language' used in discourse within policy documents, revealing the 'policy devices' or 'technologies' of policy makers (Ball 2008, p.17) – they were able to employ the language and rhetoric of neoliberalism to amplify a problem and create a 'fear for the future' in the population, whilst simultaneously justifying and legitimising the need to *shift* direction of policy.

4.4.1 Academisation - the answer to perceived problems?

Both competition and parental choice are key features of academisation and what Joyce (2013, p.12) considers as an attempt to 'provide rational answers to rationally conceived "problems"'. Whilst the first phase of academisation occurred from 2002 under a Labour government it is the second phase, since 2010, that successive Conservative governments have sought to convert all state schools into academies, citing that the bureaucracy of local authorities undermines the autonomy of headteachers to meet the needs of their pupils which subsequently impacts on levels of achievement. Policy makers have pointed to the national league tables as well as Ofsted rankings (constructed by policy makers as evaluation strategies as part of the machinery of competition), as well as international league tables, to provide evidence of this 'problem' which has enabled them to present what seems like a rational argument while also providing justification for the level of intervention that is thus deemed necessary to address such serious problems. As such the government policy makers are able to use a social justice agenda to further legitimate policy, claiming that those with opposing discourses are the '*enemies of promise*' (Gove 2013a) – whilst they have both engineered the 'need' for such a change to the structure of schools and created the evaluative tools of competition to further justify this *necessity*, exposing the strategies employed by those able to dominate discourse. Hence in the last decade the government have been able to 'steam ahead' with the academisation programme – currently around 80% of all secondary schools and 39% of primaries are academies and 88% of these are within a Multi-Academy Trust (GOV.UK 2022).

This change to the structure and organisation of schools is based on the discourse that policy makers have constantly reinforced (DfE 2010, DfE 2016, DfE 2022a) – that taking schools out of local authority control reduces the burden of bureaucracy, provides headteachers with more autonomy and leads to improved standards – a discourse that serves to hides the real ideological motivation which has been to reduce the power of local authorities and exercise more direct governmental control, whilst relinquishing responsibility to market forces. This represents a *fissure* in state education in the last two decades, over-riding the public with the private – as Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.113) suggest there has been,

> A transformation in the education system from what was originally a public service based on notions of egalitarianism and social justice to

> a system of values in which considerations of efficiency, marketability and open competition prevailed.

Furthermore, Reay (2022, p.135) argues academisation represents the ‘privatization of English education’ and has led to schools which are ‘increasingly run like businesses rather than public services’. This system, that has ultimately led to further fragmentation of the state sector, is underpinned by competition to attract pupils and parental choice, in what has become a consumer’s market for schools (Ball and Youdell 2007). Schools, as corporate businesses, are pitted against each other in terms of securing pupil numbers and as such engage in strategies like branding which Courtney (2015, p.813) argue is ‘competitor-orientated’ to secure more ‘symbolic capital’, in an attempt to appeal to parents who are now able to, in theory, exercise their choice of which school they send their children to. As such,

> English education is being reconstructed to fit the values of an elite, mostly privately educated group of men with free-market, small state beliefs, and neo-liberal values of competition, self-reliance and individualism (Reay 2022, p.134).

In addition, there is some superficial illusion that these state schools can aspire to the desirable outcomes of the public and private schools by emulating the overt ‘tools’ of such schools (like use of blazers as part of uniform and branding as discussed in section 4.3.1) but without having the social, cultural and economic apparatus that secures those outcomes as Darlene suggested when interviewed – perhaps leading to what Berlant (2011) refers to as a cruel optimism.

> *And yet at the same time despite those incredibly unfair levels of funding, the disparity, those schools are held up as the model to which state schools should aspire. So, the good state school should look like a private school but with, you know, hardly any of the resources, the infrastructure that the private school has. (Darlene)*

The continued valorisation of the public school system (and independent sector more broadly) that many policy makers themselves experienced, exposes the underlying assumptions that such a system is worthy of emulating in some shape or form within the state sector – also serving to maintain their position in the hierarchisation of schools in what has become a fragmented and diverse system, and thus legitimising its historical legacy.

> *Well, I think our system is terribly messy. I think politically language is used differently, those who are happy with it call it diversity and choice, and for those on the left, like myself I suppose, you know, who are interested in the inequality, I call it hierarchy and inequality. (Anna)*

The below section now examines alternative discourses to the notions of competition and parental choice.

4.4.2 So what is wrong with competition and parental choice?

Garratt and Forrester (2012) argue the academisation policy has conceptualised parents as consumers, in an 'education marketplace with a mantra of greater choice', whilst Ball (2013a, p.132) suggests that parental choice exemplifies the 'assiduous individualism in contemporary education' – representing an 'individualism' that is inherent within neo-liberalism.

Tracing back the notion of parental choice that is a feature of current education policy, Ball (2008) argues that whilst it emerged with the Conservatives in the 1980s, it was strongly endorsed by New Labour (1997-2010) and as such we can see the how this notion has continued over the last few decades, and how current policy is contingent. Ball suggests that the Conservative version was a 'neo-liberal choice model' with, for example, flirtations around a potential voucher system which would have seen parents able to cash in their voucher at a school of their choice – which proved good in theory but difficult to operationalise and hence was never introduced. Brown (1990, p.79) referred to the age of 'parentocracy', suggesting that neo-liberal free market solutions to education shifted the responsibility for educational outcomes 'squarely on the shoulders of the schools and parents'. Labour continued with this approach, which Ball (2008, p.150) suggested 'gestured towards collective choice and parental voice and what is called "co-production"'. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act demonstrated New Labour's commitment to parent power, indicating parents would have a say in how schools were run (for example by participating on governing bodies), they would have clearer information about schools and would be able to set up new schools supported by a dedicated fund. Whilst in theory this gave increased influence and power to parents, in reality it served to further inequalities as some parents were able to dominate discourse. Ball (2008, p.153) suggests 'choice policies'

> create social spaces within which class strategies and 'opportunistic behaviours' can flourish and within which middle classes can use their social and cultural skills and capital advantages to good effect.

Hence parent power is not afforded to all, and whilst education policy continues to offer this choice, it also leads to segregation and exclusion. Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.53) argue that neo-liberalism 'presents the market as neutral and all consumers have a viable choice', and as such parents are regarded as a 'homogenous group' – a convenient ideological position that ignores the inequalities between parents in terms of the resources, facilities and actual choices they have to determine their children's educational experiences.

Brown (1990, p.80) was perhaps prophetic when he suggested that,

> the State had extended its control over the organisation and content of schooling in order to ensure that adequate educational standards are met ……in the educational parentocracy selection will be determined by the free play of market forces, and because the State is no longer responsible for overseeing selection, inequalities in educational outcome, at least in official accounts, cannot be blamed on the State.

Current education policy (DfE 2016, DfE 2022a) refers to parents being able to choose the best school for their children but this claim is problematic and requires critique, as it is not a level playing field for all parents. The problem is twofold, firstly in a competitive market, with success measured through league tables and Ofsted results, there is potential for 'differential valuing of clients by institutions' (Ball 2008, p.139) – schools may seek pupils who will 'achieve' well and contribute to the schools performance ratings in order to maintain their competitive advantage and as Ball suggests these are more likely to be 'white, middle-class, English speakers' (p.140). Chitty (2014, p.121) suggested that academies were able to 'take advantage of the ability to set their own admissions criteria by "cherrypicking" able pupils', whilst Reay (2017, p.49) reported that academy schools were 'flouting admission rules by selecting pupils from more privileged families' citing evidence from the Academies Commission – thus increasing the likelihood of social segregation and inequality. Secondly, it is those middle-class parents who are more likely to secure places for their children in 'successful' academies and schools as they have the level of education themselves, the language, resources and know-how to navigate the often-complex information about admissions processes (Coldron et al, 2010). Thus, as Anna alluded to when interviewed, it is those parents with less resources and less ‘know how’ that are least likely to secure places for their children in the ‘best’ schools – and these are more likely to be working class parents, resulting in a ‘double disadvantage’.

> *And I always call it the alchemy of privilege, the wealthiest children go and get the most resources, and I think that’s a problem and I think we need to reform that. It’s hard to reform because we are a free country and you can’t abolish schools and parents have the right, just as they have the right to pay for piano lessons at home, they have the legal right to gather together and pay for education. (Anna)*

In addition, whilst some parents have been armed with this so-called choice many have also been demonised for not being engaged in their children’s education and this further provides a rationale for inequalities in outcomes. Ball (2008, p.213) suggests this emphasis on ‘deficient parenting’ provides explanations that the government can utilize for their own means rather than engaging with ‘issues of poverty and structural inequality’.

> *I think that this focus on parental choice has had really damaging, damaging impact on working class children learner identities…….. And these children are having to deal with the repercussion of being chosen against, they are the sort of children nice parents don’t send their children to school with. And that has devastating impacts on their self-worth and sense of educational value. And I think that instead of compensating for the poverty of the children attending these schools in poorer areas, the norm now is for these schools to be disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure, resources and curriculum. (Darlene)*
>
> *And I think that the problem with the parental choice first is that it’s linked to school funding with student enrolment numbers and that’s led to lots and lots of problems. And I would now say that within the state sector, you can clearly see that you’ve got, that there is schools that can deem to be middle class schools and schools that can very much seen to be working class schools. And I think the choice project, the right-wing choice project, has really been problematic (Darlene)*

As indicated above, when interviewed Darlene commented on the problems associated with what she called the ‘choice project’ and the repercussions of this for children. In an environment where schools, and their pupils, are set up in competition with each other, it is inevitable that there will be winners and losers (Davies 2014). The notion of choice is an illusion for many and only a reality for some – in the same way that the existence of private independent schools is not a choice when only 7% of children can attend them. Only those with economic capital have option to take advantage of all the choices available whilst other parents are restricted to choosing a school within their locality or in other localities if they are able to afford to travel or relocate. This exemplifies the ‘assiduous individualism’ Ball refers to (2013, p.132), that is reflective of neo-liberalism – education is a commodity in which parents weigh up their choices to support the life chances of their children and its value is not simply as an inherent ‘good’ but something more instrumental, providing social capital and opportunity. Wolf (2003, p.14) argues it is the middle classes who are the ‘real beneficiaries’ here, citing that in the last 50 years whilst working class children have had better chances of getting to university, it is the chances of the middle classes that have grown much more. Overall, this has led to a situation that Ball (2003, p.25) describes, ‘currently, in developed societies around the world, education policies are primarily aimed at satisfying the concerns and interests of the middle class’. Thus, the government claim that their policies support all children is contested, and rather it has led to a fragmented system in which wealthier families in society continue to have advantages and the disadvantaged experience growing inequality, summarised in more depth in section 4.6.

The next section gives a particular focus to women’s voices in this aspect of education policy and examines their inclusion and exclusion.

4.5 Women’s voices

Whilst the data gathered from interviews has informed the analysis in this chapter, the direct quotes from individual interviews have been integrated within it as vignettes to provide perspectives from women and add disruptions to the narrative. A feminist genealogy approach is concerned with the difference between male and female experiences and the absence or presence of women in the policy-making process and this section is intended to examine the part women have or have not played in policy to provide context for this and subsequent chapters. The key points for this section are that, firstly, until the later part of the 20th century women had almost no formal role in the state and government and as Joyce has indicated, ‘the creation of the ruling class mentality depended upon the masculinization of power and the subordination of women’ (2013, p.11) and this is reflected in section 2.3 on feminism. Secondly, as women did begin to occupy policy-making roles in the later waves of feminism (examined in sections 2.3-2.5), their influence and actions have arguably been aligned to their social class – largely middle and upper class – which has resulted in support for the status quo rather than a challenge to it.

This is evidenced to some extent by the women who have held key government positions in recent years, who by the very nature of their roles have been involved in developing and implementing the current education policy discussed in the sections above, whilst not necessarily been the architects of it. In the Conservative led governments there have been two women Prime Ministers, Theresa May and Liz Truss (though the latter was in office for just 50 days) and out of the ten Secretaries of State for Education since 2010 four have been women – Nicky Morgan July 2014-July 2016, Justine Greening July 2016-January 2018, Michelle Donelan (in office for just 2 days) and Gillian Keegan since October 2022.

However, it must also be noted that since second wave feminism through to our current suggested state of fourth wave feminism, many women have sought to disrupt and challenge education policy, an example of which is provided by Baroness Blower (section 4.3.2) who is, at the time of writing, contesting the continuation of grammar schools within parliament. In addition, there are many other women connected to the current Times Up For The Test campaign which seeks to end grammar school selection on the basis of the 11-plus examination. The comments integrated into the sections above also demonstrate how the women interviewed as part of this study contest and challenge dominant discourse around the shift to academies, that reflect the neo-liberal characteristics of competition and choice. This demonstrates the growing influence of women in recent times in problematizing policy, reflecting the growing participation and power of women in policy discourse (Pillow 2015).

Whilst the above section demonstrates the involvement, and potential influence, of women in policy discourse currently, there seems little literature citing women's involvement in policy discourse in the post war period, and this might be considered indicative of the social and cultural context of that time as outlined in Chapter 2. During this period (1945-1979) all the Prime Ministers were men, reflective of a patriarchal society, and out of the seventeen different Ministers responsible for Education (as Secretary of State or similarly named) only four were women – Ellen Wilkinson (Labour) August 1945-February 1947, Florence

Horsburgh (Conservative) November 1951- October 1954, Margaret Thatcher (Conservative) June 1970-March 1974 and Shirley Williams (Labour) September 1976- May 1979.

It is interesting to note that Ellen Wilkinson was the Labour Minister for education following the 1944 Education Act that brought in the selective grammar school system. Given her background as an advocate for the working class it might be assumed she would have opposed the segregation of the tripartite system, favouring instead the comprehensive ideal being discussed at the time. Chitty (1989, p.25) argued that she 'made little attempt to challenge the prevailing philosophy of her Ministry which embraced a firm commitment to the tripartite system', whilst Morgan (1984, p.174) suggested, 'Ellen Wilkinson embodied Labour's instinctive faith in the grammar schools, the bright working-class child's alternative to Eton and Winchester'. Similarly, Shirley Williams (Labour Minister of Education and Science 1976-1974) was initially reluctant to take on the role of Minister as Labour's policy supporting comprehensive schools was not popular with parents at her daughter's grammar school, and subsequent Labour governments have not ended selection.

These four women ministers in the post war period represented a minority of women in public positions of power at this time. Whilst they may not have seemingly opposed the prevailing discourse of the time this may well have been in part because two of them were members of the Conservative Party – and thus aligned with policy that sought to conserve the powers and privileges of the status quo – and all of them were surrounded by male dominated discourse and beliefs within a male dominated government and parliament, where there were likely attempts to silence and undermine them. As Reeves (2019) has indicated, women MPs at this time were subject to the stereotypes about women common in post-war England – that women should be housewives and mothers – and as such were often treated with derision within Parliament and actively undermined. For example, attempts were made to cut expenditure in their departments that would block policy implementation and undermine their achievements. In the public arena the influence of women MPs was also actively undermined and ridiculed in this period. Reeves (2019, p.78) comments that 'endless news columns about women MP's fashion obscured the columns of Hansard that they filled with their speeches in the chamber'. It is worth noting that even today, whilst there may be more women in parliament, they continue to be subject to undermining tactics and targeted for abuse, as indicated in the section on fourth wave feminism in Chapter 2.

Reeves (2019, p.85) also suggests that during the 1950s there were indeed opposing women's voices to selection, 'within the Lady Member's Room – such as Alice Bacon and Peggy Herbison – calling for a more comprehensive system', though it was the male dominated discourse that prevailed. The existence of a Lady Member's Room is itself reflective of how women were marginalised in Parliament at this time, echoing the wider social and cultural context. As such it is not surprising, given the development of feminism and women's influence outlined in Chapter 2, that voices of women in this period were more marginalised and excluded than currently, whilst it is important to recognise that even in current 'enlightened' times there is still continuing discrimination of women.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to problematize our 'historical present' in terms of school organisation and structure through three discursive constructs – diversification, selection, and competition – using two objects of analysis, grammar schools and academisation, to frame this around.

Concurrent with a feminist genealogy approach the intention has not been to find answers to identified issues or problems, but rather to articulate and analyse those problems and consider how conditions of possibility are contingent rather than necessary – whilst also considering the absences (and presences) of women's voices, as discussed in section 4.5. In the case of this chapter the problems relate to the crisis and tensions inherent in an increasingly fragmented state sector of education that has emerged and developed alongside a historic and powerful independent sector. Thus, drawing particularly on Koopman's (2013) three Cs of genealogy this chapter has sought to *critique* and problematize education policy in this area, demonstrate its *contingency* and examine its *complexity*.

Analysis of current school organisation and structures – our historical present – has revealed the continuities in education policy that can be traced back over decades (and in some cases for centuries) and identified where there have been disruptions and *fissures*. This analysis and critique has demonstrated that whilst current policy makers have introduced a diverse and marketised system of education in the last 30 years (intensifying in the last decade), which might reflect a decentralising agenda indicative of neoliberalism, the reality is that education policy has also being centralising – the majority of the state sector has been academised and is now funded directly by the government. However, it is important to recognise the tension here, that whilst it may appear more centralised, policy makers have capitalised on the 'tools' and 'technologies' they have assembled – in particular through carefully chosen language and rhetoric within policy discourse – to divest themselves of ultimate responsibility for educational outcomes as they have bequested power, autonomy and accountability to schools and families, resulting in a contradictory centralising and decentralising policy.

This marketised state school sector – characterised by diversification, selection and competition – has been 'encouraged' to look towards the independent sector as a model to aspire to in order to raise standards and aspirations. Hence it has been important to examine the independent sector as part of this chapter to consider how it has, and still does, serve as a vehicle for assembling and maintaining power structures that current policy is contingent on. Analysis of data has exposed how many of those with policy-making powers have *come to be* – via 'engineering' within public schools and through the networks established that have continued and evolved over time, serving to support and uphold the status quo. Whilst alternative discourses have provided disruptions and challenges – *fissures* and *cracks* – there has been no real *erosion* to the position and status of the those occupying powerful positions as policy makers in government. Had alternative discourses dominated policy-making our present and future conditions of possibility might have been much different.

Our 'present' can be seen as contingent on the dominant discourses around diversification, selection and competition, resulting in a state school system that segregates children into different 'types' of schools and also segregates within schools – still using measures of intelligence and ability that can be traced back to 1944 and indeed the last century. This has led to the continuation of selective education – both independent sector and grammar schools – that serves the middle and upper classes and largely excludes the working class or disadvantaged. Critique of the current diversity of schools, particularly with reference to academisation, has highlighted that forms of selection are inherent within the state sector too and that the notion of social mobility is contested. There is little evidence from league tables and Ofsted reports to support the government discourse that diversification and competition has led to improved standards, and the justification for removing schools from local authority control to reduce bureaucracy has been undermined by the development of large MATS – resulting in one form of bureaucracy being replaced by another. This exposes the ideological motivations behind this policy agenda which was to reduce the power and influence of local authorities and privatise state schools, using rhetoric around raising standards and increased autonomy for schools in order to justify this.

The increased diversification of the state sector, and associated selection and competition, can also be seen to have perpetuated social class divisions and increased inequalities. Policy discourse suggests that all parents can exercise choice, as part of this diverse and marketised school system, yet analysis of data indicates such choice benefits only a narrow section of society, the middle classes – with social, cultural and economic factors being obstacles to many disadvantaged and working-class families, in turn impacting on their outcomes and career opportunities.

This chapter has sought to look beyond simplistic explanations of policy to demonstrate the complicated layers of the metaphorical cliff-face – illuminating where there have been cracks, fissures and erosions and where there have been continuities in dominant discourses of those policy makers who have been able to employ a range of assembled tools to justify and legitimate policy decisions that serve to preserve their status whilst giving the illusion of serving the needs of the wider population. Genealogy is not just about the past but the future too and the inclusion of women's perspectives (from the interview data) that questions and challenges dominant discourse, serves as a reminder that there are opportunities for alternative possibilities, even whilst recognising that current structures ultimately serve to maintain the status quo and obstruct the potential for a future reconstruction of education based on more egalitarian principles.

The next chapter focuses on the curriculum to examine the discourses surrounding government policy in this area and the claims that it will reduce inequalities.

Chapter 5: The Curriculum: Discourses of breadth, balance and a knowledge-rich curriculum.

5.1 Introduction

> *How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and principles of social control (Bernstein 1977, p.85)*

This chapter, like the previous one, draws upon Koopman's (2013) key concepts of genealogy – critique, contingency and complexity – with consideration of the questions posed by Rabinow (1999) and Pillow (2015) outlined in Chapter 3. Current policy in this area is problematized through analysis of the two main data sets – literature and documentation and the data gathered from interviews with women, whose perspectives are integrated within this chapter.

The school curriculum is the key object of analysis for this chapter with the inter-related discourses of 1) a curriculum for breadth and balance and 2) a knowledge-rich curriculum, subject to problematization. Discourse around the curriculum and the recent shift towards a knowledge-based curriculum is complex and contentious with a variety of supporting and opposing perspectives related to this. Like the previous chapter, and as per a genealogical approach, the purpose here is to offer a higher-level critique to expose and problematize the underlying assumptions and mechanisms that underpin this area of education policy, considering the strategies those in power employ to legitimise such policy.

My overall argument for this chapter is that the current curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, and does not, as claimed by policy makers, lead to a reduction of inequality and 'levelling up'. This will be addressed through framing the argument around a number of substantive points. I will argue that the school curriculum is not neutral or based on 'truths' and cannot be simply defined – rather the curriculum that is our 'historical present' is contingent on the power struggles over recent decades with foundations that are ideological as opposed to pedagogical. Following this I will argue that the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum, touted by current policy makers, requires problematizing – it is neither broad nor balanced and instead has become narrow and restrictive for many pupils. This will involve critiquing the government's shift towards a knowledge-rich curriculum and questioning the very notion of what is meant by knowledge. I will then argue that this narrowing of the curriculum and focus on knowledge, has been accompanied by changes in how the curriculum is taught, with a shift from more pupil-centred, progressive pedagogies towards direct instruction. I argue that taken together these shifts in curriculum policy have increased inequalities in education rather than reduced them and hence do not support the social justice agenda, as policy makers claim. Finally, in relation to this study's focus on women's voices, I argue that inequalities for girls continue, and are exacerbated by the content of the curriculum and perpetuated by stereotypical assumptions related to gender, which further compound inequalities. In terms of the four time periods of this study, the main analysis for this chapter is situated in the second and last time periods (1979-1997 and 2010 onwards) because these periods were characterised with significant policy shifts related to the curriculum in schools.

It is worth acknowledging here that whilst I am arguing in this chapter that current policy is ideological this is a problematic concept for a Foucauldian genealogy approach, focussing on discourses. As examined in section 2.2.7, Foucault was troubled by the notion of ideology and how it might imply the existence of a universal rationality and truth. Gale (1999, p.397) argues that 'discourses produce texts as well as interpreting them and they appeal to ideologies whilst also being informed by them', whilst Ball (1994, p15) suggests that ideology, discourse and text are 'implicit in each other'. Hence, whilst referring to ideological based policy it is important to recognise this relationship with discourse.

In summary, this chapter will problematize areas of education policy, in relation to the curriculum, using Koopman's key genealogical concepts of criticality, contingency and complexity. As such, my analysis will foreground the limits imposed by the current curriculum settlement. And, rather than perceiving current education policy as 'necessary', it will be critiqued to consider how it has been shaped by power, influence and interest over time – which discourses were dominant and which were excluded or marginalised, resulting in our historical present. Like in the previous chapter the metaphor of the cliff face (section

4.1) is utilised here to illustrate points of disruption where *cracks*, *fissures* and *erosions* have interrupted dominant discourse on curriculum, demonstrating both contingency and complexity.

5.2 The battle for the curriculum: power, ideology and pedagogy

The key argument of this section is that the school curriculum is neither neutral nor based on 'truths' and as such it cannot be simply defined or explained on the basis of what constitutes 'key' or 'essential' knowledge. Rather, the curriculum that is our 'historical present' is contingent on the power struggles in education that have taken place in recent decades, that have ultimately shaped the curriculum – in particular, tracing back to the 1988 Education Reform Act we can see how the government seized power from teachers and educators to determine the curriculum and assessment themselves (examined in section 5.2.2). The curriculum therefore has foundations that are ideological as opposed to purely pedagogical (though it is acknowledged that pedagogy is not a neutral concept either), and, as such, the motivations behind such ideologies need to be exposed, as per a genealogical approach**.** Before looking at this I will give a brief overview of current policy on the curriculum for context before considering how this is contingent.

Recent policy (2010 onwards) has sought to conflate a number of concepts to demonstrate commitment to reducing inequalities, as demonstrated in the recent White Paper that stated,

> From early years onwards, all children will be taught a broad, ambitious, knowledge rich curriculum and have access to high-quality extra-curricular provision. (DfE 2022a, p.24)

Here we can see the reference to a broad curriculum that is generally referred to as 'broad and balanced' – a notion that can be traced back decades, and in particular to the 1988 Education Reform Act which indicated that state schools must satisfy the requirements for 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum' (GOV.UK 1988). However, the reference to a knowledge rich curriculum reflects a *fissure* from previous policy. Since 2010, successive Conservative governments have been preoccupied with schools developing a knowledge-rich (or knowledge-based) traditional curriculum, indicating this is essential for the development of cultural capital and so-called social mobility, clearly demonstrating their ideological position in the polarised debate between traditionalists and progressives – also referred to as the knowledge versus skills debate (examined below). In this endeavour, policy makers (for example, Gove 2009, Gibb 2017) have overtly drawn on the work of E. D. Hirsch (1988) from the United States, who advocated a knowledge-based curriculum with a focus on ‘cultural literacy’, arguing that working class pupils were being disadvantaged by a reduced curriculum, and it was an issue of social justice that this be rectified. In addition, the concept of ‘powerful knowledge’ (Young and Lambert 2014, p.65), which refers to the importance of pupils learning knowledge they might not encounter outside of school, has also been co-opted by the government to support their claim for social justice, though Young (2022, p.1) has regarded this as a conflation of his work with ‘Gove’s traditionalist view of knowledge and the elitist curriculum based on that of the public school’. This stance on ‘knowledge-rich’ appealed to English policy makers who were seeking to shift away from what they considered to be ‘progressive’ practice in schools and could co-opt the use of the *social justice* argument, normally associated with progressives. Reay (2017, p.76) challenges this policy discourse arguing that ‘working class knowledge’ – and we could add to this other excluded knowledge such as non-white, non-heterosexual to name but a few – continues to be excluded in the curriculum and this exacerbates inequalities – the cultural capital and cultural literacy that current policy makers refer to amounts to a rejection of the value of working-class experiences and skills, and their identity and this is a barrier in addressing inequality. An example of this is that there is no requirement within the history curriculum that covers this period, to teach about the ‘enduring influence’ of the massacre at Peterloo in 1819, in which at least 11 were killed and hundreds injured, whilst protesting for parliamentary reform (Thompson, 2013, p.779). This resonates with arguments that Donald (1992, p.154-155) has put forward which suggest that whilst the accumulation of cultural capital might support mobility it is also ‘perfectly compatible with the production and maintenance of unequal social relations’ – whilst some pupils will be familiar with the cultural capital current policy makers are promoting, others will experience it as an ‘external imposition’. In a similar vein, the reference in the above quote, to extra-curricular provision (discussed in section 5.3 below) is aimed at demonstrating the government’s apparent commitment to ‘levelling up’ in society. In general government discourse on the curriculum – and the language and terms associated with it – has been subsequently reinforced in schools, the media and wider society, ensuring it has become embedded and part of a normalised discourse around the curriculum. As Schiro (2013, p.9) suggests,

> particular groups replicate their ideologies by educating (socializing, indoctrinating, acculturating) people to their beliefs by subtly attempting to “orient people’s thinking in such a way that they accept” the ideology’s view of the way things should be done, the ideology’s sense of what is natural, and the ideology’s position on roles in society.

Thus, the government has attempted to legitimise centralising policy and their control of the curriculum, claiming this is necessary to reduce inequalities – whilst avoiding undertaking any real reforms, like removing structural and economic inequalities, that might threaten the status quo. As such the curriculum has become a tool of the government subject to and the expression of its ideology, and cannot be seen as neutral. Instead we see the complexity inherent in understanding the curriculum that is examined in the next section.

5.2.1 The curriculum – some *not so neutral* key concepts

This section outlines some key concepts commonly related to the curriculum to provide context for subsequent sections, whilst also demonstrating that such seemingly neutral concepts are in fact laden with assumptions and interpretations that are a product of the ideological inclinations of policy makers, and as such are not neutral at all, but are complex.

The curriculum might be considered in a very simplistic way as *what is taught* – knowledge and skills – and in the case of schools in England this might be the stated programme of study related to different subject areas that reflect the National Curriculum (the statutory curriculum set out by the government) or subject based examination syllabi. Kelly (2009) suggests such a definition is very limiting, and the curriculum is far more complex than this – rather than the curriculum being a collection of different subjects there is a need to consider a *total curriculum,* one that provides a justification of the purposes of those subjects and the intended knowledge to be taught, and the effect this knowledge is likely to have on the recipients of it.

Then there is the *hidden curriculum* to consider, the things pupils learn that are not necessarily planned for or intended, which Kelly (2009, p.10) suggests relate to attitudes and values and which are often communicated to pupils in an ‘accidental’ or ‘sinister’ way. Whilst some things like promoting teamwork in the classroom might be done with a degree of consciousness, and hence perhaps only ‘hidden’ to the pupils who do not see the planning behind such activities, there are other forms of learning that might be transmitted to pupils that impose particular values and beliefs on them, such as beliefs about gender roles or the imperative to conform and comply with authority. This includes the use of language and inherent messages, for example, the use of terms by teachers like ‘strong lads’ and ‘ladylike behaviour’ were identified in the GenderWatch programme I was involved with in the late 1980s (outlined in Chapter 4) and such gendered language has still not disappeared, evident in classrooms and wider society – as Beard (2018, p.20) states, there is a historic tradition of gendered speaking ‘to which we are still directly, or more often indirectly, the heirs’. The hidden curriculum also refers to the choice of subject content and resources used in the classroom that often, inadvertently or not, focuses on white men to the exclusion of women or people from other races and cultures, transmitting messages to pupils about who is worth studying and who is not (discussed further in section 5.4). As such the hidden curriculum is far from neutral and Kelly (2009, p.11) suggests that teachers need to be responsible for these ‘implicit forms of learning’ and need to ‘recognise and identify the hidden implications of some of the materials and the experiences they offer their pupils’.

This also relates to the distinction between the *planned* and *received* curriculum, the recognition that experiences pupils receive are not simply those which were planned and intended – as such the curriculum can be considered as complex. In addition, a distinction can also be drawn between the *formal* curriculum (timetabled activities of the school) and the *informal* curriculum – those voluntary activities that occur at lunchtimes or out of school hours and are often termed as *extra-curricular*. These might include sports, clubs and societies and whilst these might appear to be benign are anything but, as evidenced by, for example, the focus on debating societies in public schools like Eton and within Oxbridge – intended to hone the skills of future politicians and policy makers equipping them with what Joyce (2013) refers to as technologies or tools of power – in this case the tools of oracy and rhetoric. It is important to note here that such debating societies have been the domain of males to the exclusion of females, reflecting an ancient tradition and belief that ‘to become a man (or at least an elite man) was to claim the right to speak’ (Beard, 2018, p.21), so ensuring the continuation of the patriarchy. As discussed in section 5.3. below, the range of extra-curricular activities differ greatly between schools with some pupils having access to far greater opportunities than others, perpetuating further inequalities in society. Thus, these common concepts to describe and explain the curriculum cannot be seen in simplistic terms – the curriculum, in all its forms, is not neutral but rather is loaded with meanings, assumptions and interpretations that requires critique and problematization.

A key consideration here is *who* determines the curriculum. Whilst it might be considered this is the role of education experts this has increasingly become centralised to be the domain of government policy makers, as outlined in section 5.2. As Counsell (2018, p.1) states 'curriculum is about power' and it is this notion that needs examining, to consider who has decided what does and what does not get included in the curriculum and the reasons behind this. In turn, this relates to what actually constitutes as knowledge in different subject areas, for example, within the subject of English which works of literature are focussed on and why are these considered more relevant than other canons of work. Schiro (2013) also queries what knowledge consists of – understandings, skills, meanings, or values – and we might also ask *whose* knowledge, who has the power to decide what does and does not count as knowledge. The knowledge versus skills debate is deeply polarised and has become a political tug of war between 'traditionalists' who favour a knowledge-based curriculum and 'progressives' who favour a more pupil centred, experiential approach to learning that has a key focus on developing skills – with both relating to different perspectives on the purpose of education.

5.2.2 Tensions in curriculum design

As indicated above, the debate about whether the curriculum should be knowledge based or skills based is deeply polarised and, following Schiro (2013) and others, I argue that this polarisation is primarily ideological. I also argue that for a meaningful curriculum and educational experience to be provided for children and young people, such ideological foundations must be recognised, challenged and dismantled. These tensions and debates are at the heart of curriculum theory which will now be considered drawing in particular on the works of Pinar (2004) and Schiro (2013).

Pinar (2004, p.2) describes curriculum theory as 'the interdisciplinary study of educational experience', but he suggests that whilst education may have been 'colonized' by disciplines such as psychology or sociology, curriculum theory is a 'distinctive field of study, with a unique history, a complex present, an uncertain future'. This idea compliments a genealogical approach to examining the curriculum – considering how our historical present has come to be and conditional possibilities. Like Kelly (2009), Pinar (2004, p.16) argues that the curriculum is more than courses of academic study in which competency can be measured, and rather has value for society and the 'self', enabling pupils to 'understand their own self-formation within society and the world' – indeed, the real aspiration for education should be the cultivation of 'original thought' (p. 20). However, this aspiration is unlikely to be achieved in contexts, like England, where policy makers have created a culture of performativity which Pinar (2004) argues has led to a curriculum driven by examinations and assessments. Control has been removed from the very people, teachers and educators, who are best qualified in the field – resulting in the curriculum becoming a political football for policy makers to 'tackle' in order to improve the standards in school, that their own instruments of measurement have found lacking.

Tracing back to the 1988 Education Reform Act we can see how the power to determine the curriculum and assessment was seized by the government, removing power and control from teachers who, since 1944, had experienced what Lawton (1980, p.22) described as 'the Golden Age of teacher control (or non-control) of the curriculum'. Whilst in the early 1960s there had been shifts suggesting the government's intention to become involved in the curriculum – particularly with the setting up of the Curriculum Study Group in 1962 which was done without consultation with schools (Chitty 2014) – it was the 1988 Reform Act that really empowered the Secretary of State for Education to prescribe the curriculum for state schools and 'created greater central control over educational content, changing quite dramatically teachers' ways of working and their professional discretion' (Garratt and Forrester 2012, p.77). Since this time there has been a centralisation of curriculum policy, representing a significant *fracture* from previous policy, and evidenced by the introduction of a National Curriculum and a national system of pupil assessment and testing and the formation of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) to advise the Secretary of State. Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.95) argue that the introduction of the National Curriculum was ideologically driven, reflecting 'Thatcherite' New Right ideology and was intended to draw power away from teachers and local authorities and also produce 'national citizens of particular kinds, ones looking more to the glories of the past than the future'. Whilst the first iteration of the National Curriculum – heavy with content and focused on lauding past 'achievements' – was subsequently revised to reduce content, it remained focussed on traditional subject areas with associated strategies to develop literacy and numeracy, and thus we see how the most recent version is contingent. Furthermore in 1992 the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) came into being to monitor and inspect school activity, ensuring adherence to the government-imposed curriculum and associated assessment and examination system – hence emerged the twin power tools of policy makers, the power to determine the curriculum and the power to ensure it is implemented and evaluated in accordance with their expectations. Pinar (2004) argues this has ultimately led schools to become ‘skill-and-knowledge’ factories with the status of teachers reduced to ‘supervisory personnel’. This view was reflected in the interview with Anna who suggested teachers have become less educators and more technocrats.

> *Well, I followed at the beginning the reform of the curriculum and qualifications in the early Gove period and followed all those debates. And felt that basically the curriculum following on from the 1988 reforms, you know the national curriculum, it’s just too much, too much has been piled in and teachers have become less and less educators and more and more technocrats. They are required to deliver rather than to educate, that’s my overall feeling. (Anna)*

Whilst policy in England currently valorises a knowledge-based curriculum at the expense of skills, Pinar’s point about teachers being reduced to supervisors is very pertinent. An example that can be used to illuminate this, and also to expose how policy makers operate to legitimate ideological policy, is the formation of the Oak National Academy. This was set up by the government during the COVID pandemic (April 2020) to support schools with online lessons and curriculum resources in the light of school closures. Whilst such online resources may have been useful during the pandemic (though only for those who had access to technology as outlined in Chapter 4) they cannot be seen as a substitute for high quality teaching, as Pinar (2004, p.8) indicates, ‘curriculum theorists have long appreciated, the exchange and acquisition of information is not education’. However, citing the positive contribution Oak National Academy made during the pandemic, the government have set them up as an independent public body sponsored by the Department for Education, with £43 million in government funding set aside to continue their work (Booth 2022). This policy initiative represents a significant departure from previous policy with arguably an underlying agenda, and this requires critique. The recent White Paper states this National Academy will be,

> A new arms-length curriculum body that works with teachers across the country to co-create free, optional, adaptable digital curriculum

> resources, supporting schools to deliver rigorous, high-quality curricula (DfE 2022a, p.24)

Alternative discourse relates not only to concerns about the level of funding allocated, that teaching unions and professional bodies suggest might be better used if redistributed to schools (Pisanu 2022), but also to issues around professional autonomy and status. Whilst teachers may have been told *what* to teach in the past, particularly since the 1988 Reform Act, they have had relative autonomy regarding *how* to teach, developing their own schemes of work, lesson plans and resources. Government discourse focusses on the support this National Academy gives to the teaching profession claiming it reduces workload, ensuring teachers have 'high quality' resources to use, so responding to the recruitment and retention crisis.

This same discourse is reflected by some Multi-Academy Trusts that insist their teachers follow imposed lesson plans and resources in the name of reducing workload and improving standards – likely to be the result of the need to compete in national league tables, thus supporting Pinar's view (2004) that assessment and performativity are controlling the curriculum and the delivery of it, whilst also reflecting what Reay (2022, p.126) regards as a 'slide into authoritarianism'. The continued reference to reducing workload, 'commitment' to developing quality resources to support teachers and raising standards has become a mantra inherent in the discourse on curriculum policy and might be seen as a discursive strategy to mask the ideological motivations of such policy, to marginalise the intellectual endeavours of teachers and reduce their professional status to facilitators or supervisors. Ball (2008, p.112) suggests this practice represents a 'shift towards a collection curriculum, defined by tight boundaries, the authoritative specification of contents and of the sequencing and pacing of knowledge' whilst Pinar (2004, p.3-4) suggests teachers are so 'submerged in present circumstances', including multitudinous demands and increased accountability, they have been forced to abdicate their 'professional authority and ethical responsibility for the curriculum they teach'. Pinar goes on to argue that teachers should renew their 'commitment to the intellectual character of our professional labour' (2004, p.9) and contest pervasive 'anti-intellectualism' if they are to avoid being reduced to technicians. This resistance is so that,

> Schools will no longer be knowledge-and-skill factories, not academic businesses but schools: sites of education for creativity, erudition, and interdisciplinary intellectuality (Pinar 2004, p.11)

Whilst Pinar focusses on the knowledge and skills dichotomy within the curriculum and the associated status of educational professionals, Schiro (2013) has developed a quadrant model which includes four curriculum 'ideologies', revealing further complexities of the curriculum. This provides a useful and more nuanced tool to further consider the different perspectives of knowledge and the curriculum, reflecting the motivations of those aligned with each quadrant and how these relate to beliefs about the purposes of education, as outlined below.

Scholar Academic Ideology	**Learner Centred Ideology**
Learning should be based on a knowledge-rich curriculum around disciplines. The purpose of education is to develop the traditions and epistemic knowledge of these disciplines.	Learning should be experiential and based on interactions between the individuals and society. The purpose of education is the development and growth of the individual enabling them to develop intellectual, social, emotional and physical capabilities
Social Efficiency Ideology	**Social Reconstruction Ideology**
Learning should be based on how efficiently a task can be accomplished (example, practice and mastery), rather than which task they accomplish. The purpose of education is to ensure members of society efficiently meet the needs of society.	Learning should be a social process where individuals are taught to understand society to develop a consciousness about problems, injustices and inequalities. The purpose of education is to reconstruct society more equitably.

Figure 6 - Four curriculum ideologies based on my interpretation of Shiro's work (2013)

Each of the four curriculum ideologies reflect a 'vision' for the curriculum and as Schiro (2013, p.2) suggests each includes,

> distinct beliefs about the type of knowledge that should be taught in schools, the inherent nature of children, what school learning consists of, how teachers should instruct children, and how children should be assessed

As such, it is possible to use Schiro's quadrant as a lens to further examine the visions and ideologies of English policy makers and educators who are polarised between two competing ideologies, as traditionalists favouring a knowledge-based curriculum or progressives favouring a skills based, child-centred curriculum. The Scholar Academic and Learner Centred ideologies, referring to the *sources* of knowledge, can be seen to broadly represent the opposing ideologies of the government who favour the former, a knowledge based, traditional curriculum, and others involved in the field of education (example, Reay 2017) who favour the latter, a more progressive, child-centred model. Similarly, the Social Efficiency and Social Construction ideologies refer to the *uses* of knowledge which again can be crudely aligned to the opposing ideological camps in England. The teaching strategies associated with the Social Efficiency ideology, particularly practice and mastery, correlate with the government's commitment to direct instruction[20] whilst the Social Construction ideology aligns with those considered progressive (further discussed in section 5.3.1).

Schiro (2013) suggests the benefit of 'plotting' where policy makers and educators sit within the quadrant is that it enables us to better understand those with different ideological beliefs and might support more effective and constructive communication and negotiation around the formation of the curriculum. However, this assumes that the proverbial doors are open for such communication and negotiation and in England this is not the case – as indicated above, since the 1988 Education Reform Act the power to determine the curriculum has been firmly located with the government policy makers rather than education professionals, and the implications of such concentrated power have become more acute since 2010 (Reay 2017, 2022).

Whilst government policy makers claim they draw upon expertise from the education sector, with the employment of 'think tanks', focus groups and independent review bodies, this is contested, with Bousted (2022, p.66) arguing there is 'only the most perfunctory "consultation" with stakeholders' and that the government has 'with almost complete impunity' ignored perspectives that are not aligned with 'pre-established ministerial viewpoints and direction of travel'. Thus, these review bodies have generally been made up of people who support the government ideology and whilst they might include a 'token' representative from the sector, who might be seen to challenge government discourse, this is arguably only to give credibility to the 'rigor' of the review; the inclusion of a lone dissenting voice has not been seen to change ultimate outcomes. This does, however, serve to enable policy makers to legitimise outcomes and subsequent policy, claiming it is based on *independent*, *rigorous enquiry* and *evidence* – terms used to convince potential opponents that their policy is the best way forward. As Schiro (2013, p.9) suggests, 'the ideologies of particular groups carry cultural impulses to dominate rival ideologies and control aspects of their culture' – thus, the existence of these independent 'bodies' represent a technology of power – a tool or strategy used by those in power to justify and legitimate ideological policy-making, ensuring there is no real disruption to the status quo.

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[20] Direct instruction was developed in the USA in the 1960s and involves teaching by explicit instructions as opposed to discovery or inquiry-based learning that is more child-centred – in many cases the lesson is fully scripted with teachers given explicit instructions and materials (Abrams 2017)

This section has sought to demonstrate that the concept of curriculum is neither neutral nor based on 'truths', rather it has been shaped by the government and based on the ideological perspectives of policy makers rather than educational professionals. The next section aims to expand this discussion, offering a problematization of the claim that the curriculum is broad and balanced.

5.3 A neither broad nor balanced curriculum

In this section I will argue that the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum, claimed by current policy makers is a falsehood and not evident in practice for *all* pupils – the curriculum is neither broad nor balanced and instead has become narrow and restrictive for many pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Associated with this I will argue that the shift, over the last ten years, towards a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum and the preferred pedagogic approach of *direct instruction* (defined in section 5.2.2) has increased inequalities, undermining the government claim that they are committed to social justice and a reduction of inequality. On the contrary, government policy can be seen to adopt discursive strategies aimed at convincing the public of their apparent commitment to address disadvantage through such a curriculum whilst obscuring the fact that they are not tackling the structural change necessary to ensure this – it is these strategies that need to be exposed and critiqued as per Koopman's (2013) approach to genealogy that underpins this study.

An example of this is the persistent repetition and reinforcement of key language – words and phrases – like the term ‘disadvantage’, that is peppered throughout rhetoric and inherent in the last three White Papers (DfE 2010, DfE2016, DfE 2022a). Continual reference to this reveals a rhetorical strategy that deems to suggest tackling disadvantage is a primary focus of the government, implanting in the public consciousness that they are prioritising this, whilst simultaneously quashing any opposing voices with allegations they are the ‘enemies of promise’ (Gove, 2013a) As such, the government present themselves as bastions of change and improvement whilst masking that such disadvantage is the result of deliberate policy decisions over years and decades, demonstrating the limits that are imposed on thought through the persistence of particular discourses.

It is necessary to unpack what is meant by a *broad and balanced* curriculum in order to argue that disadvantaged pupils are not experiencing this, and to identify how the government discourse around it can be contested. Since 2010 there have been significant reforms to the national curriculum (including assessment at primary level) and radical reform of England’s GCSE’s (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and A levels (Advanced level) qualifications, resulting in pupils at all stages of their education being subject to changes in the curriculum and the assessment of it. The changes to GCSEs reduced or removed continual assessment and use of coursework in favour of examinations at the end of the two-year GCSE programme – resulting in a one size fits all model, benefitting those pupils who perform well in examinations and privileging the ranking and categorising of pupils over and above considerations about learning. This focus on exams is also driven by a view that only controlled examinations are a reliable form of assessment, ignoring the myriad issues surrounding them, and also suggestive of a lack of trust in teacher assessment, further revealing an ideological motivation to erode the status of the profession. As Pinar (2004) suggests, the curriculum cannot be divorced from assessment in a context where the policy makers have created a culture of performativity in the form of national league tables and other accountability measures, like Ofsted. This was clearly the goal of the DfE as stated below,

> The 2014 National Curriculum raised expectations of what all children should be taught, and we reformed GCSEs and A levels to put them on a par with qualifications in the best-performing countries in the world. Ofsted’s new inspection framework has driven leaders and

> teachers to focus on the intent, implementation and impact of their curriculum, promoting a broad, balanced approach (DfE 2022a, p.25)

In her interview, Beatrice provided an alternative viewpoint suggesting that, contrary to promoting a broad and balanced approach, the current system of assessment is based on what is measurable and reflects a narrow perspective on learning.

> *And for me I don't think as a nation what we really, what I feel we've always struggled with in Britain is having that really important conversation about what do we want to educate our children for? And it's all become very, very narrowed into the delivery of a schooling model, it's linked to a process of standardised assessment which has become very constraining. Because what we've gone for is a system of assessment which is about what it's easy to measure rather than what is actually adding value to people's lives. (Beatrice)*

The government has justified these changes claiming they have been *necessary* in order to ensure all children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and are able to meet the needs of society, stating that,

> We have sunk in international league tables and the national curriculum is substandard. Meanwhile the pace of economic and technological change is accelerating and our children are being left behind. The previous curriculum failed to prepare us for the future. We must change course. Our review will examine the best school systems in the world and give us a world-class curriculum that will help teachers, parents and children know what children should learn at what age (Gove, 2011)

This provides another example of how current policy makers employ particular language and rhetoric within discourse as 'policy devices' or 'technologies' in order to meet their ideological goals (Ball 2008, p.17) – in this case citing the 'substandard' curriculum to manufacture a national crisis in education, suggesting that our children will be 'left behind' if urgent action is not taken, thus requiring immediate reform of the curriculum and a shift in policy that they can justify and legitimise by this supposed crisis. As Clarke (2019, p.1-2) argues, such crisis discourse is common for policymakers seeking 'radical change' and it 'privileges certain diagnoses, whilst foreclosing others, and promotes preferred solutions that "fit" the chosen diagnoses'.

The National Curriculum (DfE 2014, p.2) suggests that 'all state funded schools must offer a curriculum that is balanced and broadly based' and,

> promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The above statement suggests that *broad and balance* refers to a number of dimensions and the most recent White Paper (DfE 2022a, p.25) offers more exemplification stating that 'the cornerstones of a broad, academic, knowledge-rich curriculum are literacy and numeracy'.

Thus, we have a further reference to *knowledge-rich* that has been in the government discourse since the post 2010 curriculum reforms began. Bousted (2022) argues all these reforms have been driven by the government agenda to shift towards a knowledge-based curriculum, underpinned by the concept of 'powerful knowledge' and justified by the need for all children to have a broad and balanced curriculum. The discourse around a knowledge-rich curriculum (analysed in more depth in section 5.3.1) is inherent within the claim of a broad and balanced curriculum and agenda for social justice, and as outlined in section 5.2 adheres to principles advocated by Hirsch (1988), which Grace suggested in her interview have had both a powerful and damaging influence on curriculum policy in England.

> *So, I think that the curriculum that was brought in in 2014 is highly inappropriate for the needs of the nation and has not achieved its objectives in closing the attainment gap between poor and rich children. I think the influence of Young and Hirsch has been very powerful but has also been very damaging. (Grace)*

Further exemplification of what the government means by broad and balanced came with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) with the government claiming it would 'encourage schools to offer a broad set of academic subjects to age 16' (DfE 2010, p.11).

English Baccalaureate subjects	
• English Language • English Literature • Mathematics	• Sciences - either combined science (2 GCSE's covering biology, chemistry, physics) OR 3 single sciences • Geography OR History • A language (ancient or modern)

Figure 7 - Subjects included in the English Baccalaureate (GOV.UK 2019)

The government intend that 90% of pupils undertake the EBacc by 2025 and thus could be doing 8 GCSE's in what are considered traditional subject areas as indicated in Figure 7. In her interview Charlotte challenged this 'suite' of subjects suggesting these do not make sense.

> *I think for example the EBacc as a cherry-picked suite of subjects makes no sense. What's in there, and what isn't in there? It just seems to be a little bit random. The place of RE for example, why isn't that there, it's a humanities subject? Why are certain subjects privileged over others given the way that subjects have developed over time that doesn't make sense. So, I have an issue with that. (Charlotte)*

Whilst the government claim they are not *forcing* this on schools and it is only an *encouragement*, the simultaneous shift of accountability measures to include pupil attainment in the EBacc represents a strong indirect pressure on schools, where it is high risk for schools not to achieve well in national league tables. This has resulted in the development of 'core' traditional subjects being prioritised over creative and vocational subjects – developing a hierarchy of subjects where some subject areas and the knowledge gained from them is seen as more important or less important than others – which undermines the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum and reveals complexities masked by policy rhetoric. This was something that Elizabeth raised in her interview, indicating concerns around the arts being 'squeezed out' of the curriculum.

> *So, I don't actually believe that Nick Gibb and Michael Gove whoever we have got now, Gavin Williamson or whatever he is called, I don't believe they don't care about the arts, but their actions have led to the arts being squeezed out of the curriculum. And I am very unsupportive, I am very critical of that. (Elizabeth)*

In a study of secondary school teachers by Neumann et al (2020, p.707), 75% of teachers reported that the EBacc had led to a narrowing of the curriculum with many 'creative' and vocational subjects being removed from the curriculum in their schools – creative subjects[21] include areas like Art and Design, Design and Technology, Drama, Music and Media Studies whilst vocational subjects include Applied Science, Child Development, Food Technology, Health and Social Care, Construction and Engineering. Government discourse claims that pupils who want to follow vocational routes can attend the University Technical Colleges (UTCs) introduced in 2010 under the Free Schools initiative. These are neither a university or technical college but rather a type of specialist secondary school funded directly by the Department for Education, which pupils can transfer to at 14 years old to follow programmes of study that combines the National Curriculum with technical and vocational elements. Noble (2023) outlined that whilst more than 50 UTCs have opened since they were launched in 2010, many of the colleges have faced financial difficulties and struggled to attract pupils, resulting in 13 of them closing. In a report for the Education Policy Institute, Robinson (2018) found that the outcomes of pupils in UTCs were poorer than in other state funded schools and the drop-out rate of pupils at 16 years old was significant. For pupils to have to make such a choice at the age of 14 years can be seen as both selective and divisive and reflects a historical divide that Garratt and Forrester (2012, p.89-90) refer to as the 'separation of "mental" and "manual" labour as a means to justify a similar partition of academic and vocational education and training' and thus we can see how current policy is contingent. Furthermore, Reay (2017, p.65) has argued that despite the rhetoric about higher status vocational routes, these policies have always been aimed at lower achieving pupils – in particular it is the disadvantaged pupils often guided towards these routes as more affluent families favour academic routes for their children. As such the social divide associated with academic and vocational routes is perpetuated and inequalities are further embedded.

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[21] The tension around the term 'creative' subjects is noted here, as it might imply other subject areas are not creative. That is not the intention and the use of term here reflects the common grouping of particular subjects.

> *Well, I interviewed an English secondary school teacher in, it must have been 2019 now before this, the pandemic started, in sort of December 2019. And she said that the bottom three sets never encountered a novel, they didn't do any fiction, any poetry, any plays, they just did basic literacy, the English curriculum at secondary level. (Darlene)*

As per a genealogical approach, it is important to consider how our *historical present* is contingent – to consider the continuities and discontinuities in education policy on the curriculum over time, the *cracks* and *fissures*, to determine how and why current policy is what it is – and why it is not something else. In terms of inequalities in curriculum 'offer' this is something that has continued over time and can be traced back to the beginnings of state involvement in education when the 1870 Education Act sought to introduce elementary education for all. As Reay (2017, p.29-30) indicates,

> Right from the beginning the class system dictated the nature and remit of schools …..state supported schools …became the schools for the working classes, with a sharply different curriculum to those schools that served the middle and upper classes

These differences relate to power and the use of education as a tool to maintain social class divisions, reflecting Bernstein's (1977, p.85) quote at the start of the chapter.

Thus, in the 19th and early 20th century there was a great distinction between the curriculum and knowledge offered to the rich and that which was given to the poor, and this reflected both the distribution of power in society and the perceived need to control the masses (as discussed in Chapter 4). Joyce (2013) outlines how the 'classics' – a curriculum based on the classical (particularly Greek and Latin) languages and literatures – were at the centre of the curriculum for those (boys) in public schools from the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries, considered essential in 'shaping those who would govern others' (p.242). A focus on the classics was considered integral to the education of the elites, involving the training of *habit* and *discipline,* developing *character* that would be essential for leadership – thus 'classical language and thought became in effect a private language binding them together and serving as template for their own society' (Joyce 2013, p.247). In contrast, the curriculum for poorer children involved learning to read and write and do basic arithmetic (the 3 Rs) in addition to 'religious' instruction – the former considered necessary for the labour market and the latter for social control (discussed in Chapter 4), ensuring that the education of the working class posed no threat to the 'social order'. As Patrick Colquhoun, a London Magistrate indicated in 1806 as the education of the poor was being discussed,

> The prosperity of every state depends on the good habits, and the religious and moral instruction of the labouring people……it is not, however, proposed …… that the children of the poor should be educated in a manner to elevate their minds above the rank they are destined to fill in society, or that an expense should be incurred beyond the lowest rate ever paid for instruction. Utopian schemes for an extensive diffusion of knowledge would be injurious and absurd (cited in Donald 1992, p.21)

Thus, the 'diffusion' of knowledge for the poor was very limited and considered unnecessary for the roles they would occupy in the workplace. This breadth of the curriculum for the working class did improve to some extent in post war England when secondary education became free and compulsory (Garratt and Forrester 2012). However, inequalities continued in the tripartite system, as outlined in Chapter 4, which saw the continuation of different 'types' of curriculum with grammar schools providing an 'academic' curriculum to prepare for university – supporting the middle class – whilst secondary moderns, populated by the working class, offered a 'narrow curriculum' which was often compromised by staff shortages (Reay 2017, p.38). These limitations were indicated in a debate in the House of Commons in 1956, which not only suggested the curriculum as being limited to the three Rs (harking back to focus of late 19th century education for the poor) but also alluded to the expectations that were had of pupils in secondary moderns, that they would not progress beyond the confines of their 'own' environments – exposing the dominant discourse of those in power that their position in society would not be undermined by 'masses' being educated.

> Secondary modern schools, like all schools, are social institutions as well as places of instruction. Literacy and mastery of the "three Rs" must be accompanied by a respect for hard work, self-discipline and good manners. They are concerned as well to give to the duller children a sense of competence and achievement, to the average all-round development of their brains and bodies, to the brightest a challenge to stretch themselves……..the education is, rightly, related to the conditions in which many of the children live, with which most of them will be familiar, and in which many of them will expect to work when they grow up. While it is important for them to see subjects in their widest setting, it is not unreasonable to expect children to take a great interest in subjects connected with what they are likely to do after leaving school (Vosper 1956)

Whilst the shift towards comprehensive education sought to address these inequalities, differences in resources and opportunities ensured that some pupils were more disadvantaged than others, leading to a current context that is contingent on such a historical tradition of inequality and difference. The current policy rhetoric may *claim* that the curriculum will support levelling up but the *enactment* of the policy suggests it will not, as demonstrated by the marginalisation of vocational subjects – raised by Fran in her interview – and subjects that are not included in the EBacc.

> *Yes, so I mean, you know, I think more broadly obviously I think it doesn't include enough focus on the individual, on personal social development and so on. And I think the whole sort of vocational curriculum is an absolute joke, you know, and it has been for years. It's not prioritised, and they are lower status qualifications, so it doesn't seem to me that 14-19 have got a suitable way of offering anything that isn't basically an academic offer. (Fran)*

Hence, to cut creative and vocational subjects out of the curriculum in favour of traditional subjects (and alternative schools for vocational subjects) might be considered the antithesis of developing a broad and balanced curriculum that the government claims it is achieving. It is noted that Ofsted (2023) have acknowledged that 'concerns about the amount of curriculum time given to art, craft and design are not unwarranted'. Though the government claim that the EBacc and National Curriculum form only part of the school curriculum and schools can (and indeed should) include much more than this, in reality not all schools have the resources to offer more. In addition, the pressure of competing in the league tables (imposed by the government) results in schools giving the bulk of time and resources to the subjects that they will be measured on, reflecting what Neumann et al (2020, p.708) report as ‘a redistribution of resources along the lines of a stronger hierarchy of subjects’, resulting from the curriculum reforms. Furthermore, pupils might be withdrawn from ‘non-core’ subjects in order to catch up in ‘core’ subjects, further narrowing their learning opportunities.

The government discourse around the notion of breadth and balance can be seen to disguise the reality of a narrow and exclusionary curriculum, representing what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) refer to as the *logic of difference*[22]*.* Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue that discursive space can be organised in one of two ways within the framework of political logics: a *logic of equivalence* in which discourse is around two opposing antagonistic entities or the *logic of difference* that seeks to prevent such antagonisms, instead calling for consensus towards a common *vision*. By continually referring to a commitment to breadth and balance for *all* children and relating this to the imperative of social justice, the policy makers attempt to commandeer a discursive space generally occupied by progressives, thus legitimating their policy, and attempting to undermine any opposition to it.

As well as narrowing the curriculum, another consequence of this is the perception that some subjects are not as *valuable* as others, with subsequent impact on the teachers of those subjects and on pupils. This represents Laclau and Mouffe’s *logic of equivalence*, as some ‘knowledge-rich’ curriculum areas are compared against others that policy makers consider ‘knowledge-poor’. This antagonism or dichotomy also contradicts the rhetoric and discourse of policy makers that stated the curriculum reforms were essential to give *all* pupils the cultural capital necessary to enable them to progress – as a matter of social justice. As Cairns et al (2020, p.4) state,

> Schools must, on the one hand, endeavour to increase English Baccalaureate (EBacc) participation in line with Department for

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[22] Laclau and Mouffe’s political discourse theory complements Foucauldian genealogy as both are concerned with the operations of power and knowledge through discourse . In addition, the logic of equivalence (and by implication, logic of difference) can be seen as illustrating Foucault’s notion of dividing practices.

> Education targets…. On the other hand, they must demonstrate to Ofsted how they are developing their pupils' cultural capital. The former does not include the arts, the latter seems impossible to achieve without them.

This further exposes the *chasm* between policy rhetoric and actual practice, and the complexities resulting from a centralising and decentralising government agenda. On the one hand the government have taken control of the curriculum – determining what is and is not included and providing the veneer of a broad and balanced curriculum for all – but on the other hand have abdicated responsibility for the implementation or outcomes of this policy, ensuring schools are responsible the curriculum and assessment of it (reflecting the neo-liberal approach outlined in Chapter 4). There is a focus on the outcomes rather than the practices that lead to those outcomes, and as such some schools are making decisions that narrow the curriculum even further for pupils. These include reducing the key stage 3 curriculum to two years instead of three, so that pupils will have an additional year for GSCEs and, in primary schools, the preparation for standardised assessment tests (SATs) in Year 6 have resulted in a preoccupation to prepare for the SATS at the expense of other learning. Whilst headteachers of these schools might be criticised for these decisions, it is the policy context they are working within and the imperative of achieving well in national league tables that likely influence them to take such actions, revealing the tension between the centralising agenda that imposes policy and the decentralising agenda that places accountability firmly with schools.

The consequences of such a narrowing of the curriculum on some pupils are significant and in particular it is the more disadvantaged pupils who are affected. It is in the deprived state schools where pupils are now likely to have fewer option choices as school leaders plough their limited resources into the 'core' subjects that impact on national league tables. Reporting for the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Sibieta (2021, p.1) indicated that it is these schools that have seen the largest cuts to their budgets,

> the most deprived secondary schools saw a 14% real-terms fall in spending per pupil between 2009–10 and 2019–20, compared with a 9% drop for the least deprived schools.

In addition, as Neumann et al (2020, p.710) reported, as some pupils are 'forced' into taking EBacc subjects this might increase 'disengagement and disaffection' for lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities, and as Long and Danechi (2020, p.3) suggest, this may even lead to some pupils being 'off-rolled'[23]. These consequences will affect schools that have more inclusive intakes, and these are more likely to be in areas of disadvantage which have less resources to support the needs of all their pupils. Reay (2017, p.74) argues that 'perversely, in the English educational system it is the white middle-class children with assertive parents who are more likely to receive extra help'.

> *So that's where that falls down. It falls down on it can't address who the choices were made for, and it can't address modernity. And also, what it can't address is the uncomfortable fact that the attainment gap between poor kids and rich kids – which a powerful, knowledge rich curriculum is meant to wipe away with giving the cultural capital well the attainment gap is widening. And, you know, one third of disproportionally poor kids won't get a level four at maths or English and are condemned by that to lives where they are excluded because they can't get access to decent jobs. And that has profound effects on their health and their life. (Grace)*

As such, schools in more 'middle-class' areas, or the grammar schools and independent schools that select pupils on the basis of ability, are much less likely to be impacted by the curriculum reforms, as they have the resources to offer a broader range of subjects (as part of the formal curriculum or as part of their programme of extra-curricular activities) and have the resources to support any pupils in need of additional support – thus social inequalities are reproduced rather than reduced and some pupils continue to have significant advantages over others, as has been the case historically (Reay 2017, 2022). In addition, Hawksbee (2022) indicates that

> the wealthiest pupils are also three times more likely to sing in a choir or play in a band and almost twice as likely to play a musical instrument. They are also more physically active and report greater levels of self-belief and life satisfaction.

A key point here is that some schools are able to complement the formal curriculum with an extensive extra-curricular programme which enhances and enriches the curriculum – suggested by policy makers to be both an entitlement and essential to all children.

> As part of a richer school week, all children should be entitled to take part in sport, music and cultural opportunities. These opportunities are an essential part of a broad and ambitious curriculum, and

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[23] Off-rolling involves removing pupils from the school roll so that their potential low attainment would not impact on overall average performance indicators

> support children's health, wellbeing and wider development, particularly as we recover from the pandemic (DfE 2022a, p.29).

This is another area of policy discourse that requires problematizing – in this statement the DfE fail to acknowledge the inequality in resources that schools have at their disposal and as such sets out expectations that are unachievable for many. Thus, policy makers present themselves as committed to meeting the needs of *all* children – justifying and legitimating policy – whilst simultaneously putting more pressure on schools that have been made accountable to meet such expectations, without being given the resources to enable them to do so. Thus, the idea of curriculum policy as serving the interests of all is a fallacy and represents an ideological 'slight of hand'. As an additional point, as well as some pupils being advantaged by a full programme of extra-curricular activities in schools, their more affluent parents can further supplement the school curriculum with the use of personal tutors for their children, as outlined by Cribb et al (2013) and Major (2016) in Chapter Four, as well as providing other types of enrichment (resources, technology, experiences) that further give their children advantages over their more disadvantaged peers. As such the advantages afforded to some pupils, that can be traced back over decades – evident mainly in the independent sector but also in state-funded grammar schools (outlined in Chapter Four) – have continued, and we can see how this element of the curriculum is contingent.

In the above sections I have argued that the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum for *all* children is not being manifested, nor is it an achievable goal without increased resources going to state schools. Pupils in schools serving deprived communities, are more likely to be experiencing a narrowing of the curriculum as traditional subjects are elevated above non-EBacc and vocational subjects, reflecting historical inequalities that our present context is contingent on. In addition, these schools are unlikely to have the resources for an extensive programme of extra-curricular provision in the arts and other subjects that would provide breadth and depth. This means that some children experience curriculum *poverty* – the very opposite of a broad and balance curriculum – resulting in continuing inequality with many children being 'left behind', the very thing that Gove (2011) claimed the reforms were necessary to address. Thus, chances for so-called social mobility are reduced and the 'top' jobs remain the domain of those attending independent schools, grammar schools and the more affluent state schools – the status quo is maintained even when the government claims to be challenging it, resulting in a convenient paradox. Having sought to critique policy related to the curriculum and demonstrate its contingency and complexity, the next section examines the knowledge that is included (or excluded) in traditional subject areas, examining government discourse that suggests a knowledge-rich curriculum will support a reduction in inequality and achieve ‘levelling up’.

5.3.1 The shift to a knowledge-based curriculum and direct instruction – a recipe for social justice?

The key argument for this section is that the shift, since 2010, towards a *knowledge-rich* curriculum and the preferred pedagogic approach of *direct instruction* in some schools is serving to perpetuate inequalities within the education system rather than reduce them, undermining the government claim that they are committed to social justice and levelling up, as stated in the recent White Paper.

> Every child should benefit from a broad, ambitious, knowledge-rich curriculum, taught by highly skilled teachers. This is essential to the task of spreading opportunity and levelling up (DfE 2022a, p.25)

The experience of a narrow curriculum (discussed in section 5.3) that is based on traditional academic knowledge and accompanied by direct instruction pedagogy, arguably does not give pupils the same opportunities as others to be prepared for some jobs/careers, or to be ‘socially mobile’, as policy discourse suggests, and thus many pupils continue to be disadvantaged with reduced ‘life chances’. In a speech to the Social Market Foundation, Gove (2013b) linked the ‘stalling’ of social mobility in the last few decades as coinciding with progressive, child-centred teaching methods and reminisced on the traditional curriculum of the 1940s. However, as Furlong and Lunt (2020) point out, increased social mobility in the 1960s and 1970s was more a result of structural changes in society that increased opportunities and thus the argument that it is due to a progressive curriculum can be problematized – suggesting that the recent policy shift can be seen to reflect more ideological perspectives. Policy makers like Gove (2013b) have cited ‘powerful’ academic based knowledge as a moral imperative to ensure more disadvantaged children have the same cultural and intellectual inheritance of their more advantaged peers in the independent sector, whilst also denigrating the principles and pedagogies of progressive education,

> Progressive educational theory stressed the importance of children following their own instincts, rather than being taught. It sought to replace an emphasis on acquiring knowledge in traditional subjects with a new stress on children following where their curiosity led them

As a secondary school teacher myself from the late 1980s onwards I would argue this description of progressive education requires critiquing as little more than a caricature. Whilst creative, pupil-centred pedagogies were indeed practiced, in my experience this was accompanied by a strong focus on knowledge and the acquisition of it, a point also raised by Anna in her interview, outlined in the box below. This reflects the argument of Wells (1999) that education should provide children with both access to the accumulated knowledge and skills of their cultural environment whilst also providing them with the creative and critical skills to contribute to, and critique, that body of knowledge and skills – thus avoiding a simplistic and artificial dichotomy between knowledge and skills and progressive and traditional approaches to education.

I never really liked the knowledge and skills debate because of course knowledge is terribly important. And one thing I would want to say very powerfully to you is, there is such a misrepresentation of what might be called the progressive approach. Because the progressive approach, the best of it, never spurned knowledge, it just had a particular view of whose knowledge might be imbibed, it was creative in its methods. (Anna)

Discourse like this reflects the strategies of policy makers to both undermine ideological opponents and legitimise their own policy agenda. Thus, it is important here to examine what a knowledge-based curriculum is, and how *power* is inherent in this – who has the power to determine what constitutes as knowledge and what is included and excluded in the curriculum – in order to highlight the contingent limits imposed by particular discourses. It is also important to examine this in relation to direct instruction in contrast to more progressive pedagogies.

In relation to knowledge, Counsell (2018) suggests it is the ‘character of knowledge’ that needs to be questioned, for both its structure and also its status as ‘truth’ and she queries the extent to which teachers and pupils are able to ‘participate in challenging or reaching those truth claims’. To this end Counsell distinguishes between *substantive knowledge* and *disciplinary knowledge*, the former relating to content as established facts and the latter relating to learning about how knowledge came to be and how understanding of it may evolve or be revised through enquiry – recognising that this distinction will vary across different subject areas. Whilst the knowledge-rich curriculum, favoured by policy makers over the last decade, is generally associated with substantive knowledge, Counsell (2018) suggests the disciplinary dimension should not be neglected. Whilst this might be referred to as disciplinary *knowledge* it is the domain where skills such as critical thinking might be further developed as pupils enquire into the origins and status of knowledge – and have opportunities to question the character of knowledge that Counsell and others (for example, Wells 1999) argues is so important. Thus, both domains are essential elements of the curriculum, providing a reciprocal bridge between learning academic knowledge and critiquing how it came to be, and indeed how it might be otherwise. As such I do not argue against the current focus on knowledge per se, but rather the focus on a narrow concept of knowledge and the subsequent shift in pedagogy that threatens to further undermine the development of essential skills, resulting in perpetuation of inequality and not the claimed 'levelling up'.

This also relates to the quadrant of ideologies identified by Schiro (2013), outlined in section 5.2.2, and further demonstrates the complexity of this area. Here we can see that the two *sources* of knowledge he refers to, the 'Scholar Academic' and 'Learner Centred' ideologies, broadly reflect the opposing ideologies of current government policy makers who favour the former (a knowledge based, traditional curriculum or *substantive* knowledge) – and others involved in the field of education (example, Reay 2017) who favour the latter – a more progressive, child-centred model of learning knowledge or *disciplinary* knowledge. Likewise, the Social Efficiency and Social Construction ideologies refer to the *uses* of knowledge which again can be crudely aligned to the opposing ideological camps in England. The pedagogies associated with the Social Efficiency ideology, particularly practice and mastery, correlate with the government's commitment to direct instruction whilst the Social Construction ideology aligns with progressive pedagogies. These dichotomies also represent Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) *logic of equivalence* – an antagonistic opposition has been constructed between on the one hand a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum and direct instruction pedagogy lauded in government policy discourse, and on the other hand a progressive model of learning that encourages skill development, that the government claim is 'knowledge- poor'. Whilst this area is far more complex than simplistic divisions – with educationalists not easily mapped into one camp or another – such divisions serve a purpose for policy makers as indicated in the statement below,

> 'Knowledge', I hear people gasp. 'Surely education is about so much more than that. It is about creativity, problem solving, thinking critically, and inventing?' Yes, I agree whole-heartedly that a good education is about all those things. But each of them is dependent upon, and impossible without, a fundamental basis of knowledge about the subject in question. (Gibb 2016)

This provides another example of the discursive strategies employed by government policy makers – using the arguments of their ideological opponents in order to undermine those arguments. In this case, Gibb has taken one perspective of progressive educationalists – the need for pupil centred experiential and skills based learning – and subtly ridiculed them by suggesting he is quite aware of the importance of such things but that they are not as important as the accumulation of knowledge, thus attempting to signify divisions that demonstrate his thinking is elevated and superior to the 'deficient' thinking of his ideological opposites, foregrounding government policy as the 'right' one. Also inherent in Gibbs statement is the suggestion that progressive educationalists do not consider knowledge to be important and that is not the case – knowledge has always been at the heart of teaching, it is more *how* that learning is accessed, critiqued and acquired that is the difference, with progressives favouring more creative pedagogy over the direct instruction approach of traditionalists (Reay 2017). In the interview with Elizabeth it was clear she disagreed with the perspective adhered to by Gibb indicating her belief that both knowledge and skills are important.

> *But in terms of the current emphasis, I think knowledge is important but I don't think it's as important as the ministers think and I think skills are important as well. I listen carefully to what Nick Gibb says and because I disagree with a great deal of what he says but I have never doubted his passion for the subject, I have never doubted that he is not committed to raising standards and understands the issues. I just disagree with him. (Elizabeth)*

Whilst this chapter is about the curriculum it is important to examine the pedagogy related to it – they are inextricably linked – and I am arguing that the recent government drive for *direct instruction,* in addition to the knowledge-based curriculum, increases inequalities as opposed to reducing them, as policy makers claim. Pedagogy, together with curriculum and evaluation, form Bernstein's (1977) three message systems of schooling that he considers essential for their socialisation impact and the role they play in serving to reproduce culture. Particularly relevant to this section is Bernstein's view of pedagogy, which he considered to be 'what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge' (1977, p.85). This is relevant here as current policy makers seek to validate a shift towards direct instruction (often called teacher-led instruction) as a preferred and more appropriate way of transmitting knowledge. However direct instruction can be problematized as a valid tool for transmission because in some schools, particularly schools in disadvantaged areas, this is being seen to reduce the capacity for some pupils to develop skills that more child-centred progressive approaches enable. As indicated in section 5.2.2, direct instruction involves teaching by explicit instructions, as opposed to discovery or inquiry-based learning that is more child-centred and is some cases lessons are fully scripted with teachers given explicit instructions and resources (Abrams 2017). Tracing back in time as per a genealogical approach, this is reminiscent of the formal classrooms at the turn of the 20th century, where organisation of learning was about social control (as indicated in section 1.3), and thus we see how current policy is contingent and also reflects what Reay (2022, p.1) argues is a 'slide to authoritarianism'. This also represents a concerning shift in policy in terms of teacher autonomy as well as pupil learning, prophesised by Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.102) who suggested that whilst pedagogy has always been the 'domain of professional teacher autonomy' it was their view that 'eventually some technization of practice will probably result from pedagogies being a policy focus', leading to de-professionalisation. Reay (2017, p.56) suggests the pedagogy accompanying the narrow curriculum seen in schools mostly serving disadvantaged communities, amounts to 'teaching to the test that is not experienced by their middle-class peers'.

> *But the other concerning thing is that although it's called the national curriculum, I think there is growing disparity in the curriculum content and how it's delivered. So, although in all state schools there is this sort of very strong focus on content and not enough on process, I think in more affluent schools there tends to be a broader curriculum offer and a more progressive pedagogy. And there is actually quite a lot of emerging research now that shows that there is a difference in pedagogy offered to different social classes. With the working classes more likely to experience what one researcher called, a pedagogy of poverty, that pays very little attention to critical thinking skills and offers what she calls a drill and kill approach. (Darlene)*

The governments preoccupation with direct or teacher-led instruction, as opposed to more child-centred pedagogies, was reflected in the speech given to the Education World Forum, by the Schools Minister (Nick Gibb) in which he extolled the virtues of both a knowledge-based curriculum (declaring himself a E.D Hirsch enthusiast) and direct instruction, quoting research that undermined more child-centred approaches. Analysing the content of the speech he makes a compelling argument for direct teaching, for example,

> Children need to be taught the body of knowledge that we all take for granted. In too many countries – including Britain – educationalists have argued against knowledge and in favour of skills. I believe this has been deeply damaging to millions of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds…….
> The PISA results from last year serve to confirm the ever-growing body of international evidence on this point, that teacher-led instruction is more effective than child-centred, enquiry-based approaches. (Gibb 2017).

The use of such powerful language and rhetoric can be convincing – and indeed reflects a technology of power that policy makers often utilise, where alternative discourses are critiqued as not been in the interests of the disadvantaged whilst their own policy appears to be justified. And indeed, the accuracy of Gibb's statement around the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results can be critiqued as outlined by Bousted (2022, p.76) who, also referring to the 2016 PISA results, indicates that

> the English education system is at the top of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) league table for rote learning, and bottom for the promotion of 'deep learning' involving complex cognitive activation strategies'

Bousted (2022, p.77) went on to reiterate that Andreas Schleicher (OECD Head of Education) had suggested a key problem for the English education system was,

> an over-reliance on exams that demand the reproduction of learned knowledge, and the lack of time and opportunity for students to engage in more open-ended tasks that require the transformation of knowledge across subject disciplines in order to solve real-life problems.

The notion of a knowledge-rich curriculum and direct instruction are not contested per se, but rather it is the manifestation of these things in practice that can be problematized as well as the issue that both are promoted at the expense of other elements of the curriculum and other pedagogies. For example, the principles of Rosenshine (2012) related to direct instruction – including the use of modelling, questioning and feedback – are used in schools with positive effect, but the issue is that direct instruction can be 'mis-used' to become simply 'teacher-led' learning, with imposed scripts, instructions and materials and with little opportunity for pupils to engage in problem solving or critical thinking activities. Whilst the government discourse around this is that it is reducing inequality and supporting levelling up, an alternative discourse is that it is a pedagogical strategy that is more about social control and behaviour management rather than a tool for learning. Reay (2017, p.185-186) suggests that

> we cannot make sense of contemporary working-class underachievement without investigating its historical roots, and recognising that the original purpose of providing state education for all was to keep working class political and economic ambitions in check, not to realise them. From the outset, the upper and middle classes wanted a docile, obedient working class, not one that inspired to equal recognition, respect and rewards.

The use of this sort of direct instruction seems to be on the increase in academies for state educated children yet on the decrease in the independent sector. Benn (2020) suggests that independent schools have 'switched to team and project-based learning' with headteachers of independent schools citing that employers want 'new and different skills' and not just the ability to retain facts – the critical thinking skills for example that are associated with progressive pedagogies children need to be prepared for a future employment landscape that is not yet known, and as such need to learn a range of skills and learning strategies that can be adapted to meet the demands of a fast moving employment market. Reay (quoted in Benn 2020), argues that double standards are at play,

> Progressive is such a slippery term, which has been used and abused within English education. In the private sector, given their resources, it can be viewed as a positive development, helping to provide a broader, richer blend, creativity as an add-on to academic education. But in the state sector, progressive education has wrongly been represented as holding children back, wrongly associated with over-permissive and inexperienced younger teachers and seen as getting in the way of powerful knowledge and high achievement.

Recent governments have sought to encourage emulation of the independent sector as indicated in Chapter four, and thus this adherence to a knowledge-based curriculum with a teacher-led pedagogy approach, that has its roots in the past decades, seems a departure from the trend towards more pupil-centred approaches emerging in the independent sector whose alumni are still prevalent in for example, government, law and industry, as outlined in Chapter 4.

Thus, the debate about the curriculum, and associated pedagogy, is complex, deeply polarised and continuing. Tracing back in time, as Kelly (2009, p.3) has argued, the insights emerging in the 1960s and 1970s (related to progressive, child-centred education) have been stifled with increased 'politicization' of education and 'the impact of competing ideologies, the use of testing, inspection and the legitimation of discourse as a strategy of political control'. This 'stifling' of progressive, child-centred education, evident after the 1988 Education Reform Act which heralded unprecedented reform (as outlined in section 5.2.2), has been fuelled in recent years through carefully chosen language in dominant discourses. The significant shift towards a traditional academic knowledge-based curriculum, together with a shift in pedagogic practice, is resulting in an *erosion* of opportunities for developing skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, particularly for more disadvantaged pupils and hence inequality is being perpetuated and not reduced. As Reay (2017 p.63) states, 'any critical engagement or creativity in formal schooling, especially for those in the years of GCSE preparation, has increasingly become the preserve of the upper and middle-classes'. Whilst the government are pushing a knowledge-based curriculum agenda arguing it is essential to give *all* pupils the cultural capital that has hitherto being the domain of the few who attend independent schools – and thus is essential for social justice, reducing inequality and aiding social mobility – the independent sector seem to be embracing a more creative curriculum arguing this best prepares their pupils for the future. Thus, inequalities are set to continue.

The above sections have provided a critique of current policy in relation to the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum, a knowledge-based curriculum and associated pedagogy of direct instruction, with discussion exposing the complexities inherent in this area of policy and consideration of how current policy is contingent. I have aimed to demonstrate that government policy on the curriculum has perpetuated inequality rather than reduce it, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The next section briefly examines the hidden messages within the curriculum that lead to further inequalities for girls in particular, reflecting the focus this study has on women's voices.

5.4 Continuing inequalities for girls/women - curriculum content and hidden messages

The key argument in this section is that inequalities in education are exacerbated by the content of the curriculum that continues to foreground the achievements of white middle class men, at the expense of the achievements of women, and other ethnicities. This then perpetuates stereotypical assumptions related to gender and ethnicity which further compounds inequalities. As such, the curriculum reinforces the dominant influences of some and marginalises or excludes the influence of others, failing to provide role models that many pupils might identify with. This is reinforced in a recent study of GCSE English Literature, where Fenn (2023, p.3) has reported that 'only 2% of GCSE pupils studied a whole text – a novel or play – by a female author' in 2022 and that 'across all four Awarding Bodies, the same male authored texts with male protagonists dominate teachers' choices'. This was raised in the interview with Grace as indicated in the below comment.

> *So, you will find that women are excluded, you will find that black authors, black scientists, the achievement of black, and indeed the achievement of gay people are excluded. So, you end up with a curriculum, as we've ended up with a curriculum, which is overstuffed with the achievements of white men and a curriculum which fails to engage with our place in the world and some aspects of our history that we would rather forget. (Grace)*

Whilst this also relates to the decolonisation of the curriculum and could hence draw upon post-colonial theory, the emphasis here will be on women, given the focus of this study on women's voices, and issues around intersectionality are considered. Wills (2016, p.22) argues that 'the category of gender should be an essential consideration of a decolonised curriculum', citing the need to foreground women's 'experiences of, and contributions to, the past', and also because gender has functioned as a 'key axis of power between men and women in the past'. As such, this section aims firstly, to briefly acknowledge the historical curriculum that girls experienced up until recent times and the assumptions this was based on about their future roles in society, that very much reflected a patriarchal society, and that our historical present is contingent upon. Secondly, it will argue that the curriculum continues to contribute to the reproduction of inequalities – rather than being overt as it was in previous decades this is more of a submerged problem that requires critiquing and exposing.

Tracing back to the turn of the last century and up to the post-war period (examined in section 2.3) dominant discourse was that the education of girls was secondary to that of boys, given the expectation in society of their roles as wives and mothers, or as low paid workers. Whilst wealthier women may have had more access to education this was not considered on an equal basis to their male counterparts with very few women achieving an extended education. As indicated in Chapter Two, it was during the period of second wave, and indeed third wave of feminism, that marked a shift in the experiences of some women. But whilst compulsory education for all was introduced in 1944 and girls benefitted from this, the dominant discourse continued to reinforce traditional expectations about the level of education that girls needed, particularly poorer or working-class girls. As attested to by my own experience of schooling in the 1970s, outlined in my personal reflection (section 1.2), there were separate curriculum choices for girls and boys, reflecting expected roles in society, and even as I became a secondary school teacher in the late 1980s the gender stereotyping in schools was overt, reflecting the social and cultural gender expectations of that time. Whilst there were alternative discourses about the roles and status of women developed particularly by second wave feminists, for many girls, particularly working-class girls and those from different ethnic backgrounds, the experience of living in a male dominated patriarchal society – reflected in the home and in school – was more their reality. Looking back over time, Ball (2008, p.184) suggests that it has only been over the last few decades that gender in education has been a ‘problem’ for policy makers as before this the differences in educational provision were ‘accepted, for the most part as the playing out of natural, inherent differences between the sexes and as appropriate in terms of future roles within work or the family’. The 1970s had seen legal changes, as outlined in Chapter One, for example the 1970 Equal Opportunities Act and 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, but these did not necessarily change cultural attitudes and beliefs of people in society, including those of teachers in schools. The acknowledgement of this led to what Ball (2008, p.184) describes as ‘grassroots policy change and policy effects’ with national programmes emerging, like GenderWatch (explained in section 1.3) which were aimed at challenging gender stereotyping in all aspects of schooling. These grassroots ‘equal opportunities’ initiatives had involved little government involvement, but this began to change in the late 1980s and

1990s, as policy makers made changes to the curriculum and developed focussed equal opportunities programmes, which Ball (2008) suggests resulted in girls generally out-performing boys at GCSE level in many subjects, whilst acknowledging the enduring impact of sex-stereotyping in subject entry. It should be noted here that as girls began to outperform boys in exams there emerged what has been described as a 'moral panic' (Ball 2008, Chitty 2014) about the achievement of boys and this then became the focus of government initiatives. Furthermore, as Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.150) have pointed out,

> girls' improved educational attainment does not convert into equal career opportunities and equal earnings with males, even when females have comparable levels of education. Child rearing still has a much greater impact on females' careers and wage-earning capacity than on males.

Thus the 1980's marked a *fissure* in education policy and practice in terms of the shift away from an overtly gendered curriculum, resulting in our historical present, that is thus contingent. It might be argued perhaps that we have now shed the traditional perspective of women that was inherent in patriarchal dominant discourses and instead have a curriculum that reflects the discourses of equality and inclusion – but the curriculum cannot be seen as gender-neutral (or indeed race-neutral) when it has been constructed by policy makers who themselves are imbued with particular values and beliefs. Hence, it would be a mistake to think that education, including the curriculum, is completely immune from the lingering assumptions and stereotypes that were inherent in traditional, patriarchal discourses – whilst the curriculum itself is intended for *all* pupils and there is no overt segregation related to gender, it is the hidden messages that are often transmitted in 'accidental' or 'sinister' ways that need to be addressed as Kelly (2009, p.10) suggests (outlined in section 5.2.1). Hence, I would argue, that policy maker discourse around addressing inequalities and disadvantage can be problematized, as outlined in the above sections. There are decisions made about the curriculum content (unconscious or not) that continue to reflect traditional patriarchal perspectives and enduring gender stereotypes, which are further exacerbated by images and treatment of women in the media and wider society – these continue to impact on the aspirations and expectations of girls and young women. Wills (2016, p.23) sums this up suggesting that,

> far from being the consequence of a heavy-handed conspiracy to deliberately exclude women, the continued underrepresentation of

> women is rather the product of a complex system of fallacies and unconscious bias

As the problems surrounding inequality are more ‘submerged’ it is often more difficult to address them. Many teachers might not even recognise they are saying or doing things that reinforce stereotypical assumptions and hence the recent trend to discuss ‘unconscious bias’. In a study on primary school children, Campbell (2015, p.538) found that four areas – income-level, gender, SEN status and ethnicity – were all significant in accounting for disparities in teacher-assessments of pupils. This revealed the complex nature of addressing stereotyping and the need to consider intersectionality as opposed to one characteristic in isolation. This exposes the fragmented and binary approach of policy makers who claim to be addressing inequality by tracking achievement of pupils, publishing data on isolated characteristics of pupils (DfE 2022) – failing to acknowledge the multiplicity of barriers that some pupils face. Plummer (2000) argued that whilst the national concern was around the underachievement of boys, class differences in achievement, particularly in relation to girls, was being ignored. Years later, Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.150) pointed out the same issue, that in relation to gender, it should be noted that middle class boys and middle-class girls are ‘doing well’ – hence policy should focus on the most disadvantaged girls and the most disadvantaged boys.

In addition, the stereotypical assumptions that impact on girls need to be addressed in all schools. As Butt (2022) suggests decolonising the curriculum cannot be left to the schools that have diverse populations as it is relevant and important for pupils across the country, regardless of the make-up of their communities, and as cited above Wills (2016, p.22) argues that this decolonisation has to consider gender. Kriel (2022) outlines an example to demonstrate the importance of this, citing a female Chinese pupil who reported that her ‘talent in art was overlooked as she was expected to be good at maths’, as well as indicating that girls in general are being ‘nudged to be carers’ – revealing assumptions that are made about what girls (and indeed girls of a particular ethnicity) can and cannot excel in. Such assumptions were also exposed in comments made to the Commons Science and Technology Committee (April 2022). The female Chair of the Social Mobility Commission (also Headteacher of a secondary school) told the committee that ‘physics isn’t something girls tend to fancy – they don’t want to do it, they don’t like it’, suggesting this was because girls are ‘naturally’ less inclined to enjoy physics and citing the ‘hard maths’ involved. This caused significant concern, with Youngman (2022) arguing such discourse is damaging and outdated. The inclusion of these examples might appear to be anecdotal but are intended to reveal the entrenched and underlying assumptions that continue to be manifested in current discourse related to the curriculum, and they also serve to exemplify how inequality is perpetuated.

In addition, consideration needs to be given to how these issues are addressed with pupils themselves. Wells (2016, p.24-25), suggests that 'mentioning' women in the curriculum is

> not a radical enough move towards conceptualising women and representing gendered historical concepts in ways which do not re-inscribe a practice of epistemic erasure or the textual inscription of damaging stereotypes and ideologies

As such, all pupils need to have opportunity in the curriculum in which to analyse and examine not only how knowledge has been produced but also how it came to be – what and who is included and excluded and why, and how it could have been otherwise. It is also acknowledged that pupils are influenced by factors external to the school and curriculum, particularly through peer groups and various social media platforms, which impact on their perceptions and expectations of themselves and each. Within schools, discussions around these things have generally been in the domain of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE), however there are barriers here. As a non-statutory part of the National Curriculum PSHE has suffered the same fate as other 'non-core' subjects and as it is not an examined subject either, the value and time given to this in schools is very variable, even though Whittaker (2017) reported that 90% of headteachers think it should be compulsory. As such the opportunities for such important discussions on areas like gender stereotyping are reduced, as are the chances to challenge misconceptions and expectations about gender roles.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to critique and problematize government discourse that claims to offer a broad and balanced curriculum that can meet the needs of all pupils. Drawing on Koopman's (2013) three Cs of genealogy, in addition to *critiquing* current policy on the curriculum, I have strived to demonstrate how current policy is *contingent* and *complex.*

The curriculum in not neutral or based on truths but rather reflects the ideological perspectives of the current government. By framing my argument around a number of key substantive points I have sought to identify how, when taken together, these expose the inherent problems of this policy and demonstrate the inability of it to reduce inequality and support a social justice agenda. Rather the policy on curriculum is *increasing* inequalities as the implementation of it exposes the impossibility of many schools to resource it, leading to a continuation of the historic advantage that more affluent schools have that they can bestow upon their pupils.

The notion of a broad and balanced curriculum has not materialised in many schools and instead policy has resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum with schools being forced to make decisions that will better enable them to meet the demands of the associated performativity agenda. As such many pupils are experiencing curriculum ‘poverty’ and do not have access to a varied extra-curricular programme that might have served to enrich their learning experiences. The introduction of a knowledge-rich curriculum can be seen to represent only certain types of knowledge and rather than supporting pupils to gain the cultural capital the policy claimed to intend, prominent academics like Reay (2017) argue it has done the opposite, alienating many pupils, particularly the disadvantaged. The associated focus on direct instruction as a pedagogic strategy is being manifested in some schools as more of an instrument of social control, reminiscent of historic practice of the late 19th and early 20th century, and the antithesis of the progressive strategies of the 1980s and 1990s, that supported the development of critical thinking skills – the skills that might be seen to better serve pupils in the future, as evidenced by the shift in independent schools to such strategies in response to changes in the demands of employers. In addition, the discussion in sections 5.3.1 and 5.4, on what constitutes knowledge and the status of some knowledge as ‘truth’, exposes how the valorisation of some knowledge over others in the school curriculum serves to exacerbate inequalities.

The next chapter focuses on assessment and examines the discourses surrounding the government performativity agenda and the impact of this on schools, teachers and pupils.

Chapter 6: Assessment: Discourses on performativity – a high stakes culture and model of obedience

6.1 Introduction.

> *In a school which is ridden by the examination incubus the whole atmosphere is charged with deceit… all who become acclimatized to the influence of the system – pupils, teachers, examiners, parents, employers of labour… MPs and the rest – fall victims…. and are well content to cheat themselves with outward and visible results, accepting 'class lists' and 'orders of merit' as of quasi-divine authority (Edmund Holmes 1911, pp. 65-66)*

Holmes (1911) was perhaps prophetic in recognising the pitfalls of an education system that has a preoccupation with examinations. Since the 1980s and 1990s successive governments in England have used summative assessments (tests and examinations) to evaluate individual and school achievement in what has become a high stakes performativity culture – a term originally coined by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard who referred to it as the 'global relationship between input and output' (Lyotard 1984, p.11). Whilst this aspect of assessment is the focus for this chapter, the area of assessment is much broader and complex and, as Broadfoot (1996, p.3) suggests, can be considered a central feature of social life in which 'passing judgement on people, on things, on ideas, on values is part of the process of making sense of reality'.

In relation to assessment in schools, Bernstein (1977, p.156) has referred to 'input-output' problems, suggesting that schools had become 'people-processing' institutions. In Chapter 5 I referred to Bernstein's three message systems of education – curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation – with curriculum and pedagogy being discussed. It is evaluation, or assessment, that is pertinent to this chapter which Bernstein (1977, p.156) suggests can be defined as 'what counts as a valid realization' of the knowledge on the part of the taught. It is also the idea that evaluation of knowledge – the assessment of it – conveys key messages about the priorities and presumed purposes of education in a given society. Bernstein (1977, p.154) states the need to scrutinise the social assumptions underlying the 'organization, distribution and evaluation of knowledge' suggesting that 'the power relationships created outside the school penetrate the organization, distribution and evaluation of knowledge through the social context of their transmission' – this relates to this chapter as I analyse the dominant discourse perpetuated by the current government, around assessment and performativity.

There are many dimensions to the notion of assessment that are defined and discussed further in section 6.2 below, though there are two broad camps that are commonly referred to, formative assessment and summative assessment, with the latter relating to the current performativity policy agenda. As such, discourses around performativity will be analysed through two main data sets – literature and documentation, and the data gathered from interviews with women, whose perspectives on assessment and performativity are integrated within the chapter. Pillow (2015) argues the importance of questioning discourses and considering why some have proliferated over others – it is noted that many of the key writers associated with discourse around assessment are male (Scriven 1967, Bloom 1969, Black and Wiliam 1998) and hence this chapter draws more heavily on the work of Patricia Broadfoot (1996, 2007) to reflect the focus on women's voices, as part of a feminist genealogical approach. Whilst acknowledging other key contributors to the field like Caroline Gipps (1994, 2011) the work of Broadfoot is particularly pertinent because the four inter-related functions of assessment she identifies – competence, competition, content and control – reflect themes that are integral to this study.

My overall argument in this chapter is that the pervasive and high stakes nature of the current performativity culture – created by policy makers who claim it is necessary to 'raise standards' and improve the quality of schools – is having unintended and damaging consequences for schools, teachers, and pupils, creating a culture of obedience, and resulting in an increase in inequality. In 2008, the Children, Schools and Families Committee report on Testing and Assessment concluded that,

> the central message of our Report has been that national testing can be used in inappropriate ways and that this may lead to damaging consequences for the education system and, most particularly, for children (2008, p87)

More than a decade later, the preoccupation with national testing and use of performance data has grown and pupils, teachers, and schools ‘are each subject to the gaze of the next, and all are subject to the gaze of the state’ (Youdell, 2010, p.37). Furthermore, this fixation with the presumed efficiency, and reliability of the examination system has led to the demise of richer, and more valid, forms of assessment, for example, coursework portfolios, which provide opportunities to evaluate pupils’ broader knowledge and understanding over a period of time, rather than focus on what can be assessed in a time-bound examination that is essentially constructed on a one size fits all model. This reflects what Stone (2012) refers to as a policy paradox, where policy might appear to be fair and logical on the surface but may confer advantages on some over others, as alternatives are ignored. The preoccupation with *rationality*, the idea that policy can be rational, analytic and scientific, gives the illusion that it is somehow above politics – yet as Stone argues, policy is laden with particular values and cannot be seen as a truth but rather as a set of claims that can be problematized. In this case, examinations come to be seen as objective and measurable, able to provide more ‘rigorous’ assessment, and alternative discourses are diminished, as are the opportunities of many pupils who are disadvantaged by the exam system.

> *Far too much emphasis goes into the exams at the expense of other skills. (Fran)*
>
> *There are just too many exams for young people to deal with. There are just too many. And actually, it’s a miserable experience for children, I think. (Charlotte)*

As such, this chapter is framed around several substantive points in relation to discourses around the assessment and performativity agenda, focusing on the impact on schools, teachers, and pupils. I will argue that the introduction and government use of league tables, together with monitoring and accountability via the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), has created a high stakes environment within education, placing pressures in some schools that has resulted in them adopting particular practices aimed at ‘gaming’ the system to improve results. This is particularly evident in *schools* in more disadvantaged communities where those pupils are thus further disadvantaged. I will then argue that these practices have increased pressure on *teachers* and further reduced their autonomy, contributing to a recruitment and retention crisis – this has also impacted more on schools in disadvantaged communities. In turn, I will argue the subsequent impact of this performativity agenda on some *pupils* is significant – many pupils are being negatively impacted by ‘selection and sifting’ practices on the basis of ability, the narrowing of opportunities and focus on examinations that enable only a small amount of the curriculum to be assessed and also favour those who are able to perform well in such a high-pressured context. As such government policy reveals itself to be contradictory as it claims to be inclusive yet is based on selection. Furthermore, as examined in section 4.3, selection on the basis of ability is contentious and rather favours those with access to greater resources, exposing government policy and practices that continues to legitimise the prevailing social order. I will argue such practices impact on pupil well-being and undermine the opportunity for pupils to engage in more creative educational activities that might support improvement of life chances in a fast-evolving employment context.

This chapter, like the previous ones, draws upon Koopman’s (2013) three Cs of genealogy. This area of assessment requires *critique* in relation to the limits it assumes and imposes, current policy needs to be analysed to consider its *contingency,* and the *complexity* of issues around policy on assessment and performativity needs to be exposed. In terms of the four time periods of this study, the main analysis for this chapter is situated in the third and last time periods (1997-2010 and 2010 onwards). Whilst key policy decisions related to assessment and performativity occurred in the late 1980s – the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (DES 1987) and 1988 Education Reform Act – the effects of these manifested and developed further in the 1990s and beyond and were reflected in the Labour Government White Papers (DfEE 1997, DfES 2001) and Education Act (DfES 2002), all of which declared a core commitment to raising standards of performance in all schools and are drawn on for this chapter. The intention here is not to necessarily propose solutions but to problematize and expose submerged and emerging problems, as per a genealogical approach, to consider how our ‘historical present’ is contingent – how it has been shaped by power, influence, and interest over time – and consider conditions of possibility. Like in previous chapters the metaphor of the cliff face (section 4.1) is utilised to identify the *cracks*, *fissures* and *erosions* that have interrupted dominant discourse on assessment and performativity, demonstrating continuities and discontinuities.

6.2 The complexity of assessment

Before addressing the key arguments, it is important to define the key concepts around assessment to provide context for subsequent sections. It is acknowledged that understanding of assessment is inextricably linked to understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy as these three elements of education, that Bernstein (1977) considers fundamental, are all inter-related and each influence the other. Indeed Broadfoot (1996, p.26) argues that the key purpose of assessment is to 'promote and accredit' competence and this links directly to the content of the curriculum. Whilst this Chapter will focus on assessment there are inevitable references to curriculum and pedagogy (Chapter 5).

Assessment within schools is complex in terms of what it actually means and the purpose of it and these layers of complexity need to be exposed in order to develop more understanding (Koopman 2103). Harlen (1994) suggests assessment is about gathering evidence and interpreting this against a set of criteria to form a judgement. But questions arise here when considering *who* it is that gets to decide on *what* evidence is gathered and *what* criteria is used and *what* purpose it intends to serve, and in particular the benefit to the pupils who are subjected to such assessment. Broadfoot (2007) suggests that evidence can be both formal or informal with the former including day to day observations of pupils and looking at examples of their work, and the latter pertaining to either internal or external tests and examinations. This also reflects a common understanding that assessment falls into one of two broad camps, formative assessment or summative assessment – the former referring to assessment of pupils which is ongoing and is 'intended to contribute directly to the learning process through feedback which models success and guides future efforts', and the latter that is an end point evaluation of learning (Broadfoot 2007, p.7). This suggests that the purpose of formative assessment is to support future learning through feedback, guidance and encouragement – what Broadfoot (2007, p.8) refers to as assessment *for curriculum,* as it is an ongoing process, and what is commonly called assessment for learning (AfL) in schools. In contrast, the purpose of summative assessment is to simply measure what a pupil knows at a certain point in time and to provide information for those involved from pupils and teachers to schools and the government – it is thus assessment *for communication*. This also broadly reflects the three purposes of assessment that Archer (2017) posits – that assessment is to support learning (akin to AfL and learning *for curriculum*), for accountability (related to performativity) and for certification (relating to some forms of summative assessment and *assessment for communication*). It is assessment for communication and performativity that this study is concerned with and in particular, how summative assessments have led to the communication of performance data that serves the purpose of government but is leading to damaging consequences for schools, teachers and pupils.

However, the formative/summative dichotomy might be considered simplistic, not reflecting the layers of complexity in the purpose of assessment, and this warrants some consideration before focusing on summative assessment and issues around performativity. Tracing back to the 1987 Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) report (DES 1987), whilst formative and summative assessment are both cited as key purposes of assessment, there is also reference to diagnostic assessment and evaluative assessment – the former intended to identify pupils' learning needs and the latter to identify the quality of provision. Whilst TGAT identified these four purposes of assessment it is interesting to note that diagnostic assessment is now often conflated with formative assessment and evaluative assessment is linked to summative assessment, through the subsequent emergence of league tables that has led to analysis and evaluation of exam results at school and national level. Though formative and summative assessment should be interlinked and mutually compatible, the focus on formative assessment – the importance of which can be traced back through time (Scriven 1967, Bloom 1969, Black and Wiliam 1998) – has been overshadowed by the national preoccupation with summative assessment. Archer (2017, p.1) argues this reflects the power inherent in assessment and the danger in over-emphasising one aim of assessment over another – currently resources are ploughed into the high-stakes assessment process to secure high-performance data, to the detriment of investment in 'lower stakes' formative assessment. This reflects the increasing obsession with results and outputs evident in government policy since the 1990s, and the shift towards a culture of performativity. As Elbra-Ramsay (2019, p.42) states,

> Despite the apparent influence of formative assessment in policy and practice, the simultaneous growth of performativity, and the ongoing divergence between the two ideas, has meant that the purposes, expectations and practice of assessment have become distorted; performance data, used for governance purposes, has become prioritised and ideas subsequently polarised.

Furthermore, other nuances related to the meaning and purpose of assessment attest to its complexity, offering further depth to the broad formative/summative understanding of assessment. Broadfoot (1996) identifies four inter-related functions of assessment that are pertinent to this study – notions of competence, competition, content, and control – all concepts that permeate the chapters of this thesis and from a genealogical perspective can be seen to be in evidence since the beginning of state funded education in the 19th century. Broadfoot (1996, p.26) argues that an 'enduring' purpose of education is to 'promote and accredit *competence*, which in turn serves to influence the *content* of education. In turn, assessment serves to 'manage the inevitable *competition* for limited rewards', and also to *control* both individual aspirations and systemic functioning.

These four functions – competence, content, competition and control – provide a lens through which to critically view the following sections when looking at the practices in schools that impact on both teachers and pupils, in order to assess contingency of current policy. Broadfoot (1996, p.10-11) suggests that '*competence, competition* and *control*, and the way they in turn influence the *content* of education' provides the 'key to understanding educational assessment procedures in industrial societies'. In brief, competence refers to certification and recognition of achievement, generally defined by the quality of performance in exams, and this is discussed in the below section in terms of school focus on exams and performativity and subsequent impact on teachers and pupils. Competition is a theme looked at in Chapter Four as part of the neo-liberal agenda that has seen the marketisation of schools and subsequent competition generated by a shift to academisation. It also relates to assessment and how pupils are compared with each other and selected in terms of ability, for example, into different schools like the grammar schools and *within* schools in terms of sifting pupils into ability groups – the impact of which is discussed further in section 6.5. Whilst the justification for selection within schools is to best enable the teachers to meet the needs of particular groups of pupils, an alternative discourse relates to competition and the need to prepare pupils for examinations in the performativity context that schools are operating in. Thus, examinations are used to analyse wider systemic functioning as school results are analysed and included in national league tables – schools are pitted against each other in the drive to secure a higher position in those league tables to avoid being labelled as a 'failing' school and to secure future pupil admissions in the competitive environment that government policy has created (discussed in Chapter 4).

Looking now at the content function of assessment Broadfoot (1996, p.47) argues that 'whatever is assessed will be reflected in both the formal and informal curricular activities of the school' and this is what is evaluated as part of systematic review (Broadfoot 2007, p.58).

Thus, she argues that education assessment is not simply about judging pupil performance but about judging institutional quality. This relates very much to discourses around performativity practices, linking to the monitoring and evaluation that is the remit of Ofsted and includes the high stakes league tables that are aimed at collecting evidence of 'outputs' with the purpose of forming 'judgements' about both individuals and schools. This is also where Broadfoot's final function of assessment, control, comes into play with the examination system serving to control both schools and the individuals within them. Broadfoot (1996, p.7) argues that formal assessment arrangements 'effect control through the language of accountability'. Schools demonstrate compliance and obedience to government-imposed accountability measures and use of performance data (league tables and Ofsted), in order to secure pupil admissions and associated government funding, and as such teachers are subject to layers of monitoring to ensure pupils meet performance targets. In addition, children are taught from an early age to see themselves as responsible for their own success or failure by their ability to perform in tests and examinations with Ball (2103, p.101) stating that pupils are 'encouraged to view themselves in terms of the paradigm of ability and its "normal" distribution'. Brown (2018, p.42) suggests that pupils who do not engage with school or achieve necessary qualifications then suffer a 'decline in future earnings' that they, and their parents, are deemed responsible for. Those who do not succeed in tests and examinations might blame themselves for their inability to achieve a 'pass', rather than consider the flaws within the system that favours some and not others (as seen in Chapter 4 with the 11-plus examination and selection for grammar schools). Thus, examinations can be seen to provide a convenient apparatus to manage individual aspirations, justify social segregation, and provide a measure of social control over the population. Whilst using tests and examinations within education as tools of social control has been evident since the introduction of these measures, the use of education per se, as a vehicle of social control can be traced back to the beginning of state funded education as indicated in Chapter 4 when, in the late 19th and early 20th century, poorer children were inculcated with messages about accepting their place in society (Donald 1992). A century later, it is possible to see how social segregation continues and is now legitimated on the basis of ability and performance in exams – demonstrating how those in power have successfully reinvented technologies of power to maintain the status quo (Joyce 2013) whilst the working classes may have been inured to 'habits of obedience' (Reay 2022, p.126).

This section has considered the complexity of assessment and the concepts associated with it. The following sections focus on the government policy preoccupation with examinations (as a form of summative assessment) and with performativity, which has gathered pace since the 1990s. The concepts that Broadfoot uses to describe the four functions of assessment - competence, competition, content and control – are also concepts that have permeated this study in relation to other areas of neoliberal education policy. As such these concepts serve a dual purpose here, providing a lens to critique the focus on examinations as a type of summative assessment, and the related area of performativity, whilst also being concepts to examine a neo-liberal policy approach to education – serving to demonstrate the contingency and complexity of education policy and the impact of this on schools, teachers and pupils.

6.3 Problematic practices in the performativity agenda

My key argument in this section is that the introduction and government use of league tables, together with monitoring and accountability of schools via Ofsted, has created a high stakes environment related to assessment within education in which schools are constantly under surveillance – reflecting what Broadfoot (1996) argues are the competence, competition, content, and control functions inherent in assessment which underpin the next sections. The annual publication of league tables ensures that schools' performance data (reflecting pupil 'competence') is regularly publicised, scrutinised and compared with other local and national schools. In addition, Ofsted has a pervasive remit evaluating every area of school 'content' with inspections taking place every few years. While there have been many iterations of the school inspection framework (five since 2010) there are now four key areas that judgements are made on – the quality of teaching, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management – as well as a judgement on overall effectiveness. Each area is judged to be either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate (Ofsted 2022) with decisions made in just a two-day inspection that schools are given no notice to prepare for. The need to comply with these government imposed high stakes accountability measures has resulted in some schools adopting particular practices aimed at 'gaming', or manipulating, the system – in order to achieve 'competitive' results necessary to be seen as a 'successful' and 'quality' school – and I argue these practices are leading to increased inequalities.

> *But I think the intense focus on testing assessment and accountability has led to this grey economy of gaming the system within education. So, head teachers have got this enormous pressure to account for their pupils' academic attainment and there is a lot of pressure on them to find quick fixes I think, especially when the attainment levels are below the national benchmarks. (Darlene)*

Such 'gaming' practices, raised by Darlene in her interview as indicated above, include narrowing the content of the curriculum to EBacc subjects to maximise chances of success in league tables, which is accompanied by pedagogical approaches like direct instruction and teaching to the test (both discussed in Chapter 5). It also includes the allocation of resources within schools to 'high' achievers and 'borderline pass' pupils to maximise the chances of those 'competent' pupils counting positively in league tables, thus disadvantaging 'lower' ability pupils. Furthermore, it includes *off-rolling* pupils who are at risk of failing examinations – illegally removing them from the school registers – to avoid them negatively impacting on schools' performance data and position in league tables. These practices are negatively impacting on disadvantaged pupils in particular and leading to the widening of inequality (Adams 2019b) – the opposite of what government policy claims is the intention. Thus, the manifestation of a performativity policy is complex and requires problematization and critique (Koopman 2013).

6.3.1 Shifts towards a culture of performativity

Tracing back to the late 1980s and 1990s it is possible to see how current practice is contingent on dominant discourses of those times and how the assessment and performativity agenda has become a 'pervasive presence' (Broadfoot 2007, p.19). As discussed in Chapter 5, the 1988 Education Reform Act marked a significant shift in policy. As well as giving control of the new national curriculum to the government – with associated and cumulative powers – it also introduced a national system of statutory testing for pupils and associated monitoring and accountability structures. These significant changes were justified in government discourse by the claim that there was a crisis in education and concerns around the ability of the education system to adequately prepare the future workforce (Chitty 2014) – thus creating the imperative for change. Standardised assessment tests (SATs) were introduced for pupils aged eleven and fourteen to act as indicators for GCSE examination success, and subsequently other layers of measurement have been added, for example, the value-added measure in 2002, contextual value added in 2006, expected progress in 2011 and progress 8 scores in 2016. In addition, very young pupils have since become subject to assessment with the introduction of progress checks for two- to three-year-olds and phonics screening for six-year-olds. These progress checks, assessments and examinations demonstrate how pupils have become 'objects that are perpetually examined' (Joyce 2013, p.272) and how examinations are used in the production of individuals (Foucault 1977b) – how the individual 'turns-out' is measured by their performance. As such, Ball (2013b, p.51) suggests,

> Measures (standards), methods (examination), techniques of analysis (statistics) which latterly attached themselves to knowledge (psychology) provided a technical repertoire for the classification of learners and the population as a whole

Whilst this practice of examinations and measurement, in relation to 'standards' has gathered pace since the 1990s it is possible to trace back even further to the introduction and development of state education. Broadfoot (1996, p.202) states, the Revised Code of 1861 introduced 'cost-effectiveness principles characteristic of business at that time' which linked the level of school funding (in the form of grants) to 'standards', in particular in relation to the measurement of pupil's progress in the three Rs. Garratt and Forrester (2012) suggest this was significant in illustrating the state's desire to exert control over education for the lower classes whilst Broadfoot (1996, p.9) argues that industrialisation and mass schooling necessitated new mechanisms for social control and 'formal assessment techniques with the educational process provided the solution to this problem' – the introduction of grammar schools in 1944, founded on the principle of measurement and selection of pupils through the 11-plus examination, might be considered an example of this. Thus, current policy and practice reflects principles established historically and can also be seen as contingent in that it has been shaped by rigid adherence to dominant discourses of recent decades – which have claimed the necessity of testing and measuring outcomes to raise standards – marginalising discourses that might have led to alternative possibilities.

My take in the end on the Gove reforms was that they wanted to make state schools more like grammar schools and private schools. And they created a curriculum and a method of judging success that was modelled on quite an old-fashioned idea of grammar schools and private schools. (Anna)

As assessment measures of pupils developed so too did the apparatus that would enable the government to monitor the school sector and hold it accountable. Broadfoot (1996, p.8) draws the distinction in accountability arrangements between quality *assurance*, which typically include forms of school self-evaluation, and quality *control*, characterised by inspection and publication of results against performance indicators, arguing that the latter is ‘an extremely powerful policy mechanism for exerting control over the education system’. Whilst schools in England had previously been accountable through the quality assurance processes of local authority’s new measures marked a significant shift towards quality control, justified in government discourse by the urgency to raise standards. League tables were introduced in 1992 which saw schools publicly ranked by their outcomes, and Ofsted also came into being (replacing HMI), with an inspection framework that had high stakes consequences if schools failed to meet the inspection criteria, with inspection reports being placed in the public domain to be analysed and compared. The notion of ‘threshold’ standards was introduced which schools were expected to exceed if they were to be considered comparatively successful. This was accompanied by layers of bureaucracy that have been necessitated in order to track, record and submit performance data so that schools can be classified and compared, arguably distracting schools from the focus on teaching and learning. The systemic assessment apparatus has become so embedded and normalised that Broadfoot (1996 p.8) suggests trying to dismantle it ‘would be likely to result in the collapse of the system itself’. Together with recent changes in other areas of education policy, examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 7, the government have been able to assemble power and control over the education system, legitimising this through crisis discourse – and presenting policy as necessary.

In addition, the changes in England reflected a global shift in measuring pupil performance, evidenced by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation) launch of the PISA survey in 1997. The PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) survey was intended to be undertaken every three years to provide comparative data on the performance of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science – it now includes data from over 80 countries and as Sellar et al (2017) suggest this is being used to provides insights into how nations are meeting the needs of young people to compete in a global and competitive workforce. The first survey was administered in 2000 and the results from this, and from subsequent surveys, have provided the government with data demonstrating that English pupils were ‘falling behind’ their international peers. The DfE (2016, p.98) has claimed that ‘compared to other advanced economies, England has a long tail of low achievement’, thus supporting a justification for the centralising control over both the curriculum and assessment and introduction of monitoring and accountability structures. Sellar et al (2017) provide an alternative discourse suggesting such adherence to PISA data is problematic. They argue that it is difficult to predict the quality of a future workforce on decontextualised tests taken at 15 years old, and that test scores are likely to reflect wider social conditions than simply relate to the quality of education – thus exposing flaws in the government's justification for policy. In addition, Sellar et al argue that the drive to compete in international league tables has resulted in shifts in the curriculum with a focus towards reading, maths and science at the expense of other subjects, reflecting the discussion in section 5.3. However, it is possible to see how current policy is contingent on developments from the late 1980s onwards and also how it marks a significant break from previous structures that were more about quality assurance than control. Information on individual school performance is now publicly available, supporting a neoliberal culture of competition and performativity, reinforcing the notion that pupils, teachers, and schools are indeed subject to the 'gaze' of the state (Youdell 2010).

From this it is possible to see how government policy makers have used discourse around falling standards as a tool to exercise power over schools, reflecting Broadfoot's (1996) belief that assessment performs a control function. Since the 1988 Education Reform Act and the introduction of league tables, successive governments have used measures of assessment to score political points with their opponents and brought education firmly in the arena of politics. Pupils' examination results, rather than a source of individual achievement, are now utilised by government and policy makers to justify ideologically based policy, using 'tried and tested' technologies of power – in this case the discourse of crisis. Through powerful rhetoric and scaremongering, the public are led to believe that pupils are 'falling behind' because of poor standards in schools, and thus face an uncertain future that they are unprepared for – justifying the need for the government to intervene and take control for the good of the nation and legitimising the focus on performativity in the name of improving standards.

> So much of the education debate in this country is backward looking: have standards fallen? Have exams got easier? These debates will continue, but what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic

> growth and our country's future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past (DfE 2010, p.3)

Hence, since the New Labour government (1997-2010) school performance has been used as a measure of both the health of the education system and also 'tightly tied to the needs of international economic competitiveness' (Ball 2013b, p. 102). Successive governments have claimed the purposes of using performance data is to hold individual schools accountable for their performance to ensure 'quality' provision, provide parents with information about their child's progress, to enable benchmarking between schools and monitor national standards over time (Bevan et al 2009, Bew et al 2011) – justified by the urgency in managing the perceived crisis in education. As such, as Ball (2013b, p.103) suggests, schools have become 'vehicles for government reason and regulation' and are 'captured in a matrix of calculabilities' underpinned by accountability systems that amount to surveillance in the name of 'good governance' (Rizvi and Lingard 2010, p.116).

It does give us, I think maybe two things, it highlights schools that are struggling so we can go in and help, but it also gives a national snapshot of performance of children at that chronological age, and I think that's helpful. I think the disadvantage is we also use the same system to monitor individual children's progress and to hold schools accountable. (Elizabeth)

It might be questioned if performance data can meet these multiple demands (Broadfoot 2007), a point also raised by Elizabeth during her interview as indicated above, but it has been used as such, with far-reaching consequences. Not least, government policy has led to schools becoming sites of competition, as part of a neo-liberal agenda, and subjected to market forces. Brown (2018, p.42) argues that a performative system has been built that

> constructs financial spurs and incentives in order to produce desired outcomes in which all significant relationships, including educational outcomes and school rankings, can be quantified and monetised

She goes on to argue that this highly regulated system in which 'performance can be measured quantitatively by test results' has led to the motivation of teachers and pupils to 'improve against the state determined performance targets' in their bid to ensure positive judgement in an increasingly competitive environment. Brown (2018) suggests this motivation is the result of how individuals might operate as potential 'entrepreneurs', driven by self-interest. In relation to schools, the failure to meet desired outcomes carries high stakes as schools stand to lose pupils and associated income, and hence the relentless pursuit of ‘quality’ outcomes, even if at a human cost. It is pertinent here to critique the notion of ‘quality’. In current discourse the assumption is that quality is related to outcomes – rankings in league tables and Ofsted categorisation – but it is more complex that this, requiring critique in order to expose the limits assumed by and imposed upon thought and practice (Koopman 2013). As Broadfoot (2007, p.64) suggests, the ‘language of standards and targets, performance indicators and strategies’ is considered synonymous with quality, providing a ‘functional’ definition of quality rather than one based on what might be exceptional. Quality has come to mean what can be easily measured rather than less tangible phenomena for example, the ethos and culture of a school or the ability to develop pupils’ love of learning or promote citizenship, and this reflects the values of policy makers. Nuttall (1994) suggests the choice of what to measure and how to do this is driven by those in power and their values, assumptions, and motivations – current policy makers have a clear focus on performativity as the key to improving ‘standards’, and as such performance data has come to reflect national systemic ‘quality’, reflecting what is and what is not valued by a government underpinned by neoliberal beliefs.

This shift towards a performativity culture, with the analysis of the school sector and its systemic functioning, has also exposed the contradictory nature of government policy. On the one hand the government have sought control of ‘standards’ and ‘outcomes’, justified by the need to respond to the perceived fall in ‘standards’, demonstrating a centralising policy agenda in which the government now intervene in the ‘minutiae of classroom processes and teacher-student interactions’ (Ball 2013b, p.108). On the other hand, policy has become decentralised as the government has firmly placed the responsibility for outcomes with schools, abdicating their responsibility for this in the name of school ‘autonomy’, with ‘little understanding of the consequences of this’ (Broadfoot 2007, p.31). Schools are expected to reach high threshold standards regardless of their pupil intakes and level of funding – as such there are built in inequalities that have resulted in some schools ‘gaming’ the system to meet expectations – whilst this might have enabled schools to achieve a veneer of success demonstrated by positive outcomes, it has had consequences for teachers and pupils, as examined in the next section.

6.3.2 The emergence of problematic practices in schools

The unrelenting focus on school performance data has undoubtedly led to changes in the curriculum and changes to pedagogical practices as discussed in Chapter 5. Whilst Broadfoot (2007) suggests that the content of the curriculum is *influenced* by assessment practices, more recently it is argued that these practices *determine* the curriculum, as the government have centralised their control in this area. As discussed in Chapter 5 this has led to a knowledge-based curriculum and the evaluation of this via end point GCSE examinations, with a subsequent narrowing of the curriculum and removal of developmental assessment opportunities, like ongoing coursework. As such, there are many skills and competencies, for example, problem solving, enquiry and teamwork, that many consider should be in the curriculum (Hargreaves 2004, Reay 2017, Wrigley 2018) that are excluded from it and hence are not assessed in examinations, and this effectively excludes the potential opportunities for many pupils to 'succeed'. Broadfoot (2007) suggests these things are considered difficult to assess in a systematic and reliable way with the potential for teacher led assessment to include bias. This issue was debated during the recent COVID pandemic when alternatives to GCSE and A-Level examinations were necessitated, including use of teacher assessment, enabling alternative discourses to gain ground and call for more permanent assessment reform. The hope that this temporary shift from examinations might provide opportunity to re-imagine end of school assessments towards more holistic practices were soon dashed with the return to exams, representing a lost opportunity (Hyman 2012) and reflecting the government discourse that they are a more accurate measure of achievement. Hence, the continued over reliance on high stakes examinations that supports the government preoccupation with what can be measured to provide 'evidence' of quality and rigor, despite them being very limiting. As Boyle (2001, p.45) suggests 'because it is so hard to measure what is really important, governments and institutions pin down something else' – this serves to exclude the potential competencies and achievements of many pupils, particularly those who may not perform well in examination contexts, who as Hyman (2021) outlines are much more likely to be disadvantaged pupils.

Whilst the narrowing of the curriculum and subsequent shifts in pedagogy have already been critiqued in Chapter 5 there are other examples of practices that some schools have developed that are aimed at 'gaming' the system and that require critique as per Koopman's approach to genealogy – in particular the reorganisation of classroom spaces, the allocation of resources in schools to borderline pass pupils, and the practice of off-rolling.

The direct instruction pedagogies that teachers in some schools are expected to adhere to – supposedly to better prepare pupils for knowledge retention and exam success – has been accompanied in some schools by a reorganisation of classroom space. Rather than pupils seated together in groups, which supports more progressive pupil-centred pedagogies, many classrooms now have pupils seated in rows, often to deter engagement with peers and enable teaching, and control, from the front. This is reminiscent of 19th century classrooms that 'rendered individual children the object of various forms of control, knowledge and concern' (Donald 1992, p.31). It is also suggestive of the spatial elements Foucault (1977b) discussed, the placement of individuals for territory and classification and production of 'docile bodies'. Such strategies in today's schools, largely those in disadvantaged communities where the focus is on control of particular pupils, exposes the 'subtle mechanisms' of power (Foucault 1980, p.102) and reflects the continued focus on control in regard to teaching, learning and assessment. More broadly this exposes how current policy reflects a return to historical models in education, as Anna reflected on in her interview outlined below, despite the government knowing the inequalities these practices perpetuated, thus undermining their claim to be committed to reducing those inequalities.

> *But as in all things with education, all of this intertwines with child poverty and then also resources for schools. So, you can't have a very progressive system… I think one of the things about the un-relaxed system that we have now with everyone sitting in rows and large classes, that kind of Far Eastern model, is it really suits a less well-funded system. But it doesn't suit the children necessarily and it doesn't suit the teachers. (Anna)*

Such classifications extend to funding and opportunities for pupils. In such a competitive environment where the position in league tables is so high stakes, some schools have focussed resources on those pupils more likely to gain the results that contribute to those rankings, in what Ball (2013b, p.109) argues amounts to 'a form of moral and economic decision making'. Pupils are 'objectified' in terms of their ability, reminiscent of post war selection processes, with 'high achieving' and borderline pupils supported with additional revision classes, 'master-classes' and teacher time to secure positive results. In schools with limited budgets (particularly those in disadvantaged communities) this invariably means that some pupils are excluded from access to additional support, which Ball (2013b, p.109) argues reflects ‘the logic of performance and productivity’ and the ‘effect of residualization’ – a break is established between those worth investing in to maximise performance data and those who are not, who are unlikely to ‘count’, a point also raised by Darlene in her interview outlined below. Thus, selection mechanisms continue by stealth – the majority of children in the country may attend non-selective schools but are subject to subtle yet pervasive practices that enable some pupils to be advantaged over others, undermining any notion of equality of opportunity or the possibility of *equality of outcome* that Gewirtz (1998, p.472) suggests is a greater indicator of social justice.

> *And I think it’s really difficult, I mean what it’s not focused on is what the experiences then are for children caught up in these, you know, power plays and attempts to game the system. And I think they often get neglected those children in the bottom sets, you know, they are written off because they are not going to be, you know, the game changers in terms of the league table, unless they get a C, so why bother. (Darlene)*

Off-rolling is another practice that has emerged as a direct consequence of the current performativity and accountability culture, that foregrounds standards and performance data over the principles of inclusion. It refers to the illegal practice of removing pupils from the school roll and thus is distinguished from sanctioned exclusion processes. Done and Knowler (2020) suggest that whilst much of the data around off-rolling is anecdotal, given that schools attempt to conceal this illegal activity, there is now emerging data to suggest it is a growing concern and thus there are emerging discourses related to this. Recent reports (DfE 2019c, YouGov 2019, Graham et al 2019) have found evidence of off-rolling in schools and also indicated that it is pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils who are disproportionately represented in exclusion data and off-rolling data, hence another strategy that impacts on particular pupils as Fran reflected on in her interview, as below.

> *But I do think the accountability system, you know, that causes a lot of gaming, and we know that in turn that incentivises some schools to get rid of the kids who are not going to get the good results. (Fran)*

The YouGov study (2019) stated that league tables were considered a key driver for off-rolling, suggesting what Machin and Sandi (2020, p.125) refer to as ‘strategic pupil exclusion’ and what Slee (2019, p.909) believes is due to the ‘ethic of competitive individualism’. As such the pressure from government policy on school leaders can be seen as a key cause of their participation in exclusionary practices and a disconnect from their own pedagogic values – reflecting what Moore and Clarke (2016, p.667) found in their studies, that the requirement of official policy on teachers ‘was at odds with their own deeply held view of what public education was fundamentally for’, with a recognition that their desire to support pupils achieve good results in exams would invariably lead to others failing, ‘serving to perpetuate socio-economic inequalities in the wider world’. This was reflected in the tensions described by Charlotte, a current Chief Executive of a multi-academy trust, in her interview.

> *I don’t want the young people in my own school to be disadvantaged because actually I spend all my time arguing with the metrics. So, in the end, what we always do is just get on with it, and we do our best with it, and we try and beat the system……..I wouldn’t do anything that I didn’t feel was correct. But equally I can’t allow the young people that I work with to be disadvantaged. (Charlotte)*

Whilst evidence suggests the practice of off-rolling affects those with special educational needs and the disadvantaged, it is not necessarily happening in the schools that serve disadvantaged communities. Done and Knowler (2020, p.518) refer to schools ‘with student populations possessing high level of social capital that are seeking to maintain high performance ratings and market position’ as potential utilisers of this strategy. As such, those disadvantaged pupils and/or ‘less able’ pupils within ‘high performing’ or ‘outstanding’ schools are more likely to be subject to off-rolling, perpetuating the inequalities they face. This is a direct result of neoliberal government policy that has sought to develop competition and control through a performativity culture, which is leading to the development of covert technologies of practice, a dissonance with pedagogic values and hence changing not only what teachers ‘do’ but ‘who they are’ (Ball 2003, p.215).

There is evidence however, that the current government performativity agenda is being challenged, for example through the Re-thinking Assessment campaign. This involves a coalition of school leaders and teachers from state and independent schools who are lobbying to ‘modernise’ assessment to provide an alternative to examinations which they consider limiting ‘with an emphasis on factual recall over deep thinking’. They are providing alternative discourses around assessment and calling for a ‘more balanced, holistic and “multi-modal” approach’ which ‘supports ongoing learning and enables young people to demonstrate what they know and can do’ (Rethinking Assessment 2023).

> *And I think if we are talking about assessment, I should have mentioned there is this big movement, Rethinking Assessment, which is an alliance of state school and private school big chesses and I think it's having quite a lot of pressure. Putting a lot of pressure, even on the government. (Anna)*

To those immersed in the current system this coalition might provide a 're-imagining' of assessment and opportunity to consider a different future possibility. However, the current examination system has become embedded over many years – it is contingent on age-old practices and these practices are now entrenched, as evidenced by the immediate return to examinations following the COVID pandemic which failed to provide the hoped-for impetus for change. Schools have come to be defined by their performance data and ranking in league tables and teachers have arguably become commodities in a performativity culture – they are the means to the end, and as such their ability to secure pupil outcomes has become paramount.

6.4 Performativity – tormenting our teachers?

Whereas the last section looked at how the performativity agenda has impacted on school practices this section looks particularly at the impact on teachers. My key argument here is that the practices some schools have adopted have increased pressure on teachers and further reduced their autonomy – in both what and how they teach. Whilst the government (DfE 2010, DfE 2016) claim their policies provide greater autonomy, the reverse seems to be true. Many teachers are subject to close monitoring and are 'performance managed' to ensure compliance and obedience to this performativity culture, demonstrating how Broadfoot's (1996) notions of assessment as competence, competition, content, and control apply to teachers. This 'performativity problem' is contributing to a recruitment and retention crisis and is impacting more on schools in disadvantaged communities where expectations for outcomes are the same but where resources are more limited, subsequently impacting on pupils in those schools.

> *So, I think that teachers are feeling that they have to do it too. And I mean I think it's just unbelievable, when you go to other countries like Finland they just can't understand our total obsession with assessment measuring and testing. They don't do any of that and their children are doing so much better than ours. (Darlene)*

Whilst teachers might have entered the profession for intrinsic purposes, for example to work with children, to inspire young minds and generate curiosity or because of their own experiences of education (Heinz 2014, Kass and Miller 2018, Goller et al 2019), the current climate of performativity, has arguably reduced teachers to undertaking what Haberman (2008) described as 'shallow' functions – giving information and directions through direct instruction pedagogies, giving tests to establish grades and rankings and punishing non-compliance. These shallow functions have been exacerbated in recent times by the imposition on some teachers of externally constructed lesson plans and resources and the mis-use of direct instruction pedagogies (discussed in Chapter 5) – all part of the performativity culture and preoccupation with ensuring pupils are prepared for exams, reducing the role of the teacher to a facilitator or technician (Ball 2008, Pinar 2004) and rendering the process of teaching and learning to an 'input-output calculation (Ball 2013b, p.104). Many teachers might thus consider their professional identity and status challenged by the government policy preoccupation with performativity with Moore and Clarke (2016, p.667) suggesting this might render 'the tenability of their work both fragile and vulnerable'. As discussed in Chapter 5 this is also problematic as the strategies teachers are having to deploy do not adequately prepare pupils for the world of work, a point raised by Grace in her interview outlined below in which she warns of the impact of this on pupils – denying them the opportunities to experience 'more relevant and fruitful forms of learning' (Broadfoot 2007, p.34), and thus policy can be seen to denigrate both teacher and pupil.

> *The problem is that rote memorisation is fine for low level order thinking but it's not effective for the types of learning and engagement that citizens in the 21st century will need. So, they are going to need the ability to connect, the ability to articulate, the ability to investigate, the ability to work together…. what we are doing is ramping up the rote memorisation because of exams, we are not teaching the 21st century skills that need to be taught and we are creating, so for poor children they walk away from that because they know that the odds are stacked against them in that. And for many children and young people we are creating a learned helplessness in schools and when they get to university what they want is, what do I need to do to get the mark? (Grace)*

These practices are often found in schools in more disadvantaged areas where there are diverse intakes and limited resources, exacerbating the pressure on schools to meet threshold standards to compete in league tables, thus perpetuating the disadvantage that disadvantaged or working-class pupils face, whilst also impacting on the experiences of teachers in those schools. Ball (2013b, p.136) suggests that in ‘regimes of performativity’ it is productivity that matters as opposed to experience. In this context teachers become commodities, with their worth judged on their ability to ‘perform’ and secure positive pupil outcomes as per the competitive function of education (Broadfoot 1996) – failure to do so is addressed through school performance management systems that have also been developed as part of the accountability and quality agenda, reflecting how the competence and control function of education (Broadfoot 1996) applies to teachers as well as pupils. Teachers themselves are assessed and measured with performance management procedures providing ‘regulation’ and also determining movement up the pay spine. Threshold related pay was introduced in the late 1990s with movement through the main pay scale and progression onto the upper pay scale (post-threshold) being dependent on teachers meeting pupil performance targets (DfEE 1998). This is reminiscent of the payment by results system of the 19th century, where policy sought to combine the need to ‘control the content of mass education and to ensure standards’ to reflect a good return on state investment (Broadfoot 1996) – simultaneously exercising control over teachers in the process. This provides another example of how assessment is used as both a content and control mechanism (Broadfoot 1996, 2007) in which teachers can be subject to a tyranny of ‘little fears’ (Ball 2013b, p.140) with economic imperatives becoming a determinant of classroom practice – all resulting in compliance to a performativity agenda at the expense of ‘moral and intellectual obligations’ (Ball 2013b, p.139). It is noted that the accountability measures some school leaders have put in place are a reflection of external accountability measures and the pressures they are themselves experiencing. As Bousted (2022, p.14) suggests,

> School leaders’ fear of Ofsted contributes to their unintended devaluing of teacher’s knowledge and professional experience, which leaves teachers detached from decisions about the curriculum, teaching and learning strategies and assessment

Whilst teachers have always been accountable for the learning of pupils there has been a shift in how this is evaluated. Tracing back over the last twenty years in particular the use of ‘appraisals’ or professional development discussions was common – with conversations that might focus on skills and development. This has shifted towards ‘performance’ management, reflecting the preoccupation with results and outcomes, and clearly involving judgements about performance based on pupil exam results – and as Ball (2003a, p.218) suggests ‘the ethics of competition and performance are very different from the older ethics of professional judgement and co-operation’ and introduce into the arena ‘individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy’ (Ball 2003, p.221). This is likely perpetuated by the annual lesson observations that many teachers are required to comply with. Like examinations that pupils are subject to, these reflect ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ in just one specific moment in time and perhaps expose the ‘subtle mechanisms’ of power (Foucault 1980, p.102) that are used on teachers as well as pupils within schools. This might be considered the antithesis of an education system based on pedagogic values and one that more reflects the subtle mechanisms of power related to competence, competition, content, and control (Broadfoot 1996).

> *I just think it’s all become top heavy with exams, I think teaching has become a much less satisfying occupation because of the narrowing of the curriculum and the piling on of the curriculum and exams and that’s why teachers are leaving in droves. So, I think there is too much of that. (Anna)*
>
> *They are working in institutions where, you know, the head is under a lot of pressure from the academy trust or the governors, the head is very stressed, that creates a very stressful environment for people to work in. Some of the things that people are expected to do are absolutely mad in order to chase these results and I think it’s very stressful. (Fran)*

As indicated above both Anna and Fran raised the impact of the performativity agenda on teachers within their interviews. Many teachers working in these conditions are suffering what Broadfoot (2007, p.102) regards as the ‘significant and largely negative emotional impact’ of performance management and an ‘oppressive’ standards agenda. Together with an excessively heavy workload (Bousted 2022, p.10) and reduction of autonomy, this subjection to persistent monitoring and judgement in relation to pupil outcomes, is resulting in many teachers leaving the profession, contributing to what is now considered a recruitment and retention crisis (Worth 2020, Worth and Van den Brande 2020, McLean et al 2023).)

6.4.1 Performativity – the real crisis

Whilst governments over the last decade have referred to a crisis in education to justify ‘radical change’ (Clarke 2019, p.1) the consequences of the policies they have implemented have arguably led to a real crisis, in the recruitment and retention of teachers. Whilst this section may seem a deviation from the focus of this chapter it is included to demonstrate the impact of the performativity agenda, that together with issues raised in previous chapters, is impacting on the supply of teachers into our schools and ultimately impacts on pupils.

Current statistics indicate that 23% of teachers have left the profession within 3 years of joining, 31.2% within 5 years and 40.3% within 10 years (DfE 2022d), representing a haemorrhage to the profession. DfE reports into teacher supply have cited workload as the top issue affecting retention followed by government initiative/policy changes (DfE 2017, DfE 2023). Concerns around teacher supply led to the Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE 2019d), providing the government with an opportunity to make further reforms to deal with a crisis that government policy itself is responsible for. This provides an example of what Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.20) regard as the unintended consequences of the policy cycle – conformity to one policy and achievement of its goals ‘inhibits the achievement of other goals’, in this case teacher supply. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy outlined key priorities around school culture and reform of the accountability system, the development of an Early Career Framework to support new teachers, the development of specialist qualifications to support teachers staying in the classroom and simplifying the process to become a teacher. The enactment of these priorities and manifestation in practice has caused upheaval in the education sector in particular in relation to Initial Teacher Education (discussed in Chapter 7) and have done little to avert the crisis in teacher supply as evidenced by the most recent statistics on retention.

In terms of recruitment to the profession, the lead economist for the National Foundation of Educational Research (NFER) recently reported that ‘the number of trainees entering initial teacher training in 2022 was further below target than at any point in at least the last decade’ and that ‘this challenge is particularly acute for secondary schools, given the difficulties of recruiting enough teachers in STEM subjects such as physics, computing, chemistry and maths’ (Worth 2023). Hence, as a political device, the accountability and performativity agenda, might serve the government well – to demonstrate how they are ‘tackling’ the perceived crisis of falling standards in schools – but this evidence is suggesting it is not serving teachers well, arguably the most valuable resource in our schools, and as

Martindale (2019) suggests is resulting in employment of more unqualified teachers, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities. The next section examines discourses around the impact of the performativity culture on pupils.

6.5 Have we reduced our pupils to mere numbers in a performativity culture?

In this section I argue that the performativity agenda has damaging consequences on pupils – in the drive to meet threshold targets in league tables many pupils are being negatively impacted. Pupils are subject to selection and sifting practices into ability groups (examined in Chapter 3) and the focus on end of school examinations as the key form of assessment has led to the exacerbation of inequalities rather than the reduction of them.

6.5.1 Selection by stealth

Current practices of selection on the basis of ability are contingent on policy and practice in the past and need to be problematized and critiqued (Koopman 2013). Tracing back through time children have been segregated in the state education system according to their perceived intellectual abilities. During the 19th century the Fabian leader Sidney Webb planned 'specialised' schools to fit the needs of 'particular' children. As Donald (1992) outlines the discourse around education at this time led to a system based on segregation, in which 'classificatory practices' (Ball 2013b, p.42) became embedded.

> Bright children, as identified by mental measurement, were to be separated from other children diagnosed as potentially dangerous or in danger, and therefore in need of care and control (Donald 1992, p.29)

The emergence of state schooling in the 19th century became part of wider reforms and regulations, including public health reforms, that were aimed at managing the population under the guise of concerns for the wellbeing and security of the nation, but ultimately representing what Ball (2013b, p.43) has called the developing 'grid of power'. The classification, 'measurement' and examination of children in education was accompanied by the development of systems of 'scholastic accountancy' to record and file these measurements within 'ignoble archives' (Foucault 1977b, p.191). These examinations might not have been in the same form as the examinations in the current education system, but they did signify the notion that some sort of systematic measurement of an individual was necessary and this has continued, becoming embedded in schools with the emergence of assessment tracking software to aid the process – thus as Ball (2013b, p.105) suggests pupils have become 'invested in, as a resource for the school and indirectly the nation'. Hence, the emergence of further techniques of those in power to 'judge, measure, compare' individuals, and the identification of individuals who have to be 'trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded' (Foucault 1977b, p.191). As such the measurement of learning takes precedence over the promotion of learning.

Selection and measurement on the basis of ability has continued over time with Broadfoot (1996) arguing this has been both implicit and explicit on often based on pre-existing stereotypes. It was the foundation of the tripartite system introduced in 1944, as discussed in Chapter Four, and with the advent of comprehensive education from the 1960s onwards there may have been mixed ability intakes into schools but selection and sifting of children by ability then happened *within* schools – through systems of streaming or setting – in what Brown (1990, p.75) has described as 'social selection by stealth'. This was supported by government discourse (DfES 2004) around the need to personalise learning to meet the needs of individual pupils, or groups of pupils, but might also be perceived as a subtle mechanism through which power and control is exercised, reflecting Broadfoot's notion that control is a key function of assessment. Donald (1992, p.42) suggests this amounts to children being 'regrouped around statistical norms' and whilst he was referring to 19th century policy, we can see how current policy is contingent with historic and habitual forms of selection and sifting of the population continuing from the 19th century into the 21st. This is more problematic when considering the high correlation between social class and sets or ability groups in school (Boaler 2005), with the incidence of 'lower' ability groups being populated by more disadvantaged pupils, perpetuating their disadvantage. As Armstrong (2002, p.443) outlines,

> Historically, formal educational structures in England are grounded in systems, structures, processes and curricula based on the division, assessment and categorisation of learners. These divisions have taken place according to formal and informal measures relating to place, class, gender, race, perceived ability and disability, academic performance and assumptions about learners.

Thus, the use of ability groupings in schools support the sifting and selection of pupils and can be seen as a tool to control and manage expectations and aspirations – those in lower ability groups learn to accept their position due to their own 'limitations', and those in the higher ability groups can be prepared for further study and are encouraged to develop higher aspirations. Ball (2013b, p.51) refers to this as 'grouping by performance' suggesting that this is 'taken to be an indicator of something deeper – ability' and representing the 'erasure of difference'. Though some schools have chosen different terminology to describe the groupings it is perhaps disingenuous to think that pupils are unaware of their positioning on the basis of their perceived ability. In a study into learner attitudes, Tereshchenko et al (2019, p.439) found students able to clearly articulate their views on setting and mixed ability with the survey indicating that mixed ability grouping was favoured by lower ability and disadvantaged pupils due to a more 'inclusive and collaborative environment'. In her interview Darlene also talked about the pervasiveness of 'ability grouping' and the impact of this on pupils' identity, as indicated below.

> *You know, the assessment and testing has meant that ability grouping has become de rigueur, you know, they are everywhere as I say now in nursery classes. And that ability grouping is having an incredible impact on children's learning identities right at the beginning of their education. And as I said it's the children who seem to be less able, and they all know what sets they have been allocated to and where those sets are in that hierarchy of status and worth. (Darlene)*

Whilst some schools do opt for mixed ability classes to counter obvious classification by ability, there are still often subtle segregations even in these classrooms, afforded by the use of seating plans and use of space. Pupils are often carefully 'placed' in the classroom so that those of perceived similar ability can work together – justified by suggesting this enables the teacher to adapt teaching to support those with differing needs. Ball (2013b, p.100) suggests that 'the organisation of bodies in the classroom relates to the social structure of the population' with working class students over-represented on the 'bottom tables'. As such, even in what might be considered more 'inclusive' schools we see that 'the residue of "fixed" notions of ability based on the psychology of the last century…..is still present in the ways in which children are organized, talked about and taught into the new millennium' (Rausch 2012, p.118) and thus current practice can be seen to be contingent. This invariably impacts on what pupils believe about themselves and their potential and this can impact on their wellbeing. Reay (2017, p.98) suggests that whilst levels of educational wellbeing in England are generally low it is low achievers who have 'lower levels of wellbeing than high achievers' and it is 'working class children clustered in the lower sets who are suffering the most' – points clearly articulated by Darlene in her interview, as indicated below.

> *And it's those children, predominately working class, ethnically diverse children, in the bottom sets who are repeatedly telling me that they are rubbish, they were no good or even that they were nothing, you know, that they had no worth and value. And I think that's shocking and we only have to juxtapose that incredible sort of remorseless focus on assessment and testing with UK and particularly English children's declining levels of happiness and wellbeing in schooling. We are really right at the bottom of the wellbeing PAC testing tables. (Darlene)*

6.5.2 Pupils and exams – the quest for performance data in a high stakes context

Neo-liberal government policy has created an environment in schools that places the responsibility for educational achievement firmly in the domain of pupils, parents, and schools. Whilst the government has assumed control of the curriculum and the assessment of it, they do not consider themselves responsible for the outcomes of this, implementing apparatus for monitoring and accountability that schools have to adhere to, reflecting simultaneous centralising and decentralising policy. Pupil performance data is collected, analysed and communicated to a public audience via league tables and Ofsted inspection reports, that the government claim ensures transparency and provides information to parents on which schools (and their pupils) are succeeding and which are not. This is high stakes, as indicated in the above sections, as schools require positive outcomes in such a competitive market – levels of funding in schools are dependent on pupil numbers, hence the reputation of the school is paramount in securing pupil admissions. However, the suggestion that schools (and its pupils) are on a proverbial level playing field and can all achieve high outcomes requires critique, especially when considering it is those schools in disadvantaged communities that are often ranked lower in league tables and more likely to be labelled as requiring improvement or inadequate in Ofsted inspections. The performance data of a school reflects the pupils in that school – pupils cannot be seen as mere numbers or statistics but as individuals who have different experiences, at home and at school, that impact on their ability to succeed. Hence in Chapter 4 the inequalities inherent in the structure and organisation of education in England was discussed and in Chapter 5 the inequalities relating to the curriculum offered to some pupils was critiqued – both providing evidence that some pupils were severely disadvantaged by the current system of education. Below is an extract from the interview with Darlene who spoke passionately about the impact of the current school culture and focus on assessment and testing.

> *I think that that's what children have been reduced to in schools, you know, certain numbers. And I think that the assessment process is really intensifying inequalities and reducing children's sense of wellbeing, but particularly working-class children's sense of wellbeing. Because they are the ones who are positioned as the losers, so a small minority can be the winners, the successes. And I think there is a really damaging culture of hyper-competition in schools that has come with this remorseless focus on assessment and testing. (Darlene)*

The idea that all pupils are equally equipped to pass examinations needs to be challenged. The access that some pupils have to the tools required to be successful in school is vastly variable with Broadfoot (2007) citing emotional, circumstantial, psychological, and social factors. Brown (2018, p.59) refers to the 'educational binds of poverty' that have a major impact on the ability of some pupils to achieve in the current education system and accounts for why many poorer or disadvantaged pupils continue to face barriers that are absent for their more advantaged peers. These 'binds' include material deprivation and the access to resources, illuminated in the recent COVID pandemic as discussed in Chapter 4. Evans (2006) argues this material deprivation is supported by the structures set up by the ruling classes, and in particular the Conservative Party that serves as its political arm. Evans argues that during Conservative led governments the working class are more likely to suffer as the 'natural' party of power seeks to ensure that wealth is redistributed to favour the rich to ensure they remain in power – the working class and disadvantaged struggle financially and the ability of pupils to contribute to the family income through paid work becomes more highly valued. This results in many pupils taking on paid work as soon as possible, undermining their engagement with school and their ability to succeed in exams, exacerbating inequalities as their wealthier peers do not experience the same family pressures.

This relates to the alienating culture of schools that Brown (2018) indicates is also a significant 'bind', linking to Bourdieu's theory of 'symbolic violence' – the idea that the 'dominant' culture of those in power is so nationally accepted that the culture of poorer or working-class pupils is marginalised. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.13) suggest this understanding is so embedded in the 'social imaginary' that people 'cannot even conceive of how things could be otherwise'. As discussed in Chapter 5 the notion that disadvantaged pupils should develop *cultural capital* that government policy suggests is imperative for their success, serves to valorise dominant, middle class cultural capital whilst communicating that 'working class knowledge' (Reay, 2017) is inferior. Other 'binds' that Brown (2018) refers to are the importance of school friendships and networks in pupil learning and the impact of 'turbulence' – the idea that disadvantaged pupils might move school more often, due to instability of family circumstances or school exclusions that evidence suggests impact disadvantaged pupils more. Whilst school moves can affect many pupils, as parents of all socio-economic groups might relocate due to employment for example, it is the combination of several 'binds' that are likely to lead to impact on educational outcomes and perpetuate disadvantage, and lead to pupils becoming 'tourists' in school rather than 'citizens' (Frieberg 1996). Of course, some pupils overcome these binds for whatever reason and are often used as examples to demonstrate the potential for so called social mobility, though Brown (2018, p.59) concludes that,

> Despite the hope invested in making all schools successful according to the criteria defined by a neoliberal education system, the facts are clear: whether it be in terms of PISA data or test and exam results the problem of underperformance in education by those from low-income families persists

Yet, as Broadfoot (2007, p.23) suggests, it is these assessments and examinations that have provided a level of control in society over many decades with the failure of pupils to succeed 'deemed the result of inborn limitations'. Pupils, from the very start of their education, are socialised to believe they are responsible for their lot in life through their own failings – reflecting a level of self-monitoring that Foucault (1977) believed was the key in relation to discipline and control. In accepting such failing Broadfoot (1996, p.10) suggests that pupils 'acquiesce not only in their own defeat but in the legitimacy of the prevailing social order' – the belief that they have failed in an 'apparently fair competition' and must demonstrate resilience in the face of this, serves as a measure of social control whilst enabling the government to avoid tackling the systemic injustices that preserve the status quo. As Anna suggested in her interview, outlined below, this all supports a 'rather empty' social mobility agenda and detracts from 'rich' learning.

> *I have read of examples of nurseries they will say, everybody is going to go to university, because this all dovetails with a rather empty social mobility agenda, in my view, where all poor children are told, you are going to go to university……. I think you are too young at three to be doing nursery rituals which involve you saying, and I am going to end up going to a university. I think that's ridiculous. So personally, I am very interested in much more progressive ideas about how young people learn. And there are projects, there's the Emilio Reggio project in Italy which is just the most incredibly rich. (Anna)*

Ming (2018, p.167) argues that whilst this might lead to disaffection amongst young people, the rhetoric around resilience deflects a greater danger that would come about through a debate on how we might change 'human ecologies in the direction of greater livabilities', which would challenge the powerful and raise uncomfortable questions about the social order. As such, 'the individual is the dominant frame of analysis, not the broader ecologies in which they are situated' – hence disadvantaged pupils are led to believe they have an equal chance to succeed, developing what Berlant (2011) refers to as a cruel optimism, and to accept that it is their own fault if they do not. Hence assessment in all its forms can be seen to support an agenda of social control and the subsequent maintenance of the status quo.

> *The idea the school, Eton, should in theory get all the same results as a sort of very mixed comprehensive school in the East End of London or in Blackpool is absurd, but that's what we expect schools to do. (Fran)*

In conclusion, it is important to note that the assessment and performativity culture can have a detrimental impact on *all* pupils. Those who are considered 'high-achievers' are under immense pressure to 'succeed' and can develop anxieties around exam performance. As teachers are 'focusing their concerns' on pupils who are borderline and have potential to count positively in performance data (Gillbourn and Youdell 2000) these pupils are subject to intense scrutiny and pressure. And pupils who are disadvantaged and those who predominantly occupy the 'lower ability' groupings are more likely to feel they cannot succeed and hence dis-engage from education (Reay 2017). This was reflected in the comment below that Beatrice made in her interview.

> *So, you have got two types at the moment of almost school refusal, those who are highly anxious because they are worried about failing, and those who know they are failing and don't feel there is any point continuing. (Beatrice)*

Furthermore, Broadfoot (1996, p.40) argues the processes of assessment legitimate education systems that are 'strongly biased in favour of traditional privilege', thus contesting the government discourse that suggests their policy supports so-called social mobility and reduces inequalities.

6.6 Conclusion

The above sections have sought to demonstrate the complexities inherent in policy and practice around assessment and performativity, with the submerged and emerging problems resulting from this policy being critiqued in order to demonstrate how current policy and practice is contingent (Koopman 2013). To reflect the feminist genealogy approach to the study, and focus on amplifying women's voices, this chapter has drawn largely on the works of Patricia Broadfoot, a prominent female on the discourse around assessment. In addition, the perspectives of the women interviewed as part of this study have been drawn upon to frame substantive points, with direct quotes from the interviews integrated within each section.

The analysis of policy in this chapter suggests the need for a complete re-imagining of assessment and monitoring/accountability structures. A focus on pupil assessments and end of school examinations can be regarded as limiting and reductive, providing only a snapshot of pupil achievement that is possible to measure, and thus serving to widen inequalities. The skills and competencies required for an ever-evolving employment landscape are being undermined at the expense of developing a curriculum that can be easily assessed, measured, and quantified.

The fundamental claim the government has made since 2010 to justify instituting such far-reaching systemic change in education – to improve standards and outcomes that were falling behind in international league tables – can be critiqued by reference to the 2018 PISA survey that provides little evidence of improvement (OECD 2019). In addition, the report on Ofsted by the National Audit Office (2018, p.9) indicated that

> Ofsted does not know whether its school inspections are having the intended impact: to raise the standards of education and improve the quality of children's and young people's lives.

The government discourse around the perceived ‘crisis’ in standards, which justified the implementation of a plethora of high stakes performativity practices, is critiqued and rather a crisis in education can be seen as a *result* of performativity structures. This crisis in education is one in which some schools are adopting ‘gaming’ practices in order to survive in such a competitive environment, where teachers are often reduced to technicians and facilitators as their autonomy over the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is removed and pupils are reduced to numbers on spreadsheets, experiencing sifting and selection practices reminiscent of a century ago – reflecting an agenda of social control and preserving the status quo. The discourses examined in this study suggests it is schools serving more disadvantaged communities that are more negatively impacted by the effects of the assessment and performativity culture, as well as the teachers and pupils within these schools. This suggests a critical juncture in our education system, where there is a threat to the quality and status of the profession and a crisis in pedagogic values, that is creating further divisions and intensifying inequalities rather than diminishing them. This suggests that a change is needed towards an assessment system based on the needs of all pupils, that would reflect a broader curriculum and remove reliance on high stakes assessments and exams, thus re-asserting the status of teachers and schools in assessing pupil learning and school evaluation.

Whilst it is possible to see how current policy related to performativity is contingent and has become possible due to adherence to dominant discourses of the 1980s and beyond, a genealogical approach is also about looking forward to future conditions of possibility. Government policy requires challenging to illuminate the far-reaching consequences of that policy in practice, particularly for disadvantaged communities where a focus on examinations as the key focus for assessment is considered so limiting. There are emerging seeds of hope evidenced by the Re-thinking Assessment campaign as indicated in section 6.3.2. offering alternative discourses to inform future possibilities. In addition, at the time of writing there is a growing campaign to halt the nature of high stakes Ofsted inspections, triggered in part by the suicide of a headteacher whose family have claimed she took her own life because of an adverse Ofsted report (Walker 2023a). Hence, the issues around performativity remain firmly on the agenda.

Whilst the above sections have focussed on the inequalities that disadvantaged pupils are more likely to suffer it is acknowledged that even in those schools that have strong performance data and outstanding Ofsted categorisations, there will be pupils who are disadvantaged by the current assessment system with pupils that are ‘left behind’ and hidden by the veneer of a successful high achieving school. Thus, a shift away from such high stakes accountability, that detracts from the needs of all pupils, would benefit all schools – re-asserting the status of teachers and schools in tracking progress and outcomes in a less fearful context and removing the high stakes accountability framework that inhibits schools and requires them to be obedient to a centralised agenda.

The next chapter examines education policy related to Initial Teacher Education, representing a microcosm of wider policy examined in Chapters 4-6, as it focuses on discourses on the structure and organisation of ITE, the curriculum for ITE students, and the assessment and accountability of the ITE sector.

Chapter 7: (Initial) Teacher Education – exposing a policy agenda of control, conformity and de-professionalisation

7.1 Introduction

> *The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed 2007, p.13)*

This chapter focusses on teacher education, and in particular Initial Teacher Education. Whilst teacher education refers to the continuing professional development of teachers once qualified, *Initial* Teacher Education relates to how student or pre-service teachers, are educated and trained – the undergraduate or postgraduate programmes of study they undertake in order to become a qualified teacher. In England these programmes of study are broadly referred to as either Initial Teacher Training (ITT) or Initial Teacher Education (ITE), with the former term favoured by the government and the latter mostly preferred by university providers of these programmes. There is a deep significance inherent in these terms which reflects alternative discourses around the knowledge, understanding and skills that are considered essential to become a teacher – this requires critique and is examined in section 7.2 below. The above quotation is relevant here as it reinforces the importance of teachers within the education system and hence the importance of how they are prepared for the profession. It is referred to within the DfE White Paper (2010, p.74) along with the assertion that schools 'are in control of their own improvement', and that the government would 'not mandate specific approaches'. Whilst this might give the impression that government policy supports autonomy and has trust in the education sector there are alternative discourses around government education policy that suggests a policy agenda of control, conformity and de-professionalisation. This requires problematization as per a genealogical approach.

My overall argument in this chapter is that the shifts in government policy for ITE since 2010 has impacted on the quality of ITE and risks leading to the development of a fragile profession, which has a subsequent impact on the education of children and young people in our schools. These shifts in policy relate to three key areas: the structure and organisation of ITE, the curriculum for ITE students, and the assessment and accountability of the ITE sector. As such ITE can be seen to represent a microcosm of the wider education policy that has been examined in previous chapters.

These policy changes will be examined through analysis of discourses around two key juxtapositions: decentralisation and centralisation and educational relationalities and economic rationalities. Such discourses expose the risk of developing of teachers as being positioned as technocratic automatons as opposed to autonomous professionals. For the first juxtaposition I will argue that since 2010 government policy related to ITE is simultaneously decentralising and centralising, and this has led to unnecessary upheaval and fragmentation of the sector, exacerbating the crisis in recruitment and retention of teachers. For example, the government has sought to decentralise the structure and organisation of ITE as it has relentlessly pursued a school-led model of initial teacher ‘training’ over the ‘education’, historically provided by university teacher education departments, reflecting the neoliberal principles of competition and choice, and giving the impression of bestowing autonomy. Simultaneously, it has endeavoured to centralise control over the ITE curriculum with the introduction of the mandatory ‘ITT Core Content Framework’ (DfE 2019b) which has also reduced the autonomy of ITE providers and the intellectual basis of teacher education, with high risks associated with non-compliance through Ofsted accountability. Furthermore, the recent government led ITT Market Review has demonstrated the level of centralisation and control the government seeks over the sector, justified by a government manufactured ‘crisis’, that has seen the ousting of hitherto successful ITE providers and the introduction of new providers with little or no experience of ITE, revealing perhaps the more hidden agenda behind this Review. Clarke (2019, p.85) suggests this simultaneous pulling in opposite directions reflects the ‘arbitrary and contingent’ nature of policy and has resulted in an environment underpinned by ‘coercive autonomy’ – the autonomy promised in one policy discourse is simultaneously undermined with inherent constraints and/or opposing policy, that demands compliance, thus leading ‘in Orwellian fashion to situations that are the very opposite of what they purport to promote’ (Clarke 2019, p.86). This is examined further in section 7.3 below.

In terms of the second juxtaposition, I will argue that the current policy on the ITE curriculum exposes an economic rationale, further reflecting a neoliberal policy agenda bound by ‘the elevation of market-based principles and techniques’ (Davies 2014, p.6), reducing ITE to inputs and outputs, adherence to a narrow set of ‘standards’, and a restricted perception of research and evidence – this valorises the practical elements of teaching over the intellectual and foundational concepts (Hordern and Brooks 2023) that have previously underpinned teacher education programmes, and this threatens the intellectual basis of the profession. This is examined in section 7.4 below. Both of these juxtapositions reflect discourses around the wider development of teachers, with the key argument that government policy related to ITE programmes, and qualified teachers’ continuing professional development, is risking the creation of technocratic automatons as opposed to autonomous professionals, further reducing the status of the profession. Ultimately this leads to a fragile profession, one underpinned by conformity and government control, and with lasting consequences for the education of children and young people in our state schools.

As such, discourses around current policies in this area require scrutiny or a ‘problematization of our present’ (Koopman 2013, p.17). Using Koopman’s three Cs of genealogy (critique, contingency and complexity), dominant discourses related to ITE need to be *critiqued* to consider how and why some discourses have proliferated over others, and to consider what is visible in the constructions of these discourses and what has been rendered invisible, or excluded. Current policy in this area needs to be analysed to consider its *contingency,* as by recognising *how* the present has been constructed exposes how current policy is based on a particular set of conditions – it is contingent rather than necessary – and thus enables consideration of different future possibilities. Hence, the intention in this chapter is not to propose solutions to problems but rather to expose how our ‘present’ has been constructed and shaped by dominant discourses and how it might have been, and might be, otherwise. This reflects Foucault’s approach to problematization that Koopman (2013, p.21) suggests ‘invites reconstruction’ and ‘sets problems that demand responses and resolutions’. Finally, the *complexity* of issues around policy related to ITE needs to be exposed with simplistic explanations and justifications for this policy interrogated and problematized.

In terms of the four time periods of this study, the main analysis for this chapter is 2010 onwards, whilst historical policy and discourses will also be referred to, as per a genealogical approach. As in previous chapters I have drawn upon two key data sets – policy documents, and the data gathered from interviews with high-profile women, whose perspectives are integrated within this chapter. The inclusion of this interview data reflects the feminist genealogy approach of this study which is specifically about raising women's voices, recognising the patriarchal nature of government and policy-making, and foregrounding these women's views that provide alternative discourses. As such, this chapter, like the others, draws upon the discourses of women academics and writers where possible. Pillow (2015) outlines the importance of questioning how policy has been produced – who has and who has not been involved in this – and considering how our historical present might have been, and might be, different if alternative power and influences were foregrounded, relating to Koopman's explanation of contingency. This will be considered in relation to policy on ITE with recognition that whilst many women might have been involved in policy-making in recent years, reflecting the so called fourth wave of feminism outlined in Chapter 3, they are members of the Conservative governments and thus can be seen to prioritise upholding the status quo as opposed to challenging it. In addition, it is noted that women make up around 75% of the teaching profession and as such it is mainly women who are subject to the effects of education policy, though they are 20% less likely to be in headship positions (DfE 2022e). Hence the importance of foregrounding the voices of women with alternative discourses.

7.2 It's in the name – training versus education

Before analysing the discourses around the two juxtapositions outlined above it is necessary to critically examine the two terms that are often used interchangeably and synonymously when referring to the preparation of teachers in England – Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The distinction between these two terms is essential as the inherent meanings and connotations within each reflect very different discourses about what is considered necessary for student or pre-service teachers, representing a fundamental conflict of approach in how they should be prepared for the profession.

Teacher *training* is considered to refer to the development of the practice of teaching, the 'vocational' or 'technical' aspects of teaching. Rowntree (1981, p.327) suggested it is the 'systematic development in a person of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary…to perform adequately in a job' which requires 'fairly standardised performance', whereas Good (1973, p.613) described it as

> teaching and instruction in which goals are clearly determined, are usually readily demonstrated, and call for a degree of mastery which requires student practice and teacher guidance and appraisal of the student's improved performance capabilities.

This relates to the school-led models of teacher 'training' that the current government favours, for example, the apprenticeship model whereby students are trained 'on the job', the Teach First programme and also the one-year postgraduate School Direct route that can be almost entirely school based, although much of this is done in partnership with universities and involves some *education*. This shift to school-based models of teacher *training,* that has gathered pace since 2010, is further examined below.

O'Neill (1986, p.260) clarifies the distinction between teacher training and teacher education, suggesting that the former is 'restricted to more specific, systematic, standardised, well identified, job related, results orientated practice …that relate to mechanical, technical and vocational aspects of the teaching process', whilst the latter includes the more holistic 'intellectual, emotional, and social development of the individual' which 'comprises the philosophical, professional, and pedagogical components of a teacher preparation programme'. In other words, teacher education includes teacher *training*, whereas teacher training does not necessarily involve teacher *education.* This is an important distinction and one requiring critique given the current government preoccupation with practice and training, and consistent reference to ITT (DfE 2010, DfE 2016), whilst ITE is mostly the preferred term in university teacher education departments. It is noted though that such meanings and interpretations are not always clear cut and decisive. For example, some university providers of ITE do use the name ITT which might be to reflect the terminology of government or simply because of tradition in their institutions – yet they also provide *education*. Thus, it is not such a straightforward dichotomy and the two terms are still often used inter-changeably, in institutions, discourse and literature, without inherent meanings necessarily attached.

This 'historical present' that reflects conflicting discourses around the training versus education of student teachers, can be traced back to the late 19th century when the Bryce

Report (1895) – which informed the 1902 Education Act – expressed concern at the absence of ‘systematic and thorough’ training of secondary teachers and made the distinction between *instruction* and *education*, arguing the latter, including both practical and theoretical components, was fundamental. This might have marked the beginnings of the debate about the difference between teacher training and teacher education, but it is noted that this was in relation to secondary schools which at this time was only for those families who could afford them. Poorer children attending the early state funded elementary schools were often taught by pupil-teachers – pupils aged between 13 and 18 years old who were ‘apprenticed to masters’ (Donald 1992, p.38), and operated in a monitorial and panoptic like system in which the ‘master’ was positioned for optimal surveillance of all, to ensure discipline and control (Foucault 1977b). The use of older children to teach younger children reflected the level of importance given to the emerging state funded elementary sector where the intention was to give children only a very basic education and use pupil-teachers as a communication tool to put across the key messages of the ‘masters’ – including religious and moral education to maintain social control, and to preserve the patriarchal and class-based status quo, as discussed in previous chapters. There are parallels to be drawn here with current education policy. The intense focus on assessment and performativity (discussed in Chapter 6) has led to an increased level of surveillance on teachers who are judged on their ability to secure high pupil outcomes which support a school’s position in the league tables. Furthermore, whilst teachers today might reject the notion that they are merely communication tools, the shift towards direct instruction pedagogy and imposed lesson plans and resources in some schools, as discussed in Chapter 4, reflects a similar instrumental approach to teaching that reduces teacher autonomy and professional status, and requires training rather than education, discussed further in section 7.4 below.

More formal teacher ‘training’ became available in the late 19th century with pupil-teachers able to compete for scholarships to the two-year courses provided by residential training colleges and by 1890 would-be teachers could attend the day training colleges that were attached to some universities, marking the involvement of higher education in teacher training, which the 1902 Act consolidated. However, as Ball (2008, p.67) suggests these training colleges were ‘designed to ensure that the character of teachers would be appropriate as role models for their working-class students’ – as discussed in previous chapters a key motivator for the expansion of state schooling was social control of the poor and working classes, and as such they needed ‘appropriate’ teachers to ensure this happened, and that the status quo was maintained. Despite the development of training colleges, places were limited at this time and hence much teacher training was still undertaken as apprentices in schools, under the supervision of a head ‘master’, and thus many involved in teaching lacked formal qualifications or education beyond their own limited schooling. Over a century later, current government policy is seeking to control how teachers are prepared for the classroom (examined in section 7.4 below) – imposing what should be included in ITE programmes and thus what is excluded – and it is also noted that some pupils in state schools continue to be taught by unqualified teachers as the profession is experiencing a recruitment and retention crisis, largely due to the status and conditions of teaching that is impacted by government policy (as discussed in Chapter 6).

It is not the intention here to trawl through historic policies since the turn of the 19th century to map the focus on either training and/or education of teachers through time. A genealogical approach does not demand adherence to a full developmental or narrative history but rather requires the identification of critical points and ruptures that can be problematized – the critical junctures in history where ‘certain practices, beliefs and conceptions’ require exposing in order to illuminate how our historical present is contingent (Koopman 2013). As indicated above this chapter focuses on the fourth time period of this study, from 2010 onwards. This period represents a major critical turning point in education policy with particular discourses around the training and education of teachers that amount to a total departure from, and rejection of, those discourses that led to post second world war policy – a time when teachers had higher levels of influence over what went on in the classroom from curriculum content and teaching style to pupil organisation and selection of resources (Gillard 2005a), which necessitated education as well as training. Whilst acknowledging that a full narrative history of post war policy is not required here, it is necessary to briefly examine this policy in order to assess the contingency of current policy since 2010 and understand why this represents such a critical turning point.

7.2.1 From a post-war golden age to increased regulation

In 1944 the McNair Committee report recommended a three-year training course for teachers (implemented in 1960) and together with the 1944 Education Act this represented what Gillard (2005b, p.175) suggests was ‘official acknowledgement of the professional status of teachers’ – there was an understanding that investment was needed in preparing teachers for their roles in the classroom, particularly as so many more teachers were required in the post-war expansion of state education. By the 1950s Lawn (1999, p.102) suggests that teachers were highly regarded as ‘the bedrock of the new welfare system, as the founders of the education system and as the guardians of the citizenry of the future’. When the 1963 Robbins Report proposed a four-year Bachelor of Education degree for teachers (which began in 1965), intended to ensure coverage of ‘the history, philosophy and psychology of education, child development, behaviour management’ (Eraut 1981, p.148), this marked an important recognition that pre-service teachers required *education* as well as training. Later in the 1960s the Plowden Report (1967) indicated the importance of a teaching qualification so that teachers might be considered equal to other professions – this came about in 1970 when all teachers had to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), approved by the government Department of Education, in order to teach in state-maintained schools. As such we can see how policy reflected post-war discourses around the need for a more equitable society in which teachers would play a key role and needed to be adequately prepared for this – in terms of both *education* and *training* – and it was universities that provided this, in collaboration with schools. As Lawn (1999, p.102) indicated teachers were considered as ‘partners in the deliberations of policy, able to influence the direction and control of policy’, and as such their education and training might be considered imperative.

However, the 1970s and 1980s saw attacks on the progressive methods of teaching which Ball (2008, p.162) refers to as the ‘discourse of derision’ inherent in the Black Papers, and the introduction of shorter, and thus arguably less theoretical, ITE courses – the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Graduate Teacher Programmes (GTP). In addition, government discourse in the 1990s sought to convey the necessity of ‘regulating’ teachers and this resulted in the introduction of ITE competency-based tests (now known as Teachers Standards) and the proposal for more school involvement in the *training* of teachers – School Centred Initial Teacher Training courses (SCITTs) were introduced in which schools were able to deliver teacher training programmes, generally with some involvement of universities. Also, following the 1994 Education Act the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was established to fund teacher training and provide information and advice on teaching as a career – Ball (2008, p.168) notes this ‘symbolically reverted from teacher education to teacher training’. Alternative discourses in response to this included Gillard (2005b, p.178) who suggested that, ‘most student teachers now have less than a year’s training and are taught little or nothing about the history, philosophy or politics of education’, and Revell (2005, p.1) who argued that, ‘deprived of real understanding of both theory and policy, teachers are simply parroting the latest curriculum directives. Teachers in name, but technicians in reality’.

From 2010 this movement towards school-based teacher training became more of a seismic shift, with a subsequent impact on university teacher education departments and the education of pre-service teachers. Furthermore, whilst QTS continues to be a requirement for employment in schools maintained by the local authority, it is not required for academy schools. Given the government drive to change all schools into academies – with 39% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools already academies (DfE 2022f) – this is perhaps a strong indicator of how the government perceives teachers and the status of the profession, reflecting what Anna suggested in her interview, is a wider ‘project’ to re-model teachers as technicians.

> *To me it’s all part of the project which is to cut away the university part in it…… and to make it very short, again it’s part of this technocratic project. (Anna)*

This shift reflects the current government’s adherence to neoliberalism and the associated claims within policy discourse of diversity, choice, competition and autonomy – a rationale for decentralising policy that is simultaneously highly centralised. The next section examines the discourses around centralisation and decentralisation that underpin post 2010 education policy.

7.3 Decentralisation and centralisation – tensions and turmoil

This section identifies the central role that discourses around decentralisation and centralisation have had for ITE in the period since 2010, which reflects a critical turning point in education policy in this area. Government policy in this period has been simultaneously centralising and decentralising, pulling in opposite directions, and I argue that this has led to unnecessary upheaval and fragmentation of the sector, which ultimately has an impact on the way pre-service teachers are prepared for the classroom and subsequent consequences for pupils in our schools, as well as the profession. This exposes government duplicity in education policy that claims to increase autonomy in the sector whilst simultaneously restricting it, creating what I am referring to as a ‘shackled autonomy’.

Whilst this chapter is focussing on 2010 onwards the seeds of tension between a centralising and decentralising policy agenda were sown before this and hence, as per a genealogical study, it is important to briefly consider this in order to assess the contingency of current policy. Furthermore, in order to examine policy in ITE it is necessary first to briefly refer to wider education policy – and the decentralising and centralising nature of this – to offer broader context.

7.3.1 The broader context of decentralising and centralising policy – sowing the seeds

As indicated above, the post war golden age of teaching was short lived, and criticisms soon emerged about the perils of progressive teaching with associated justification to introduce more regulatory policy and practice. More fundamental changes to the education system were evident in the 1990s and the policy developments emerging from the 1997 Labour government later gathered pace under the 2010 coalition government and subsequent Conservative governments. These policy shifts have led to a national reorganisation of state school structures to the academy system, reflecting a neoliberal marketisation of education (Chapter 4); control of the curriculum (Chapter 5), and intensified assessment and performativity culture (Chapter 6) – all of which can be seen as simultaneously decentralising and centralising. Arguably there has always been some decentralisation of education policy over previous decades – the government have historically devolved state educational services and decision making from central government to local authorities (LAs) in England (Donald 1992, Garratt and Forrester 2012, Chitty 2014, Brighouse and Waters 2021) and in the early 1990s schools were given powers to manage their own budgets via the Local Management of Schools (LMS) policy (Garratt and Forrester 2012). In the case of ITE universities largely became responsible for teacher training and education programmes.

This decentralisation has historically been accompanied by some level of centralisation in terms of a central framework of standards and accountability, though to achieve a balance between the two is challenging, as Caldwell (2009, p.56) argues,

> Centralisation and decentralisation are in tension, with centralisation indicated when the values of control, uniformity and efficiency are in ascendance, and decentralisation indicated when freedom, differentiation and responsiveness are preferred

Furthermore, the OECD (2022, p.283), citing the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), suggests that ‘when autonomy and accountability are appropriately combined, they tend to be associated with better student performance’. The current government has used this to justify their policy,

> Our reforms are designed to give school and system leaders freedom to raise standards... A more autonomous, school-led system depends even more on an effective accountability system. We are backing great teachers and great leaders to drive up standards in schools, so fair, robust, ambitious accountability is vital to monitor those standards, identify schools and areas that need extra support, and ensure children receive the education they deserve…… This approach is backed by high quality international evidence: the OECD has found “autonomy and accountability go together: greater autonomy in decisions relating to curricula, assessments and resource allocation tend to be associated with better student performance, particularly when schools operate within a culture of accountability.” (DfE 2016)

I am arguing here that the balance of autonomy and accountability – decentralisation and centralisation – in England is problematic and amounts to a ‘shackled’ autonomy. It is granted within the context of compliance, reflecting Joseph’s view of neoliberalism as giving ‘the pretence of freedom while acting in a coercive way’ (2007, p.8). Since 2010 the level of decentralisation has been unprecedented in English education policy, marking a seismic shift, with the government claim to be giving autonomy and control to the sector. This claim, considered by some as ‘empty rhetoric’ (Robinson 2015, p.469) has masked the level of centralisation that not only undermines such a claim of autonomy but amounts to a stranglehold on the education sector – a tension between power and freedom, reflecting the presence of Foucault’s (2002a, p.202) ‘problematic of government’. Mifsud (2016, p.443) argues that this ‘concurrently centralising and decentralising’ policy has constructed

> an ideological fantasy of empowerment which conceals the subordination of these policy implementations to neoliberal logics by constituting them as powerful actors who have been freed from central government constraints

The academisation of schools (examined in Chapter 3), and direct government funding to academies, was based on such a fantasy, with school leaders promised freedom from 'bureaucratic' local authorities and increased power in the new school-led system (DfE 2010, DfE 2016). This shift marked the demise of many local authority functions – as well as the expertise within LAs – with governance now the responsibility of academies, or multi-academy trusts with direct accountability to government. Government discourse around this has focussed on claims of a crisis in education (as outlined in previous chapters) – the claim that our children will be 'left behind' if urgent action is not taken and hence immediate action and reform becomes an imperative. As such the government appear to be justified in their education reforms, including those related to ITE, as more 'high quality' teachers are needed, and a rationale is produced for reducing the involvement of 'bureaucratic' local authorities accused of ineffective deployment of resources, impacting on pupil outcomes. In this particular discourse the government claims to be empowering academy school leaders with greater autonomy, as they benefit from direct funding and can make their own decisions to better meet the needs of their pupils which will in turn lead to improved outcomes. In this school led system these 'plausible' claims have become the narrative of government – rhetorical tools and technologies (Joyce 2013) – perpetuated through the media and even schools themselves, within the current neoliberal context. A shift from government to governance (Miller and Rose 2008, Ozga 2009) might be considered empowering in this narrative, though Mifsud (2016) argues this is merely a 'new method of state power and intervention' in which the government seeks control in new ways, through increased measures of accountability, reflecting Ball's (2003) notion of performativity, discussed in Chapter 6. As such, alternative discourses refer to the concealed side of this decentralising policy, that it is accompanied by increasingly centralised stringent technologies of accountability – not least reflected in government control over the curriculum and assessment and preoccupation with performance driven data that has created winners and losers – and ultimately this has reduced autonomy as well as the professional status of teachers. This is constraining schools and impacting on the educational experiences of children and young people in our schools (examined in Chapter 6), with Blackmore (2004, p.273) arguing that performance frameworks are simply structures for 'downloading responsibility for outcomes to schools' – resulting in the government re-establishing central authority and control. As such the government have achieved what

Karlsen (2000, p.535) refers to as ‘decentralized centralism’. Chitty (2014, p.258) argues this policy agenda has amounted to ‘a disintegration involving increased centralized control on the one hand, and privatization, outsourcing and marketization on the other’, whilst Ball (2013b, p.108) claims that this ‘model of marketization and competition’ has provided the government with ‘new modes of governing society and the economy, and the shaping and reshaping of individuals and individual conduct – teachers and learners’.

This government’s imperative of reshaping teachers (and learners) has manifested in the high level of ‘interference’ in the ITE sector under the guise of necessity and ‘moral obligation’ to ensure the development of ‘high quality’ teachers. Policy shifts since 2010 have led to significant restructuring of ITE - the unprecedented marketization of ITE and growth of school involvement, and subsequent undermining of the role of university education departments in the training and education of pre-service teachers. Assessment of the sector through the DfE ITT Market Review and subsequent (re)accreditation process – in which all providers of ITE had to apply to the DfE to be given a ‘licence’ to continue – has been undertaken regardless of the fact that the sector is subject to accountability through ITE Ofsted inspections and demonstrates the government’s determination to exercise control under the auspices of their quality agenda. The discourses around these policy manoeuvres are examined in sections 7.3.2 and 7.3.3 below. In addition, a mandatory ITT Core Content Framework (DfE 2019a) has been imposed on the sector further reducing the autonomy of teacher educators and this is examined more closely in section 7.4 below.

7.3.2 Decentralising and centralising policy in ITE – the cost of restructuring and reshaping the profession.

In 2010-11, around 80% of all pre-service teachers undertook university based ITE courses (Smithers, Robinson and Coughlan 2012) with the other 20% taking largely school/employment-based routes. The post-2010 restructuring of ITE – and introduction of new routes like the post-graduate School Direct one year programme – has resulted in a reduction of pre-service teachers on university based PGCE programmes to 44% with 56% now on school-led ITE routes (DfE 2022b). Many of the School Direct programmes are undertaken in partnership with universities but this still represents a significant decline in the involvement and influence of universities. As such the sector has experienced upheaval and fragmentation and this policy shift requires critique and problematization. Critique reflects one of Koopman's (2013) 3 Cs of genealogy that frames this thesis, and as Foucault suggests, critique is important in that it demonstrates that 'things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted' – thus critique consists of examining 'what types of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based' (Foucault, 2002b, p. 456). In relation to my own positionality as a teacher educator in the university sector, critiquing government policy in this field is what Gillies (2013, p.19) considers a professional responsibility in order to 'question, probe and identify weaknesses, contradictions, assumptions and problems', and what Mifsud (2016, p.444) suggests is imperative in order to 'articulate and employ doubt to chosen values, beliefs and assumptions in both policy and practice'.

As part of the drive for a school-led system the DfE White Papers (DfE 2010, 2016) – documents that can be regarded as 'technologies of government' to justify policy shifts as 'political rationalities' (Foucault 2002b, p. 341) – outlined plans to shift ITE from universities to schools. Government discourse – reflecting the neoliberal notions of marketisation, choice and competition – focussed on the claim that this policy shift would lead to alternative routes into teaching and would raise the status of the teaching profession by recruiting 'high quality' recruits to train to teach and give schools increased control over teacher training. The Secretary of State, Michael Gove (2010) argued that 'teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a Master craftsman or woman'. Thus, different post-graduate routes into teaching were introduced like Teach First and School Direct – School Direct has by far being the most popular of these routes and hence the focus on this here. The School Direct programme was introduced with two routes – a training route and salaried route for those who already had some experience of working in schools – with both ensuring that pre-service teachers would undertake the majority of *training* in schools with the option (though not a requirement) for the academic PGCE award, as well as the award of QTS.

Government rhetoric focussed on the value of school-led ITE in situating pre-service teachers within the context they would eventually be working in, with the subsequent claim that this would lead to improvements in the quality of teachers. What was excluded from this government discourse, but heavily implied, was the assumption that university ITE programmes were failing to produce the ‘high-quality’ teachers the sector needed, and schools would be better placed to do this, despite evidence to the contrary. The Ofsted Annual Report (Ofsted, 2010) indicated that the most outstanding provision for ITE was delivered in Higher Education in partnership with schools, undermining the government claim that the shift to school-led ITE was necessary. Neither was there any public acknowledgement in government discourse that university ITE programmes had a long tradition of working in partnership with schools and pre-service teachers were already required to spend two thirds of their programme in school – a requirement of circular 4/98 (DfEE 1998,p.137). As Burgess (2014) commented

> Michael Gove repeatedly praises what he calls ‘the best generation of teachers’ in our schools. What he perhaps forgets is that the vast majority of these outstanding teachers and leaders were trained by university schools of education working in partnership with schools.

Furthermore, the government claim that this policy shift to school-led ITE would raise the status of the profession can be critiqued, particularly when in the same discourse the profession was reduced to a ‘craft’, with *training* valorised over *education*. Alternative discourses have focussed on concerns that the academic and theoretical elements of university ITE programmes would be undermined by a fully school-led model of ITE. Hayes (2011, p.19) argued that the government was reducing teacher education to ‘nothing more than training to meet the narrow standards they approved’, whilst Surman (2011) argued this education policy amounted to the ‘de-professionalisation’ of teaching and teachers, leading to the creation of what Hobby (2011) referred to as fragile professionals. This is examined in more depth in section 7.4. Gillard (2005a, p.1) was perhaps prophetic about the government increasing the involvement of schools and impact on the profession,

> The aim was to increase the involvement of schools in both the initial and in-service training of teachers. Thus, was created a self-perpetuating cycle in which teachers who knew nothing about education other than delivering the government's National Curriculum would train new teachers, who would therefore know nothing about education other than delivering the government's National Curriculum. Those horrid lefty education professors with their politics of gender, race and class would be kept out of the process. The last thing the government wanted was teachers who could think.

And in this case the Right would say diversity in choice and I would say a degrading of the intellectual element of teacher training. (Anna)

The importance of education as well as training for pre-service teachers is looked at in more depth in section 7.4 below though it is noted that a report on the role of research in teacher education (BERA 2014), suggests that in other high performing education systems, for example Finland and Singapore, there has been a shift away from school-based training towards university-based teacher education, and a focus on research training for teachers – further undermining government discourse around this policy agenda that claims it is based on international best practice.

As such government discourse, which justified the need for upheaval in the ITE sector and shift towards a school-led system, is problematized and can be seen as contingent rather than necessary. The lack of evidence of a crisis in teaching in 2010, that necessitated such a shift in policy reveals an underlying policy motivation, that is perhaps more to do with controlling the sector through undermining the role of universities and marketizing ITE, than a real concern around the quality of ITE. Alternative discourses were ignored but again were prophetic in their claims, with Estelle Morris (2013) – a previous Secretary of State for Education – expressing concerns about the marketisation of ITE and reduction of university involvement suggesting that,

> The government has, in effect, handed the strategic planning of the nation's teacher training to the market. No one has responsibility to deliver and oversee an effective national strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers; there is no attempt to plan places and no one is looking at the cumulative effect of policy changes on supply.

A decade later, these cumulative policy changes are having a significant impact as outlined in the Chapters 4, 5 and 6, with the country now experiencing an unprecedented crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, arguably as a result of policy. Hence the unprecedented policy reforms that were justified on the basis of a manufactured crisis around the quality of the profession have in fact led to an actual crisis, with a widening of inequalities becoming apparent within the state sector. In response to this emerging crisis the government then launched a review of the ITT 'market' and this is another policy directive that requires critique and problematization.

7.3.3 The ITT Market Review – continuing decentralisation and an escalation of control?

The ITT Market Review provides another example of government policy since 2010 that is simultaneously decentralising and centralising which I argue has led to unnecessary upheaval and fragmentation of the sector. This has exacerbated the very real current crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers (outlined in Chapter 6), that has arguably been caused by the reforms resulting from manufactured crises, which Clarke and Phelan (2017, p.2) argue has involved 'persistent questioning on the part of policy-makers and the media, often driven by political factors, about whether teachers are meeting (or undermining) the nation's expectations'.

Government claims justifying the need for the ITT Market Review focussed on the fact that the ITT sector was neither effective or efficient – it 'is overly complex, causing inefficiencies and incentives that can prevent good teachers from working where they are needed most post-ITT' (DfE 2019d, p.31). There was no acknowledgement that the restructuring and marketisation of ITE, resulting from their own policies since 2010, had led to such complexity. In addition, they cited quality issues in the ITT sector that needed to be addressed that had emerged from national research findings (Ofsted 2021) and claimed that their policy decisions were also based on international best practice – all creating a sense of urgency to justify the Review and tackle this apparent crisis, as well as subtly reinforcing within ITE policy the imperative of global competitiveness and the risk of been 'left behind'. This approach to education policy is not restricted to England but reflected in other governments driven by neoliberalism, for example in Australia, where Mills and Lingard (2022, p.1015) argue that

> teacher education has been held responsible for graduating teachers not capable of ensuring a nation is competitive……not preparing teachers to adequately manage the behaviour of their students, of spending too much time on theory rather than on practice

In response, like in England, policy has been introduced that has 'tightened regulations' in the ITE curriculum, with 'increased emphasis on practice' and more time in school. As such the government position themselves as bastions of quality, based on the 'best' evidence, and the 'saviours' of education, whilst masking any ideological reasons for policy decisions.

> Reform of the market must be driven first and foremost by what is required for high-quality evidence-based teacher training. With the support of DfE analysts, the expert group have reviewed a range of national and international evidence on good practice in ITT (DfE 2021a, p.4)

The government discourse around the urgency of such a review, in order to address quality and efficiency and based on ‘evidence’ requires critique. There was very little engagement with the ITE or school sector during the review, meaning that very few experts in the field were consulted, and following the publication of findings the public consultation period was just seven weeks long – undermining the government’s own code of practice (HM Government 2008, p.4) that states ‘consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible’. The ‘expert advisory group’ for the Review included only five members that Bousted (2022, p.20) argues were ‘notable for being either close to ,or apologists for Gibb’s beliefs’, referring to the previous government Minister for Schools, who had championed ITE reform. This group included just one representative from the university sector, further supporting a perspective that this government reform was motivated by a desire to further marketize the sector to bring in more school based ‘players’ into ITE and so reduce the involvement and influence of university ITE provision, and the ‘type’ of education it provided.

The Ofsted research report (Ofsted 2021) that is referred to cited evidence including ‘unambitious ITE curriculums’, use of ‘outdated or discredited theories’, and issues of alignment and sequencing between ‘training environments’ and placement schools. This research had involved remote discussions with 75 ITT partnerships that was purported to be focussed on the sector response to the COVID pandemic – hence these ‘findings’ can be considered problematic as the focus was seemingly also on the wider curriculum and respondents may not have been clear about the parameters of this research. In addition, Ofsted annual reports of the sector had found 99% of ITE providers to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in 2018 and 100% in 2020 (Ofsted 2018, Ofsted 2020) whilst the OECD TALIS report of 2018 indicated that English teachers had reported high level of preparedness for teaching resulting from their formal education or training (Bousted, 2022, p.22). Whilst this does not preclude room for further improvement, that could be assured through the existing structures of monitoring and accountability – the Ofsted ITE inspection framework – it does call into question the evidence used to justify such upheaval to the ITE sector. Furthermore, on analysis of the report of the Market Review to examine the international evidence it claims to have drawn on, there is reference to just one international organisation (Deans for Impact) who are cited on 3 occasions in relation to sequencing of the curriculum (DfE, 2021a). There is no evidence of wider international practice that the recommendations of the report have drawn upon.

Whilst the ITT Market Report (DfE 2021a) indicated that this ‘evidence’ underpinned their recommendations, alternative discourses have pointed to the government use of scientific style ‘evidence’ that gives the illusion of transparency but is often ‘transformed as it enters the political environment’, and as such the government uses ‘language shrouded in talk of research data and best practice’ that aims to justify policy (Helgetun and Mentor 2022, p.88-89) – it becomes a rhetorical tool that aims to provide legitimacy. As discussed in previous chapters as this rhetoric is constantly repeated and reinforced by policy makers it becomes incorporated in discourse and embedded in practice, it is considered a ‘truth’, with Helgetun and Mentor (2022, p.90) arguing that

> once a perceived ‘best practice’ has become dominant, and sufficiently taken for granted as ‘good’, it arguably becomes a myth that constrains actors and tends to ossify (through mimesis) the environment

The genealogy approach for this study requires consideration of how current practice is contingent. The use of ‘evidence’ to justify policy in ITE can be traced back to Circular 3/84 (DES 1984) and the establishment of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) when criteria was set that ITE providers needed to meet in order to be accredited, in what Helgetun and Mentor (2022, p.90) suggest was the ‘first official iteration of explicit evidence-guided decision in teacher education’. However, the upheaval to the ITE sector as a result of the Market Review and level of control and is unprecedented. The ITE sector is being forced to comply with a new set of ‘quality requirements’ emerging from the government response to the Market Review Report, that is claimed to be based on evidence, with the threat of removal of accreditation if not compliant to these. Those achieving accreditation to provide ITE programmes – through a highly contentious ‘stage one’ process involving the submission of a wide range of documents to be assessed by Ofsted and DfE staff – have then been required to submit further examples of documentation in ‘stage two’, on the curriculum, mentoring, assessment and partnerships – for scrutiny by a DfE

'Associate', to ensure fidelity, compliance and readiness to meet new 2024 ITT criteria. The requirements inherent in the new criteria, for example on school-based mentoring, are set to place increased pressure on schools, though they were not consulted on this and are only (at the time of writing) becoming aware of the implications for schools of the ITT market review. There are two important issues here, first that schools do not have the capacity to meet new demands as they are beleaguered by increased demands of policies related to the curriculum, assessment and the performativity agenda – and the associated recruitment and retention crisis. Second, the requirement for increased involvement of mentors in the development of pre-service teachers puts additional pressures on those particular staff who have other responsibilities in the school related to their pupils, whilst also leaving the preparation of pre-service teachers dependent on the quality and experience of a particular mentor. As such, schools may opt out of offering support for ITE at the very time that policy emerging from the Market Review necessitates more support, exercising the autonomy that the government claims they have – providing an example of the tensions inherent in a centralising and decentralising policy agenda that is formulated without consultation or involvement of the education sector.

> *And it's not a school's core job, they can always opt out and training teachers is so important that to put ourselves in a position where if schools say, look we are just too busy or we have got a bad Ofsted report or we want to prioritise something else, we can't train those teachers, is really, really difficult. (Elizabeth)*

As Elizabeth pointed out in her interview, indicated above, there is a significant risk in relying on schools to 'train' teachers. Beatrice also mentioned these risks in her interview, in particular the risks related to lack of intellectual underpinnings and over reliance on one mentor in a school.

> *I think it's beginning to show itself in the fatigue within the profession to be honest and I think it's an intellectual fatigue more than anything else. I remember when I did my PGCE what you really benefited from was that first term where they took you through the understanding of child development where you got more of a focus on some of the intellectual underpinnings of pedagogy, young teachers don't get that now. And so they are very dependent on that experience of their mentor in the school. …….. And I think they miss a huge amount because what you need is you need some of the intellectual underpinnings to be able to really develop your own practice. (Beatrice)*

As such, this marketisation of the ITE sector illuminates a simultaneously decentralising and centralising policy agenda that has characterised other post 2010 policy related to schools, as examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In addition, new organisations, with no experience of ITE, have now entered the market through the recent accreditation process, whilst some established providers, including university providers previously awarded good and outstanding grades by Ofsted, have not been re-accredited. Control over the sector has increased with unprecedented levels of scrutiny, reducing the autonomy of the sector and teacher educators and as Hordern and Brooks (2023, p.2) argue, has led to 'considerable complexity, tension and disruption'. The mandated ITT Core Content Framework (DfE 2019a) that the government claims is also based on 'evidence' is an example of such control and tension, representing a challenge to the intellectual basis of the profession as well as to the autonomy of the sector. This is critiqued in the next section.

7.4 From educational relationalities to economic rationalities

In this section I argue that another aspect of post-2010 policy, the imposition of a mandated ITT Core Content Framework (CCF), exposes an economic rationale, further reflecting a neoliberal policy agenda bound by 'the elevation of market-based principles and techniques' (Davies 2014, p.6), reducing ITE to inputs and outputs, adherence to a narrow set of 'standards', whilst also establishing a level of unprecedented control over the ITE sector. This also reflects a restricted perception of research and evidence, valorising the practical elements of teaching over the intellectual and foundational concepts that have previously underpinned teacher education programmes and this threatens the intellectual basis of the profession. It is this intellectual basis and professional knowledge that distinguishes teachers and teacher educators from 'lay society' and provides their 'source of professional legitimacy' (Clarke and Phelan 2017, p.84). Thus, the CCF is important to critique as it is now the cornerstone of how pre-service teachers are prepared for their careers as teachers, and there are discourses that contest the government view of its value.

> *So I am very much for an academic underpinning of teaching. I don't know which profession hasn't got an academic underpinning, I don't know why you would not want to have that, unless you see teachers as craftspeople or technicians following a set of rules. (Elizabeth)*

Since 2010 governments have simultaneously claimed the importance of developing ‘quality’ teachers whilst denigrating their professional status and autonomy through a series of policy reforms that have included a shift toward school-led ITE and subsequent undermining of university provision (examined in section 7.3.2), and the imposition of an ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) along with ‘preferred’ research and evidence that teacher educators have to comply with or face the removal of their accreditation. This is not only a threat to teacher educators but to the future education of children and young people who potentially will have their teachers imbued with particular evidence and research, practicing to a narrow set of standards – they will have had training rather than education and potentially be technocratic facilitators instead of educated professionals with understanding of ‘foundation disciplines’ (Hordern and Brooks 2023, p.4). The historical, sociological and philosophical foundations of the profession – as well as the moral and ethical purpose – are sacrificed in favour of the development of a job-related skill set. As such there are two inter-related issues inherent in alternative discourses around the CCF, one that it is based on leading national and international evidence and the other that it disregards education – the foundational knowledge that is considered essential for teachers.

Though this chapter focuses on ITE policy post-2010 it is important to trace back to previous policy as per a genealogy study. The seeds of current policy can be traced in particular to the 1990s. Ball (2008,p.168) argues that whilst the 1997 Labour government seemed to have a more ‘positive vision’ of the teaching profession than its Conservative predecessors, within a year of government Circular 4/98 (DfEE 1998) was published which introduced a prescriptive ‘national curriculum’ for teacher training which meant QTS would only be awarded if particular Standards were met – ‘trainees’ had to demonstrate they could teach the national curriculum and deliver the literacy and numeracy strategy. Thus, adherence to a narrow set of Standards was established, which Ball regarded as ‘finally eradicating the intellectual and disciplinary foundations of teacher education’ (2008, p.168) – the curriculum would be based on skills and classroom management, which has continued to be reflected in the current version of Teachers Standards (DfE 2011). Garratt and Forrester (2012 p.108) assert this marked a shift from the ‘radical reforms’ conceived post-war, where education was regarded as a ‘public service or free good’, towards the government aligning the education system with ‘the perceived needs’ of ‘industry and economy’ (2012, p.81), reflecting the impact of global competition.

Furthermore, it is no coincidence that the mandatory curriculum imposed by the current government – the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE 2019a) – offers a more technical curriculum to match the technical Teachers Standards. For broader context here, the CCF emerged as a recommendation of the Carter Review (2015) and is the first stage of the 'golden thread' the government refers to in which teachers will have initial teacher training and then progress the Early Career Framework (DfE 2019b) for the first two years of teaching and then proceed to a series of National Professional Qualifications aimed at different stages of their career.

> Our vision is that a golden thread of evidence-informed training, support and professional development will run through each phase of every teacher's career. The ambition is excellence; teachers and their pupils deserve nothing less (DfE 2021a, p.4)

Hordern and Brooks (2023, p.1) argue that the 'CCF is currently orientated towards a scientism that (i) marginalises longstanding traditions of educational thought, and (ii) technicises and instrumentalises teaching practice'. The same can be said of the subsequent frameworks in this 'golden thread' and the idea of a 'continuum' of learning over time that Clarke and Phelan (2017, p.95) suggest ensures the teacher 'ever in search of the destination that is competence or excellence or quality, remains always an unfinished product'. Through this 'golden thread' the government can be seen to have 'aligned' a range of policies on different stages of teacher development into something that may appear standardised and coherent and part of some 'grand design' (Savage, 2021, p.2). However, alternative discourses suggest the evidence the government has drawn upon for this 'golden thread' is limiting and restrictive, favouring a technical and instrumental approach to learning over one that is grounded in more expansive and intellectual knowledge (Hordern and Brooks 2023). The development of teachers has become grounded in an economic rationale with Angus (2012) arguing that,

> The upshot is that technical/managerial, market-orientated, economically rational norms and assumptions have seemingly been imposed within a supposedly value-neutral education policy discourse

As such, Ball (2008, p. 171) argues, '*teachers have been remade within policy*, and their work and the meaning of teaching have been discursively rearticulated'. This is reflected in the recent DfE White Paper (2022a, p.17) which claims that 'every teacher and school leader now has access to a golden thread of high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development at every stage of their career', starting with the ITT Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework through to National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for middle, senior and executive leaders. This attempts a 're-making' of teachers in the preferred image of the government, with alternative discourse suggesting this 'golden thread' represents a stranglehold on the profession, with every stage of teacher *training* and development subject to the scrutiny and intrusion of government, drawing from a very narrow 'evidence' base, and excluding voices and theories that do not align with government policy, or might be considered critical of it – voices like those of Beatrice, and other women interviewed as part of this study, who clearly consider the intellectual and academic underpinnings of the profession to be an essential for all teachers.

> *And so we have got young teachers, well not just young teachers, people who are training in teaching at all stages of the profession where they are just really, really struggling because they don't have the academic underpinnings to be able to really rationalise what it is that they are doing and I think pedagogy is suffering. And I am absolutely convinced now that we need to, as a nation, refocus everybody's understanding of child development. (Beatrice)*

In addition, whilst the government claim that education policy is based on 'evidence' drawn from international good practice, there is no reference in current policy for teaching to become a master's level profession as in other higher performing countries. Achieving a masters level degree is an expectation of teachers in many high performing education systems overseas, for example, Finland, and hence it would seem that English education policy is at odds with this good practice – the policy decisions being taken in England are thus reducing the intellectual base of the profession, leading to a potentially weakened and fragmented profession, a perspective echoed by Darlene in her interview, as indicated below.

> *But it's interesting, I mean we are de-professionalising our teaching force at a time when other countries are considering it's important to, you know, increase their professionalisation, so Masters, compulsory Masters in Finland. You know you have to be really, really highly trained in an academic course that challenges you intellectually in countries like that. (Darlene)*

7.4.1 Towards a technical ITE curriculum – compliance and control based on evidence?

Within ITE the CCF is aligned to the Teachers Standards (DfE 2011) and divided into groups of 'Learn that' statements – the essential knowledge that pre-service teachers need to know that is claimed to have emerged from 'high quality evidence from the UK and overseas' (DfE 2019a, p.4) – and 'Learn how to', statements that are intended to ensure pre-service teachers are able to put their learning into practice, with the support of 'expert colleagues' (DfE 2019, p.5). The very division of the curriculum into these two 'learning' sets arguably indicates a level of compartmentalisation that is at odds with the cohesive training the CCF is purported to achieve. This leads to what Britzman (2003, p.51) describes as 'discrete and arbitrary units' that amount to a fragmented experience of the curriculum that by its nature 'cannot be extended or transformed', denying the opportunity for deep thinking and reflection as indicated by Darlene during her interview.

> *I mean this is government strategy isn't it? I mean that's why they tried to push so much of teacher training into schools as well. Because, you know, there is a focus on the practical aspects and a devaluing of the academic aspects of teacher training and so I think that's been very problematic. Because it is, it is a sort of routinisation of the teaching process, seeing it as broken down into, you know, core competencies rather than having to be a process of deep thinking, reflection, consideration, intellectual work. (Darlene)*

The DfE claim that the CCF is based on 'high quality' evidence can be critiqued. The government language of 'evidence', 'best practice' and 'targeted interventions' relate to the 'New Science of Education' that Furlong and Whitty (2017, p.28) suggest is intended to promise 'significant improvement in educational outcomes by finding out what works through the application of rigorous research'. Through the constant reference to these terms government can be seen to be following a 'rationalised approach' to improvement (Hordern and Brooks 2023, p.5) – representing a technical approach to policy justified on the basis of 'what works'. As discussed in previous sections the continual reinforcement of such rhetorical terms in government discourse, suggests a logic to policy. However, this limited view of evidence and research can be seen to reduce teachers to technocratic automatons, masking an endeavour to control the curriculum and marginalise broader foundational elements that are characteristic of professional status, by ensuring compliance through high stakes accountability measures.

Government policy would suggest that pre-service teachers are no longer expected to inquire into the nuanced historical, sociological or philosophical foundations of their professional field but rather 'learn that' and 'learn how to' in order to meet the narrow set of Standards – an A + B = C model of learning or as Taubman (2009, p.2) suggests, a 'paint by numbers approach', which has the implicit message that anyone can do it if they 'mechanically followed directions'. As Beatrice outlined in her interview this has concerning ramifications for teachers and ultimately their pupils.

> *That is what I am beginning to see, I am beginning to see people who are almost doing things by rote but they are not understanding why they are doing them. And to really understand why questioning matters you have got to understand the fundamentals of learning theory. Because otherwise you are just doing it by rote and the quality of your questioning never gets, it doesn't improve, it never gets any better. So that for me is, we are actually, we are damaging the whole science of pedagogy because we are not inducting people properly through it. (Beatrice)*

As this instrumental approach is indicative of policy and practice in schools (as examined in Chapters 5 and 6), the pre-service teacher becomes embedded in this culture and indeed may question the requirement for the more foundational elements, particularly if they are in schools for the majority of time and have less academic input – as such, as Britzman (2003) suggests, they have less time for critical reflection and less opportunity to engage in knowledge construction or theorising which she considers 'a form of engagement with and intervention in the world' (2003, p.69). In addition, Hordern and Brooks (2023, p.7) argue

> if teaching is based to a considerable extent on situated experience and the development of craft 'in practice', then what use would there be in exposure to systematically organised bodies of educational knowledge for novice and experienced teachers.

As pre-service teachers follow the 'golden thread' during their careers the intellectual basis of the profession becomes further reduced and as such a fragility is baked into the profession. Without deep knowledge of education, via foundation disciplines and critical engagement with a broad range of research, teachers of the future potentially become

> more malleable, with little wherewithal symbolically or epistemologically to scrutinise proposed changes or to contribute meaningfully to cycles of policy reform (Hordern and Brooks 2023,p.15).

As such the CCF (and also the ECF and NPQs that make up the golden thread) can be viewed as a further vehicle of the government aimed at reducing autonomy in the sector with the DfE taking control of what they think is ‘best’ evidence and research, ignoring the educational community and so reducing the intellectual basis of the profession. This is examined further in the next section.

7.4.2 Disregarding ‘education’ – the cost for teachers and pupils, and the future of the profession

In this section I argue that the imposition of the mandatory CCF has led to the reduction in the teaching of foundation disciplines, like the history, sociology and philosophy of education, and development of criticality that is inherent in these fields – learning that is essential for the development of pre-service teachers if they are to be fully prepared for the classroom and to foster critical reflection amongst pupils. This is likely to lead to a fragile profession, where teachers will lack the foundational knowledge to best serve the interests of children and young people in schools.

The CCF is purported to be a ‘minimum entitlement’ and form just part of the ITE curriculum, with the DfE claiming that ‘it remains for individual providers to design curricula appropriate for the subject, phase and age-range that the trainees will be teaching’ (DfE 2019a, p.4). Arguably, ITE providers can still cover foundational knowledge in their curriculum, but as experienced with the National Curriculum in schools – which is also intended to be just *part* of the curriculum – in practice the requirement to cover the mandated content or risk being non-compliant undermines the opportunity to cover other things. As such, the likely foregrounding of the CCF, that ITE providers are compelled to focus on, reduces capacity to engage with the rich and ‘high-quality educational research existing in multiple traditions’ (Hordern and Brooks 2023), including the history, sociology and philosophy of education – that which encourages enquiry, critique and interrogation’ (Angus, 2012). The priority for the government, evidenced in the technical basis of the CCF, is that pre-service teachers are prepared for what they consider to be their core purpose, to secure improved pupil outcomes (Mills and Lingard 2022), and to meet the expectations of the performativity culture they will become a part of. This was a view raised by Darlene in her interview in which she outlined the changes in teacher education and related this to the government agenda to ‘proletarianize’ the profession.

> *Well I think the government's aim is definitely to proletarianize the teaching force. And what strikes me is how radically teacher education has changed since I trained in the early seventies. Because there is a much, much stronger focus now on curriculum content and behaviour and far less on processes, pedagogy and the social context of teaching. So I did a lot of sociology, a lot of philosophy when I was training and I just think that's so vitally important that the government see it as, you know, far too radicalising of courses they want to make much more mechanistic. (Darlene)*

It is important to note here, given the focus of this study on problematizing policy that claims to be diminishing inequalities in education, and also the focus on women, that in analysis of the CCF (DfE 2019a) there is an absence of references that include any discussion related to foundation disciplines. In particular there is no mention of equality, inequality, gender, race or social class in the 'Learn That' statements – and the CCF has just four references to 'disadvantaged' in the whole 49-page document (DfE 2019a). This is in contrast to government discourse around a levelling up agenda and apparent commitment to supporting disadvantaged pupils. In relation to this study, it is also against a backdrop of a reported increase in misogyny in society that is reflected in schools (UK Parliament 2023) and hence it might be considered important in any mandated framework, for these issues to be specifically addressed, to fully prepare pre-service teachers for these issues. As Mills and Lingard (2022) argue, there needs to be a focus in ITE on the inequalities in society – the impact of social class and background on opportunities and performance, with consideration of intersectionality, for example with gender and ethnicity. Pearce (2012 p.100) also argues that it is vital for future teachers to 'develop a consciousness' of social class issues so they can 'better understand and critique the practices that sustain class privilege' and so they can 'use this knowledge to adopt more socially just alternatives'.

> *But I do and always have held the view that learning to be a teacher is not just about learning to do a job, it's also about understanding the importance of education. And understand the theoretical frameworks in which you operate. And the choices you make as an educator. (Charlotte)*

Whilst the CCF and Teachers Standards encourage the technical skills of managing pupils with different learning needs, Mills and Lingard (2022) suggest, there is a difference between knowing about diverse learners and knowing about diversity – the critical understanding gained from deep engagement with foundation disciplines and critical analysis of policy that might ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped to apply this understanding to their pedagogical practice. Without this understanding pedagogical practice is compromised and there is likelihood that 'inequalities are reproduced rather than ameliorated' (Mills and Lingard 2022, p.1022).

And I think the other thing is when I was a teacher educator in 2003, I …… I did the equal opportunities stuff, I did gender, race and class. I had two whole days to do that, that's not a lot….. By the time I left in 2017, I was getting an hour and a half to do the whole lot. (Darlene)

Within the CCF, for every set of the 'learn that' and 'learn how to' statements – which are given for each of the Teachers Standards (DfE 2011) – there is a reference list sanctioned by the government and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) consisting of 'best available educational research' (DfE 2019a, p.10) that is considered appropriate and current, and the absences of references related to foundation disciplines, illuminates the disregard given to this body of knowledge. The EEF is an independent charity funded by the government that claims to 'review the best available evidence on teaching and learning' and present this to schools in 'an accessible way' (EEF 2023). Alternative references and evidence, for example those used by universities, have been scrutinised and questioned in both stages one and two of the DfE accreditation process (discussed in section 7.3.3) – thus it could be argued that the intellectual foundation of the profession is being monitored to ensure that pre-service teachers are not exposed to literature and research that might contest the governments preferred narrative, resulting in what Hordern and Brooks (2023, p.10) refer to as the state supplanting,

> the academic community in terms of determining what constitutes professional knowledge for teachers, without an explicit statement of the criteria by which such knowledge is selected and appropriated, or reflection on its underpinning assumptions.

In essence teaching has become so regulated that it can be regarded as what Mills and Lingard (2022, p.1016) refer to as a 'state profession'. Furthermore, in addition to this high level of surveillance, the high stakes of non-compliance (not least a poor Ofsted outcome and/or removal of accreditation) are necessitating providers to foreground the CCF, and hence the risk that this will reduce opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in alternative ideas and research and develop an understanding of teaching as a 'decontextualised series of interventions with narrow objectives, thus marginalising wider educational good and purposes and de-professionalising teachers work' (Hordern and

Brooks 2023, p.3). Alternative discourse suggests this is problematic for a number of reasons but not least that it is through engagement with the foundation disciplines that 'provides insights into professional tasks and problems' and 'enables the professional to make sense of a variety of situations' they may encounter (Hordern and Brooks 2023, p.8). It is through this that teachers are able to build up substantive knowledge and examine connections, developing a critical and coherent understanding of a range of educational concepts that they can then draw upon within their practice, an ability to exercise judgement to better support pupils – without this deep understanding this 'default knowledge base' is absent and teachers can only draw upon a narrow knowledge and skills base, to the detriment of the learning of children and young people in our schools. Elizabeth attested to the importance of this during her interview, where she articulated the enduring impact of her own learning of foundation disciplines.

> *I didn't have a subject degree because that's not the way it worked in those days, but I had got, I did History of Education, Sociology of Education, Psychology of Education and Philosophy of Education. And I still call on that, not knowingly but I am really glad I did that. …..So I think that academic underpinning is really, really important. You somehow need it to frame your own thoughts. And also it makes you interested in education as a topic and I think that's important. (Elizabeth)*

As such, the model of learning championed by the current government, and exemplified in the CCF, can be seen to privilege 'routinized behaviour over critical action' (Britzman 2003, p.46), leading to a fragility in the teaching profession that will impact on pupils and their development. Biesta (2007, p.5) also makes a crucial point that pre-occupation with this 'evidence-based' practice assumes 'the only relevant research questions are questions about the effectiveness of educational means and techniques', and disregards other things like 'judgements about what is educationally desirable' – there should surely be more to education than questions of efficiency and effectiveness indicative of the 'neo-liberal embrace' (Clarke and Phelan 2017, p.5).

Essentially, the disregard in the CCF for the knowledge provided by the foundation disciplines is an issue of social justice, and arguably is intended to prepare teachers to be technical automatons as opposed to critical professionals. As examined in Chapters 5 and 6 government policy in relation to the curriculum and assessment demonstrates a level of control that has led to a level of 'gaming' in schools and requirement to be compliant, reflecting the argument of Mills and Lingard (2022, p.1014) that 'pedagogy, curriculum and assessment have all been complicit in reproducing inequalities and in the marginalization of particular student groups'. If this is to change there needs to be more to the ITE curriculum than the technical based mandatory framework that has been imposed on the sector, that will not lead to a 'quality' school system that serves our children and young people well.

7.5 Conclusion

The quote at the start of this chapter suggests that 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (Barber & Mourshed 2007, p.13). In this chapter I have sought to argue that the education of teachers has been significantly undermined by government policy since 2010 – that valorises training over education – and that this policy direction risks the development of a fragile profession, one that lacks substantive disciplinary foundations and is controlled by a government that claims to draw upon international evidence and best practice, whilst simultaneously disregarding the perspectives of the academic and professional community. This is likely to have lasting consequences for the education of children and young people in our state schools.

I have examined discourses around decentralising and centralising education policy and, in relation to Koopman's 3 Cs (2013), have critiqued the government claims that such policy is necessary, as opposed to contingent, demonstrating the complexity inherent in discourses surrounding the restructuring of the ITE sector, ITT Market Review and imposition of a mandated Core Content Framework for the ITE curriculum. I have sought to argue that claims inherent in government policy, that led to an unprecedented upheaval in the ITE sector, are flawed, as evidenced by analysis of alternative discourses and the perspectives of women, that challenge such claims. As such, current policy represents an abandonment of post-war principles that recognised the importance of education and is relentlessly pursuing an economic rationality that seems intent on reducing teachers to technocratic automatons as opposed to high-status professionals. This chapter has also demonstrated how ITE policy has mirrored the school-based policy that has been examined in previous chapters, with an unprecedented restructuring of the sector and control of the curriculum and assessment. As such, the neoliberal principles of competition, diversity and choice have coalesced with increasing government powers in the name of accountability and transparency. The Ofsted inspection framework and government accreditation process, that was an outcome of ITT Market review, are both mechanisms that ensure compliance – both scrutinise the research and evidence base of the curriculum in ITE to ensure ‘fidelity’ to a narrow evidence base that can be seen as a challenge to the intellectual basis of the profession. As such the profession is experiencing what amounts to a shackled autonomy.

> *I mean we are actually taking some of the professional rigour out of it as well for that reason which I think is very, very dangerous because what really needs reasserting is the professional integrity of teaching and there is almost a view now that anybody can do it….This is actually, it’s a professional vocation and we have got to re-establish the importance of it really because it’s the building blocks of the nation and that’s why it’s so high stakes. And I think, you know, sort of, I think the profession is almost sort of losing its confidence around that as well. (Beatrice)*

Whilst this genealogical study is about critique and problematization rather than putting forward solutions, it is also about raising the voices of women and foregrounding the alternatives they provide to dominant discourse provided by government policy makers. The following chapter will now consider the insights and future possibilities including the perspective of women’s voices.

Chapter 8: Conclusion - Looking backward, looking forward

8.1 Thesis review

> *It always remains important to deflate claims to authority – claims to speak and, even more, claims to speak for – as they threaten to become too monological, too unrealistic and so too exclusive. It is therefore especially important to heed different, marginal, abnormal, transgressive voices that question the 'we' of political dialogue and the 'I' of agency (Donald 1992, p.178)*

In the preceding chapters this thesis has explored discourses around four key areas of education policy with a focus on four post World War II time periods, framed around Koopmans (2013) 3 Cs approach to genealogy (critique, contingency and complexity) and informed by questions posed by Rabinow (1999, p.12) and Pillow (2015, p.137). Using a genealogical approach, the dominant discourses around education policy have been *critiqued* and problematized to expose how our 'historical present' came to be, and how it might have been otherwise if alternative events or discourses had prevailed. As such our present is the result of dominant discourses that were able to shape policy and impose 'conditioning restraints' (Foucault 1977b, p.30-31) that have brought us to where we are now – we can see how our present and future conditions of possibility are *contingent* and not necessary. The quote above is particularly relevant here as we can see how dominant discourses have indeed become exclusive and how other voices might provide insights into future possibilities.

Analysis of these dominant discourses has revealed inherent *complexities*, exposing the underlying assumptions and mechanisms that underpin education policy, demonstrating the continuities and discontinuities over time and revealing the endurance of patriarchal power. Linked to this last point, an important aspect of this study has been to consider the involvement and influence of women in policy-making over the four time periods – aligning this with the different waves of feminism that are seen to have brought some social, economic and cultural changes, and exposing the perpetuation of male dominance. As such this study has drawn on the voices of women using the data collected from interviews and has disrupted the text of the thesis with inclusion of pertinent vignettes from those interviews.

As consistent with a genealogy study, the aim of this conclusion is to offer new insights and perspectives that have emerged from critiquing and problematizing the dominant discourses around these four areas of education policy. These have been divided into two key areas that outline my contribution to new knowledge, paralleling Benhabib's (1986) two modes of critique, diagnostic and reconstructive (Koopman 2013). The first area involves diagnostic, or problematizing, critique and includes both substantive insights and methodological insights. The second area also involves reconstructive, or pragmatic, critique and includes consideration of future possibilities that foreground women's voices and 'invite reconstruction' (Koopman 2013, p.21). In addition, the chapter will consider the limitations of the study and potential areas for future study. Finally, it will offer a personal reflection on my learning during the process of completing this study.

8.2 Contribution to new knowledge: Diagnostic critique 1 – substantial insights

As indicated in Chapter 1, this is not a conventional thesis. Whilst a traditional thesis might have a narrow focus that can be examined in depth, I have taken a long perspective examining the discourses around four key areas of education policy over a significant time period. However, it has been by looking at this long view, and four areas of policy, that has afforded me the opportunity to gain valuable insights and develop a powerful grasp of the nature of education policy in England, that might not have been possible by focussing on just one area of policy – thus the long view has enabled me to offer a unique and distinctive perspective that would not have been possible otherwise.

Analysis of all 'four horsemen' together has demonstrated the unprecedented upheaval in the English education system, particularly in the last decade, as a result of policy changes in all four areas – all justified in government discourse by the imperative of responding to an apparent crisis in education that they have been required to find a solution to, for the sake of our children and young people who would otherwise 'fall behind' their international peers and be disadvantaged. However, as outlined in section 2.2.6 such policy 'solutions' can create the very problems they intend to 'fix' (Bacchi 2000) and this has been evidenced in the above chapters where examination of alternative discourses in relation to each area of policy, has demonstrated that government policy has not diminished inequalities but has rather led to increased inequalities that serve to maintain the status quo.

Looking at all four areas of policy through Koopman's lens of critique, contingency and complexity (2013) the key substantial insight provided by this study is the very absence of all three of these concepts in education policy today and the limitations that this imposes as other possibilities are closed down. Rather than critique in policy there is a level of *naivety*, whether contrived or unwitting. The contingency of policy is denied as it is portrayed as *necessary* in response to a 'crisis' in education, and we can see a *simplicity* in policy as the government claims that by doing A and B we will necessarily achieve C, in a technical 'painting by numbers' approach (Taubman 2009), with no acknowledgement that education, and all it embodies, is much more complex than this. The below sections will look at this in more depth drawing on some examples from the analytic chapters.

8.2.1 The absence of criticality and whiff of naivety

Analysing the four areas of policy we can see that policy is characterised by a lack of real criticality, more demonstrating a naivety in which limits on thought and practice are simultaneously imposed but disavowed. The continuation of government sanctioned selection processes in the state sector, through the grammar school system and associated 11-plus examination, can be seen as one example of policy examined in this study that demonstrates the absence of criticality, and the presence of naivety in government education policy. This could be seen as unwitting naivety perhaps, an adherence to a system they consider 'works', or it could be conceived of as a contrived naivety – a strategy that conveniently divests the government of the need to end selection processes that have been serving the affluent since 1944. Either way the continuation of this selection undermines their claim in policy discourse to be committed to 'levelling-up' and reflects both a lack of criticality and unwillingness to acknowledge other possibilities. This study has highlighted that the continuing commitment to the grammar school system, justified in rhetoric that they are a vehicle of 'social mobility', has been contradicted by alternative discourses that indicate that only around 3% of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds attend these schools (Cribb et al 2013, Danechi 2020) and many of these do not progress as suggested (Reay 2017). The 'boom' in private tutoring (Major 2016) to support children passing the 11-

plus exam is ensuring these schools are monopolised by more affluent groups in society and this is perpetuating social class divisions, disadvantaging those who are deemed to have 'failed'. This can be seen to be increasing inequalities rather than diminishing them, demonstrating the naivety of policy makers as they fail to acknowledge, or conveniently ignore as Reay (2017, 2022) suggests, that it is the wider social inequalities and the 'educational binds of poverty' (Brown 2018, p.59) rather than perceived 'ability', that determines success in such selection processes and ultimately life chances. This was a key point raised by Grace's during her interview as indicated below.

> *Well I would say, I always say this, first of all we are not going to make any difference to our education system until we eradicate child poverty. Forty per cent of the gap is before they start school and then it widens. What you are saying to schools all the time is that you have to climb Mount Everest without oxygen and without crampons because what's dragging you back is the level of poverty we have in our country, so we have to address that (Grace)*

In addition, the study has illuminated how inequalities are compounded by government allegiance to the independent sector that serve just 7% of the pupil population but continue to provide a guided route to government (and other positions of power) to ensure the perpetuation of the status quo. Government policy for the state sector continues to claim that 'social mobility' is possible for all whilst ignoring that it is not a level playing field and that some children have advantages conferred by this system. It is a rhetorical stance that belies any level of criticality, with a continued acceptance of a system that privileges some over others. A significant insight from this study has been the development of an understanding of the strategies of power maintenance, in particular the level of engineering within public schools that ensures that particular pupils (males) are empowered with the tools and technologies to adopt key decision-making positions in society, to the exclusion of others, including women. The study has revealed how these institutions have adapted over time, developing enduring networks that enable them to survive and thrive (Joyce 2013, Malik 2023), evidenced by the claim that they provide a public benefit, and continued valorisation in public discourse that suggests their characteristics are worthy of emulation. Whilst this might suggest a level criticality it also indicates a naivety that these rhetorical tools and technologies cannot be seen through.

8.2.2 The denial of contingency and insistence on necessity

The continual reference in government discourse to a crisis in education that is threatening the life chances of our children, has resulted in unprecedented reforms in education in all four areas of education policy. The government have claimed these reforms have been necessary in order to deal with this apparent crisis and in doing so have denied the contingency of policy, asserting that there is no other way but their way and that policy is necessary. As such we have seen, for example, the drive for academisation which has resulted in the fragmentation of the state school system in which social class has continued to be a significant determinant of experience, opportunities, and achievement. This policy was not necessary but rather contingent on a set of circumstances and discourses the government have peddled. Neither has it led to the promised outcomes (Reay 2017). The policy to academise has represented a significant departure from previous policy with a restructuring of the state school sector that is unprecedented and has also exposed how government adopt rhetorical strategies to serve their purposes. Rather than diminishing inequalities this 'privatisation' of the state sector (Reay 2017) has created a system of winner and losers and has not delivered on the promise to increase autonomy for schools that would lead to pupil's needs being better met. Around 80% of secondary schools and 39% of primary schools are now academised and out of local authority control. These schools are now under the direct control of the government and dependent upon them for all funding. The majority of these schools are part of Multi-Academy Trusts which have assumed many powers of the local authorities and built up similar bureaucratic layers of administration – the same systems that provided the government rationale for removing schools from local authority (Wilkins 2017), exposing a more ideological agenda discussed in Chapter 4. As a result, the expertise and many of the services of the local authority have been lost. This study has demonstrated that the autonomy promised to academies – to give them control to manage their schools to better serve the needs of their particular pupils – is rather a 'shackled' autonomy. The increased accountability measures and intense focus on performance data have served to undermine this autonomy and necessitated schools to focus on outcomes – this study suggests this has led to the adoption of practices in some schools that might enable them to compete in league tables but has resulted in negative effects on teachers and pupils as examined in Chapters 5-7. None of this was necessary and could have been otherwise but provides an example of the impact of government policy that denies contingency and suggests there are no other alternatives.

Another example from this study that provides insights into the denial of contingency in policy relates to ITE. Analysis of policy related to ITE has focussed on the unprecedented changes imposed on the sector in the last decade in the structure and organisation of ITE, the curriculum for ITE students, and the assessment and accountability of the ITE sector, reflecting the changes that have also been imposed on the school sector. The government have claimed these reforms have been necessary in order to manage the ‘crisis’ in education and ensure the ‘training’ of ‘quality’ teachers and thus there is an implicit denial of contingency. However, rather than necessary this policy can be seen to be contingent and the result of a government agenda to control the ‘training’ of teachers in the same way they are exercising control over the state school sector, to ensure future teachers will be acquiescent to the policy being established in the school sector and ensure the perpetuation of policy rather than pose any challenge to it. This study has highlighted that policy emerging in response to the apparent ‘crisis’ in the sector has in fact led to a real crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers and overall fragmentation of the sector. The policy reforms over the last decade can be seen as contingent rather than necessary. The Ofsted Annual Report (Ofsted, 2010) indicated that the most outstanding provision for ITE was delivered in Higher Education in partnership with schools, undermining the government claim that the shift to school-led ITE was necessary. More recently, the claim that the ITT Market Review was necessary, predicated on the imperative to improve ‘effectiveness’ and ‘quality’ in the sector, has been undermined by Ofsted findings that found 99% of ITE providers to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in 2018 and 100% in 2020 (Ofsted 2018, Ofsted 2020) and the OECD TALIS report of 2018 which indicated that English teachers had reported high level of preparedness for teaching resulting from their formal education or training (Bousted, 2022, p.22). As such we see a denial of contingency in the claim of necessity.

8.2.3 The absence of complexity in favour of the simplistic

The pursuit of a policy that proffers that a particular kind of curriculum, and particular process of assessing it, can measure educational success exposes a simplistic perspective that ignores the messy complexity of social reality. It imposes limits on other ways that educational success can be conceived and reduces it to assessing ‘ability’ through a time-related examination. The analysis of discourses around the curriculum in this study has highlighted the extent of the control the government now has over what is taught in English schools, signifying the curriculum is now a tool of the government, rather than a vehicle for developing knowledge and learning determined by educational professionals. Whilst the 1988 Reform Act marked a shift to more government control over the curriculum this control has been intensified in the last decade with a policy shift towards a knowledge-based curriculum that government discourse claims will contribute to ‘levelling up’ by ensuring that disadvantaged pupils have ‘powerful knowledge’ (Young and Lambert 2014), and the cultural capital required to enable them to compete in the future employment market. This rhetoric is superficially persuasive but underlying this is an assumption that it is level playing field and this study reinforces that it is not. Pupils have different experiences, in and out of school, that impact on their ability to achieve, such as material deprivation and access to few resources, and hence it is not a fair competition (Brown 2018).

This study indicates this policy agenda has led to curriculum poverty for many, particularly disadvantaged pupils, as a focus on academic subjects, reflected in the EBacc, have resulted in the demise of more vocational and creative subjects, removing an avenue for potential success and narrowing the curriculum for many pupils, thus revealing a simplistic approach to policy that denies the complexity and multiplicity of learning pathways. In addition, the continued adherence to a ‘type’ of knowledge, which champions white middle-class men at the expense of women adds to this curriculum poverty and can be seen to perpetuate stereotypical assumptions, limiting the scope of what pupils learn and how they perceive the world and those within it, and further revealing a policy agenda that denies the complexity of what knowledge constitutes.

The lack of complexity in policy and simplistic/technical approach suggests that if pupils do A (follow a knowledge-based curriculum) plus B (have their ability in this curriculum measured in an examination) this will equal C (evidence through performance data that will demonstrate national progress in pupil outcomes). Whilst this is limiting in itself, the imperative for schools to compete in league tables has led to practices related to the curriculum that further disadvantage some pupils. These include reduced curriculum options and direct instruction teaching strategies – at the expense of more progressive pedagogies – to prepare pupils for examinations and maximise their chances of counting positively in school performance data. The focus on examinations has not only excluded other forms of assessment (like coursework) but has impacted directly on what is included in the curriculum (and what is excluded). Hence, the shift towards a traditional, knowledge-based curriculum that can be more easily measured to provide 'evidence' of achievement through examinations. In this knowledge-based curriculum some pupils are being denied the opportunity to study and achieve in subjects they might have excelled in, as vocational subjects and creative subjects are marginalised in the curriculum and hence some skills and competencies are not assessed (Hargreaves 2004, Reay 2017, Wrigley 2018). This undermines the notion of a broad and balanced curriculum and thus we see how the denial of the complexity of what education is, and what it can do, together with a lack of acknowledgement of how policy will be enacted in practice, serves to perpetuate inequalities rather than reduce them.

Another key point relates to the curriculum offer and pedagogic practices currently being adopted in the independent sector. Whilst the government have valorised the independent sector for its focus on academic and traditional subjects, it is evident that these schools are currently moving towards a more progressive project-based curriculum as well as progressive pedagogies (Benn 2020) in order to equip their pupils with the skills anticipated they will need for future success – the very opposite of what the government have imposed on the state sector. It is revealing that government policy for state schools is undermining such progressive education and shifting towards practice that the independent sector no longer consider appropriate for the future needs of their pupils – thus government policy that claims to be addressing inequalities can be seen to be perpetuating them.

A further example from the study that exposes the absence of complexity and presence of simplicity in policy relates to the analysis of alternative discourses about the government imposed mandatory ITT Core Content Framework (DfE 2019a) – which is essentially the core curriculum for ITE. This, together with the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011), demonstrate this government's assumption that teaching is a more practical, technical job rather than an intellectual profession in which pre-service teachers should critically engage with the historical, sociological or philosophical foundations of their professional field. There is no acknowledgement from the government of the complexity involved in becoming a teacher. The imposition of the CCF can be seen to undermine the autonomy of teacher educators as well as impacting on the breadth of the curriculum offered to pre-service teachers – in the same way we have seen the autonomy of school teachers affected and the narrowing of the curriculum for some pupils. As teachers are now being trained via a compartmentalised 'Learn that' and 'Learn how to' model their ability to develop 'critical relationships to knowledge' (Britzman 2003, p.53) is thwarted and they risk becoming technocratic automatons without agency, rather than advocates and agitators for the profession, and this has implications for the future of the profession covered in section 8.3.

What is also revealing are the rhetorical tools used by the government to provide a logic for their policy, the consistent use of phrases related to the CCF like 'evidence based' and 'best practice', that suggests policy is rational and based on 'what works' (Hordern and Brooks 2023, Biesta 2007). This can be seen to provide a legitimacy to policy that on further examination is shown to be simplistic – built on a narrow, instrumental notion of evidence that just involves evidence and practice and omits the crucial and complex element of interpretation. The adherence to such a limited and particular evidence base, and exclusion of wider academic research undermines the intellectual basis of the profession, revealing a disregard for the wider educational professional community, including teacher educators, and an attempt to reduce teachers to technocratic and compliant automatons as opposed to developing them to be autonomous professionals.

8.2.4 The 'four horsemen' of the education system – further insights

Policy in all four areas – school organisation and structure, the curriculum, assessment and performativity, and teacher education – has been revealed to be simultaneously decentralising and centralising with similarities in how this policy has been produced, disseminated and enacted. This might suggest what Savage (2021, p.2) has referred to as 'policy alignment' in education policy in the last 10 years, outlined in section 2.2.4. However, this policy can be seen more as a reflection of the neoliberal values of governments in the last two decades rather than the orchestration of some 'grand design', with Balls (1993) notion of adhocery appropriate here. Whilst referring to the 1990s, Broadfoot's (1996, p.210) perspective on policies being part of any grand plan is equally relevant since 2010.

> Rather they must all be seen as flotsam on the tide of rationalization and stringency of which the shift towards greater control in education is but one manifestation. What is now taking place arguably is a quite fundamental change in the mode of policy legitimation through the growing dominance of a technocratic rationality informed by mechanistic evaluation as the basis for decision making

Whilst there may not have been a ‘grand design’ there are some key patterns and insights emerging from analysing all four areas of education policy together – policies that have brought unprecedented upheaval to the English education system. Reforms in all areas of policy analysed can be seen to be lacking in criticality and underpinned by a naivety that imposes limitations to thought and practice, obstructing other possibilities. Policy that has been driven through as a necessity to deal with the ‘crisis’ in education can be seen as contingent – it could have been otherwise if other perspectives and voices had been allowed to offer alternatives. Finally, policy can be seen to be simplistic and ‘technicised’ with no acknowledgement of the complexity of social reality.

A further insight provided by this study relates to how those in power have come to acquire and hold on to that power, deploying strategies, for example a repertoire of rhetorical tools, to justify and legitimate this policy in all four areas. These tools and devices have been used to convince the nation that such rapid reform is essential in order to deal with the ‘crisis’ in education, establishing their moral imperative to improve the quality of schools and teachers to ensure all children have the best ‘quality’ education. The result of this is that those in power have been able to simultaneously manipulate the direction of discourse and marginalise alternative discourses – ensuring the exclusion of some voices from the policy process (as outlined in section 2.2.3) and as such alternative possibilities in education policy have been undermined.

Additional insights are inter-linked and relate to autonomy and control, the de-professionalisation of teachers and educators, and selection – all suggesting that rather than diminishing inequalities this compendium of policies is increasing inequalities, with the implication that some children are being severely disadvantaged. Whilst the government have suggested their policies increase autonomy, this study suggests it is a ‘shackled’ autonomy, that is underpinned by accompanying policy that has imposed stringent controls on the education sector, impacting on the professional status of teachers and educators.

The academisation of the state school sector has brought schools under the direct control of the government and their autonomy has been severely curtailed by the requirement to compete in league tables and ‘pass’ Ofsted inspections, that has ensured compliance to the governments preferred knowledge-based curriculum, preferred pedagogies and imposed mode of assessment (examinations). In some schools this has resulted in teachers been told what to teach, what resources to use and how to teach, to prepare pupils for examinations – this undermines both their autonomy and professional status. This is reflected in the ITE sector where the autonomy of teacher educators has been similarly undermined with an imposed curriculum characterised by a limited evidence base and underpinned by a ‘learn that’ and ‘learn how’ approach that amounts to painting by numbers (Taubman 2009) – so revealing the underlying government assumption that teaching is a mechanical process that anyone can do, as opposed to an intellectual endeavour. It is not just teachers and teacher educators who are subject to control. The segregation inherent in education, for example in setting, serves the purpose of social control as some pupils come to see themselves as ‘less than’ and perceive lack of success in exams as more about their own limitations than societal inequalities. This can be seen to provide a convenient ‘safety valve’ in which many pupils accept their ‘lot’ whilst also providing legitimation of the prevailing social order (Broadfoot 1996), reducing the potential for these pupils to question their lot in life. This has illuminated how little has changed over time – whilst there may be no overt statements about keeping the ‘lower orders in their place’ like at the turn of the last century (Donald 1992), the current systems continue to segregate on the basis of social class, though just in a more discreet way and under the veil of policy that claims to be committed to ‘levelling up’ and ‘social mobility’. The government can thus be seen to be complicit in exclusionary policy and practices that are increasing inequalities rather than diminishing them

The implications of this are that our children and young people might not be prepared to meet the needs of a rapidly changing economic landscape, with fast evolving technology and changing work practices – despite this being what the government claim their policy is intended to do. This also demonstrates how policy makers are so intent on denying criticality, contingency and complexity that they are willing to sacrifice the future of young people, or some young people, to maintain the prevailing order. Whilst public schools are embracing a more progressive project based curriculum along with progressive pedagogies (Benn 2020) to meet the demands of the future – demonstrating their ability to adapt to ensure they continue to be equipped with the necessary tools of power (Joyce 2013) – state schools are at the behest of government policy adherence to a knowledge based curriculum with direct instruction, which is likely to perpetuate inequalities as pupils, particularly the disadvantaged, are ill-prepared for emerging and future employment demands. It is ironic that at a time when employers need problem solvers and creative thinkers our education system is increasingly focused on examinations that are constructed for the reproduction of particular knowledge and individual competition (Broadfoot 2000), reflecting the view of Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.100) that 'accountability measures, ensure that schools cannot achieve policy goals of producing creative thinkers and entrepreneurial dispositions'. It is not the basis of knowledge that is the issue here but the manifestation of this in schools as indicated in Chapter 5. As Broadfoot (2007, p.49) suggests, this is 'working directly against' the development of individuals with broad and meaningful knowledge who will be able to compete in a future employment market.

In summary, the study has sought to utilise Koopman's (2013) 3 concepts of genealogy – critique, contingency and complexity – to examine discourses around four areas of education policy across four time periods. A key insight of this study has been to find these concepts absent and denied within education policy. The study has revealed that dominant discourses that have claimed radical reform over the last decade has been essential – to improve the quality of schools, teachers and pupil outcomes – can be challenged and problematized. The study suggests that schools are experiencing more of a 'shackled' autonomy, with policy and practices serving to increase inequalities rather than diminish them. In addition, teachers are being framed as technocratic automatons as opposed to autonomous professionals, with policy related to ITE revealing the underlying assumptions of the government that teaching is a formulaic and mechanical process rather than an intellectual endeavour. An important implication here is that this risks the development of a fragile profession, where teachers will lack the foundational knowledge to best serve the interests of children and young people in schools, simply becoming envoys of the government. Thus, the study has illuminated a policy context that points to England being at a critical juncture in education. Current policy is contingent and not necessary – it did not have to be this way and is a result of how the government have dominated discourse to the exclusion of other voices. The next section considers potential future possibilities, including in particular the perspectives of women who were interviewed as part of this study, to reflect the focus on women's voices.

8.3 Contribution to new knowledge: Diagnostic critique 2 – methodological insights

The feminist genealogical approach to this study has provided a methodological approach which has enabled me to reveal new insights into how policy has been conceived and enacted, and importantly, who has been included and excluded in the policy making process over a longer period of time. These insights would not have been possible otherwise. Tamboukou (2003b, p.14) stated that

> I have come to the conclusion that there is no way of truly understanding what genealogy is about, other than concentrating on a genealogy per se, analyzing it in its minor details, reaching the most remote points of its networking revealing the hidden micro-mechanisms of its operation

This understanding of genealogy resonated with me as I focussed on key junctures in education policy over the four time periods and pried into the dominant discourses around them – discourses that foregrounded the voices of men and excluded and marginalised the voices of women, providing me with new understandings of education policy and how it might have been if different power and influences had been present.

This approach might also provide a model for other researchers to utilise, to overlay their research with a particular lens to provide new insights, which might be related to gender but could also be adapted to use with other factors like race, class and sexuality.

A key insight emerging from this feminist genealogy approach has been the consideration of future possibilities and opportunities for reconstruction that might be provided by looking at the perspectives of women and these are now considered in the below section.

8.4 Reconstructive critique: Potential future possibilities and opportunities

A Foucauldian approach to genealogy 'invites reconstruction', as a complement to the diagnostic critique that has been the main focus of this thesis, where new perspectives and new knowledge might emerge to inform contemporary and future policy (Koopman 2013, p.21) Donald (1992, p.175) suggests that 'historicity' makes constant critical examination and reconstruction essential, whilst Koopman (2013, p.101) suggests that such critique also 'act as a kind of hinge by way of which we transition out of old practices into new ones', which is pertinent here as I consider future possibilities.

Through the insights provided from this study including the views and perspectives offered from the seven women I interviewed, I have identified two broad arenas to consider future possibilities and next steps. The first relates to changes to education policy, that might be outside of my direct control but requires consideration, and the second relates to ITE and the arena where I have potential to influence.

8.4.1 Policy alternatives

In this section I refer to what I consider the 3 E's to policy reform – emancipation, empowerment and equality. These are not discrete concepts but inter-related with each serving the other.

Emancipation and empowerment go hand in hand and here I am referring to the future possibility of reducing (or removing) government control of education, with a reform of accountability and monitoring structures, that would enable educational professionals to reclaim control of the profession. A *re-professionalisation* is needed as opposed to the de-professionalisation currently being experienced, with teacher autonomy re-asserted and the important work of teachers and educational professionals valued. This emancipation would involve a shift in schools from a performativity culture to a learning culture, requiring a recalibration that would see teachers and schools refocussing on the purpose of education and the values of schools to contribute to 'genuine equity of education' where teachers would not be 'compliant survivors' but rather be 'thoughtful contributors'(Roberts 2018, p.155-156). This reflects the perspective of Clarke and Phelan (2017,p.84) who argue that the intellectual and political freedom of teachers is an imperative if they are to question 'educational purpose and process' – teachers should have the knowledge and understanding to 'speak *for* education' as this is 'a key source of their authority as educators'. Mills and Lingard (2022, p.1026) similarly refer to the notion of an 'activist professional' – the idea that teachers should have the knowledge and understanding to be able to recognise and call attention to injustices and inequalities in the classroom – whilst Angus (2012) outlines the imperative of such activists is to 'problematize and re-imagine the neoliberal imaginary and replace it with a more desirable and educationally appropriate alternative. This might be achieved through reclaiming 'pedagogical intelligence' – planning for 'children in the room', using more pupil centred pedagogies, teaching knowledge and skills while still creating opportunities for pupils to play and enabling pupils to see the world beyond the classroom.

This would require changes to the current curriculum and assessment policy that might only be assured by a shift away from centralised control to experts in the field with decisions underpinned by pedagogical rationale rather than ideological motivations. Thus, educational professionals, school leaders and teachers might reclaim the intellectual basis of the profession and regain their autonomy to best meet the needs of the particular pupils in their schools. This would also include ensuring diversity in the curriculum, like opportunities for vocational studies and also diversity in the representation of women and ethnic groups for example. This would include recognition of a broader range of knowledge and modes of assessing pupil achievement, as Darlene and Grace allude to:

> *I mean I think there needs to be a revaluing and a revalorising of working-class knowledge's, which includes vocational knowledge's……But it's also really important to have pedagogies that emphasise collectivist rather than individualistic approaches to learning. So, you know, team building, they do masses of team building in private schools (Darlene)*
>
> *I think we are going to have to look seriously at the curriculum and to ensure that we have skills and we have interdisciplinary work in the curriculum. What the OECD talks about if you like, Andreas Schleicher talks about if you are doing physics, thinking like a physicist. If you are doing drama, thinking like an actor, it's adopting the mindset of the subject. And you do that through enacting in your learning the subject, that's what we need to have. We need to ensure that the curriculum is representative of the different voices in our society, representative of our place in the world. (Grace)*

A shift away from examinations as the sole measure of learning/knowledge would be empowering for schools, teachers and pupils alike and ensure a broader range of learning could be assessed, over a longer period of time, securing increased engagement in learning as opposed to a focus on preparation for examinations. Whilst there might be concerns raised about removing examinations as a form of assessment, for example because of the need for national benchmarking for pupil outcomes or concerns about teacher bias in other forms of assessment like coursework, there are solutions to these things as Elizabeth and Charlotte voiced.

> *So you could do a sample twenty per cent test for policy purposes, you could do the national assessment. So, I think what we need to do is, the way we are going to find out how our children are doing nationally is this, and that could be something…… so I am constantly trying to think, well which bits of the system is it that do need to be changed? And I think it's the consequences of the results, not necessarily the testing. (Elizabeth)*
>
> *I would personally prefer to go back to some sort of blended arrangement whereby you have properly moderated coursework, that was part and parcel of the course and then some control condition tests which just checked that for those that have been doing that work fairly that was representative of the general standard of their work. I can see nothing wrong with doing that. (Charlotte)*

Related to the idea of assessing learning over a greater period of time is the notion of life-long learning, which might be a future possibility that not only removes the pressure to achieve in a small window of opportunity but would also enable the continued development of new knowledge, skills, qualities, and dispositions, to better meet the needs of a fast-changing employment landscape, reflecting what Claxton (1999) argues is the only valid preparation for an unknown future, and requiring a re-imagination of education and the purpose of it at a structural level (Coffield 1999). Both Anna and Beatrice supported this.

> *Adolescence is the most turbulent of many turbulent phases of the human existence. And somehow the idea that we pile on the most pressure and tell young people in this window, when their hormones are going crazy, but also their personalities are forming, tell them that this is the moment and there is no other moment when they need to shape their future. And they need to do it through these very rigid and arid and scary ways. It just seems to me a miss-step…..And I have become more and more interested in lifelong learning because it's crazy that we put all our investment and all our thoughts on, you know, years 0-3, to 16-19 or up to 22, and then most of us are going to live to 85 (Anna)*
>
> *And it really, it's resonated with me lifelong really that sometimes we are putting very high stakes on a narrow set of indicators ….And I think that is increasingly important now where people will not stick with the same career lifelong and they need to view themselves as continuous learners, there is that opportunity to reskill and upskill and retrain throughout your life. (Beatrice)*

Referring back to the emancipation of teachers, another future possibility would be a shift towards institutional self-evaluation, potentially with external 'critical' support, that might be a model that is empowering for schools and teachers, ensuring a focus on improvement without the costly impact of the current high-stakes performativity agenda. This would shift the current evaluation of schools (and its pupils) from being performance driven with 'judgement' at the heart of the process to a more 'diagnostic' model with learning and improvement as the focus, reflecting the distinction between quality assurance and quality control (Broadfoot 1996). Ofsted might be 're-imagined' to be this 'critical support', whereby the judgements and labelling of schools is discarded and replaced with school visits that are more developmental and target orientated. These future possibilities are advocated in the views of both Charlotte and Elizabeth.

> *You've got to have some sort of system of accountability but Ofsted as it stands has been one of the most appalling inventions I think over the last 30 years in the way it's evolved. I'm not against schools being inspected. I think they need to be. I think they need to be audited. But labelling them in the way that they're labelled and the level of accountability and the lack of genuinely helpful steps to improve and support that is feed into our system, it is just all punitive. And that to me, you can't run a healthy system when the system is entirely punitive. (Charlotte)*
>
> *I would redraw the line between politics and education and I would move to teaching becoming an evidence based profession so that teachers evaluate their own work, they are free to experiment as long as they evaluate it and learn from it. (Elizabeth)*

Looking now at my third 'E' to policy reform – equality – this relates mainly to the future possibility of ending selective education to address some of the current inequalities in our education system, that confer advantages on some children simply by virtue of the social class they are born into. This would mean the end of the grammar school system and the 11-plus examination and also a perhaps longer-term plan for reform of the independent sector. This was a theme that emerged from some of the interviews with Anna in particular expressing strong views around this.

> *I would love to see the political left and right agree that you need a really good school in every community and it needs to be non-selective. That it needs to be a mix of knowledge and the arts, that it needs to be properly funded, that you need to find a way to fold in the private sector and slowly reduce those differentials. Which you would increase the funding for local schools. (Anna)*

Anna also suggested that a future possibility should be the reform of public schools that seem to provide a direct route to the corridors of power, suggesting this might be possible if done by evolution not revolution.

> *I think in a way it's easier to attack, not attack, but to challenge and reform those big public schools. Because I think there is recognition, it's not right that in the 21st century we have a prime minister, the twenty-fourth, who has come from a school that is so removed from the experience of most people. And the same with a significant portion of his cabinet. (Anna)*

Whilst the reform of selective education might be a longer-term vision, the inequalities within schools might be addressed more quickly with a funding model that ensured schools had appropriate funding to support the needs of their particular pupils, with significant funding increases for those schools serving disadvantaged communities. However, as a number of the women interviewed indicated, real equality for children will only come about with real changes in society, in particular tackling the poverty many children experience throughout their lives that severely impacts on their opportunities and experience of education.

> *I always say this, first of all we are not going to make any difference to our education system until we eradicate child poverty. Forty per cent of the gap is before they start school and then it widens. What you are saying to schools all the time is that you have to climb Mount Everest without oxygen and without crampons because what's dragging you back is the level of poverty we have in our country, so we have to address that. (Grace)*

In summary, these are some of the future possibilities in which our current education system could be re-imagined to address the current crisis in education. A comment made by Darlene during her interview summed up this vision for a future education system as below.

> *It would be underpinned by the three Cs, collaboration, caring and collegiality. It would be based on inclusivity, happiness, wellbeing and equality rather than the exclusion and exclusivity that the current system is based on. And it would prioritise success for all and have a broader extent of what knowledge and learning is, then the narrow remit that we have got at the moment.(Darlene)*

For this to be possible there would need to be an understanding of criticality in education policy and the acceptance of alternative thoughts and practices. The acknowledgement of the contingency of policy would be essential to conceive of other possibilities, and a commitment to complexity in policy would be needed that would embrace the messiness of social reality. Overall, this would require what Donald (1992, p.179) has stated as, 'the sustained critique of regimes of truth, the patient and practical reform of existing institutions, and yet also a political imagination, which so far, looks more than anything like a witty and subversive science fiction'.

8.4.2 Initial Teacher Education – agency and influence

Whilst the future possibilities outlined above require shifts in government policy, one of the outcomes for this study might be achieved in my own sphere of influence, via the teacher training and education programmes that develop our future teachers and leaders. For example, I intend to develop further opportunities for student teachers to identify, critique and understand the submerged problems inherent in education policy. Enabling further critical discussion on the purpose of education, pedagogic values, and the intellectual basis of the profession within programmes might serve to strengthen the foundational knowledge of student teachers. In addition, further development of work related to critically analysing government policy on assessment and performativity and the complexity of this in practice, might better equip student teachers with deeper knowledge and understanding to navigate the complex territory of education as they enter the profession as teachers and potential future leaders. This is also important to address what Anna described in her interview as the lack of historical memory and the importance of this in ensuring people know about the past and learn from it, understanding how the past has influenced the present.

> *But the lack of historical memory and the lack in many cases, in some cases with the clever and cannier political people, the deliberate blocking of historical memory and misrepresentation of what went on in the past. (Anna)*

The potential impact of 'white-washing' the past was also echoed by Charlotte.

> *The cultures of schools layer up and traditions develop and they disappear quickly too. If you put a bit of bleach on everything and it disappears and we've had that bleach and it's been paired down to something very, very simple, you know to do with teachers and classrooms and children. (Charlotte)*

Thus, incorporating some sessions on teacher education programmes that enable student teachers to examine education policy through Koopman's 3 Cs of genealogy – critique, contingency and complexity – may support their development and growth as transformative professionals rather than facilitators or technicians (Clarke and Phelan 2017), support their development as critical consumers of policy and better prepare them for their future roles.

In addition, the focus on women's voices in this study has served as a provocation to reflect on my own practice and experience as a woman responsible for a teacher education department within higher education. This reflection relates to a number of areas including how I am given a voice myself and how I ensure others are, how we ensure the content of the curriculum reflects diversity and avoids stereotypes that might be unconsciously reinforced, and the use of gendered language – in relation to staff and students. Hence a further outcome of this study is the recognition of the importance of being vigilant and proactive in these areas. The next section outlines some of the limitations of the study.

8.5 Limitations of the study

Whilst the study has exposed submerged problems in education policy, such a genealogical study has inherent limitations. A genealogical study is not intended to be a developmental history, but rather focuses on critical junctures or turning points in history that require critique and problematization. As such this study has examined specific education policies and literature in the time periods that have represented turning points and provided examples of continuity or discontinuity. Hence, there may be specific policies that have not been included in this study that might have been relevant to others and provided alternative lines of enquiry and critique. Notwithstanding this, the approach taken has opened up unique possibilities for new critical insights as indicated in section 8.3.

In addition, the study has been informed by data collected from interviews with seven women who currently play, or have played, a key role in the national commentary about education. As outlined in Chapter 3 these women were identified because they have spoken out about education and the intention was that their voices would provide a contrast to the dominant male voices in education policy. It is acknowledged that this is a small sample and the inclusion of a wider group of women might have led to different perspectives and insights.

8.6 Potential future Study

The aim of this study has been to contextualise and historicise the current education 'crisis' through the lens of government policy in four key areas in four time periods. Government policy in all four areas has led to unprecedented upheaval in the sector and this study has aimed to expose problems and issues within that policy and the discourses it reflects and recirculates. This offers stimulus for further investigation related to all four areas of education policy. However, in the short term I am particularly interested in undertaking further research in my own field of ITE, in particular investigating the government claim that their policy on Initial Teacher Education is based on 'best international practice'; my contacts with international teacher educators might provide the opportunity for critically examining such claims. In addition, the focus on women's voices in this study has also served as a provocation to further examine the experiences of girls and women in education, particularly in light of a rising tide of misogyny in society and attempts to marginalise the voices of women that might seem at odds with the fourth wave of feminism and suggestive of continuing patriarchal norms.

8.7 A further personal reflection

As a teacher educator with a background in teaching and school leadership, I have been involved in interpreting and implementing policy in both schools and ITE and have experience of being held accountable for outcomes related to this policy. As indicated in the personal reflection in the introduction to this study, I recognise that in my earlier career I often focussed on *how* to implement policy rather than ask *why* it should be implemented. This study has shifted my thinking and understanding to an extent I had not expected. It has revealed the complexities in policy formation and exposed the dominance of particular people, particular experiences and particular voices in the policy-making process – in particular, the enduring influence of largely white men from public school backgrounds who have been able to dominate discourses over decades to the exclusion of others, including women, despite social, economic and political changes. I understand how policy establishes limits to the thinkable and practicable; how it is contingent rather than necessary and how it reduces complex and entangled social realities to simple and simplistic causal chains. But perhaps most importantly, it has awakened an understanding in me that our current context is the result of decades of patriarchal dominance in policy-making. The study has enabled me to really analyse the strategies that policy makers have deployed to justify and legitimise policy – the tools and technologies at their disposal as well as the networks that they are able to draw upon to further their policy agendas and maintain power. It has also further developed my understanding of how social class continues to be a key factor in success (acknowledging other intersectional factors too) and the troubling notion of social mobility. Given my own background and experiences outlined in Chapter 1, I am perhaps seen to be 'socially mobile' and an example of what the government claim is possible for all – but I do not think it is possible for all without essential change, and this study has deepened my understanding of how people like myself, who have 'done well', are used as examples to demonstrate the legitimacy of a policy discourse that subsequently enables the government to avoid tackling social inequality.

In summary, completing this study has been a personal and professional learning curve – it may sound a grand claim, but it has changed me. I have embraced being a researcher and found the experience highly challenging (in many ways) but also rewarding, enlightening and highly motivating. I am looking forward to continuing my journey in education as a teacher educator, researcher and academic.

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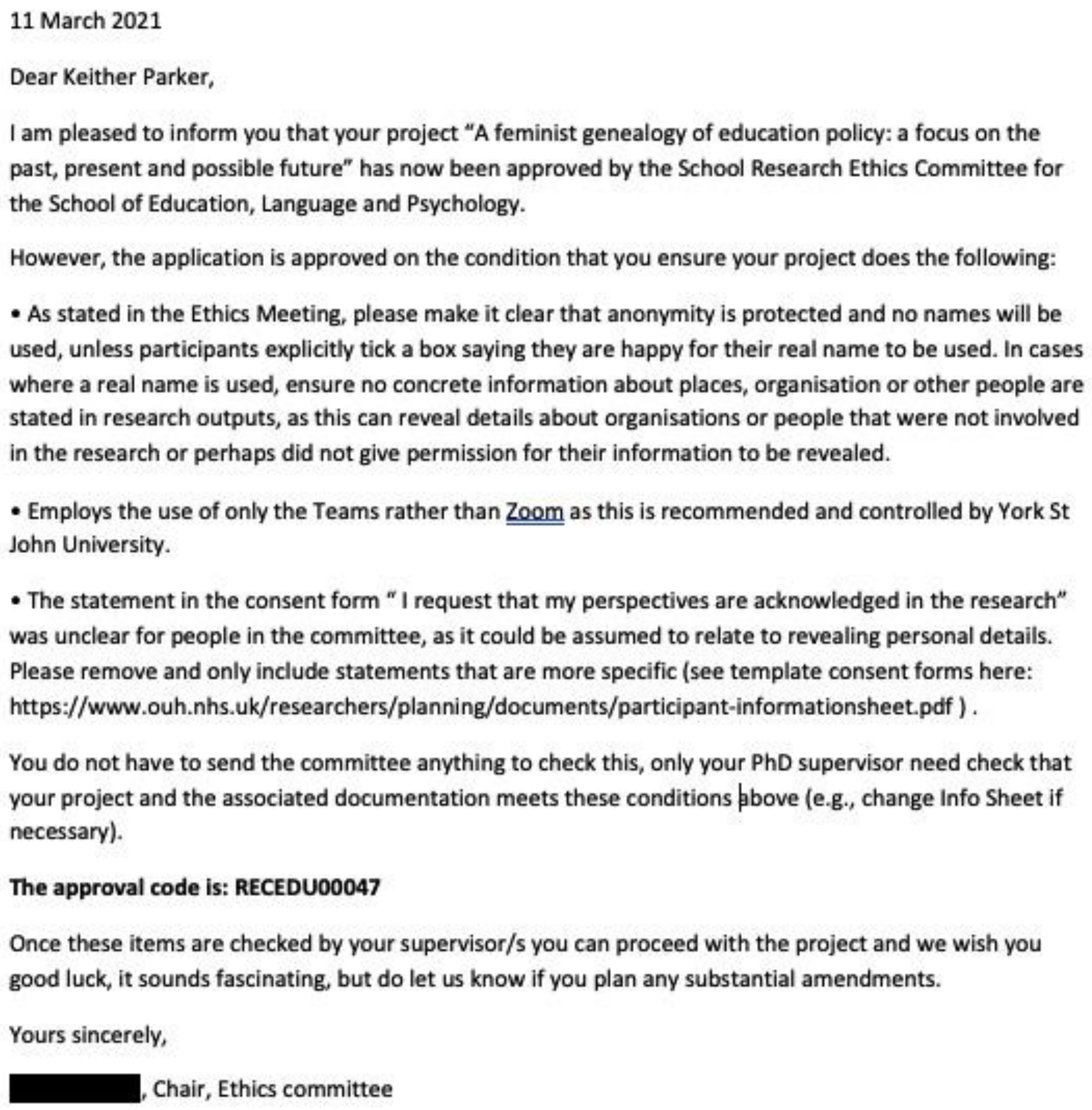
Chapter 10: Appendix

10.1 The women interviewed

Interviewee	Experience and expertise in education
Anna	A British journalist who has been writing about education and politics since the early 1980s. She has published news features, opinion pieces, pamphlets and books on various educational issues and has campaigned for equality in education. She is also well known for public speaking around educational issues and is active on social media.
Beatrice	Deputy Director of a local authority with responsibility for education, leading a team of staff who work with primary and secondary schools on all areas of education policy including school achievement and improvement and educational support including SEND.
Charlotte	Chief Executive of a Multi Academy Trust and well known for her commitment to social justice and reform in education, particularly Ofsted. Her views and opinions are widely conveyed through use of social media and involvement in a national think tank for school leaders.
Darlene	A Professor of Education at a university in England and published author. Her research and publications reflect a strong social justice agenda and commitment to addressing social inequality, in particular in relation to social class and gender.
Elizabeth	Ex-Government Minister highly involved in education in the period this study covers. Since leaving government she has continued to be involved in working within education and is recognised for the significant contribution she has made in education both inside and outside of government office.
Fran	A British journalist who has reported widely on matters related to education since the 1980s. She contributes regularly to a national broadsheet newspaper, has written pamphlets and books on education and is involved in educational campaign groups. She is highly active on social media as a journalist and feminist.

Grace	A high-level official in a national organisation advocating for teachers and education. Prior to this she was a teacher and university lecturer, with a senior role in a university education department. She is an outspoken critic of current government policy and has published news articles, features and books. She is active on social media.

10.2 Ethical approval



11 March 2021

Dear Keither Parker,

I am pleased to inform you that your project "A feminist genealogy of education policy: a focus on the past, present and possible future" has now been approved by the School Research Ethics Committee for the School of Education, Language and Psychology.

However, the application is approved on the condition that you ensure your project does the following:

- As stated in the Ethics Meeting, please make it clear that anonymity is protected and no names will be used, unless participants explicitly tick a box saying they are happy for their real name to be used. In cases where a real name is used, ensure no concrete information about places, organisation or other people are stated in research outputs, as this can reveal details about organisations or people that were not involved in the research or perhaps did not give permission for their information to be revealed.

- Employs the use of only the Teams rather than Zoom as this is recommended and controlled by York St John University.

- The statement in the consent form " I request that my perspectives are acknowledged in the research" was unclear for people in the committee, as it could be assumed to relate to revealing personal details. Please remove and only include statements that are more specific (see template consent forms here: https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/researchers/planning/documents/participant-informationsheet.pdf) .

You do not have to send the committee anything to check this, only your PhD supervisor need check that your project and the associated documentation meets these conditions above (e.g., change Info Sheet if necessary).

The approval code is: RECEDU00047

Once these items are checked by your supervisor/s you can proceed with the project and we wish you good luck, it sounds fascinating, but do let us know if you plan any substantial amendments.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted], Chair, Ethics committee