

TITLE OF THESIS

The Neolib-rebellion

**A critical analysis of how neoliberal values are presented in the discourse of
contemporary education policy in England**

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the dominant values of neoliberal politics are presented within the discourse of contemporary education policy in England. Utilising a uniquely developed analytical framework, the research deconstructs the language and the social processes at work in creating contemporary education policy in England and reveals how dominant neoliberal values are legitimised through a depoliticised discourse of ideological fantasy. Underpinned by Critical Realism, this study employs Bhaskar's 'depth' ontology (1978) as a conceptual lens to view education policy as an empirical surface artefact, with a deeper, hidden social reality obscured by its discourse.

This thesis is written from the critical perspective that neoliberalism erodes the concept of education as a public good, reducing it to a marketised commodity. The research identifies three key mechanisms that drive the neoliberal agenda of contemporary education policy in England:

- the importance of global competition
- the development of future human capital
- the performance and accountability of educational institutions

The study argues that these cogs in the neoliberal engine of educational reform are legitimised and promoted as the solution to issues of social inequity that are 'problematised' within the discourse of education policy (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977). The research contends that education policy discourse highlights problems of social injustice and presents neoliberal solutions which portray a utopian prosperous and fair society. It proposes that the ideological narrative woven into contemporary education policy is a form of discursive crisis management which pledges to tackle societal issues of inequality yet fails to acknowledge the roots of the problems.

This study provides an original contribution to the field of research through employing an individually developed critical analysis framework. It utilises linguistic and interdiscursive analytical methods to explore how education policy discourse constructs emotive narratives which blur the boundaries between ideological fantasy and neoliberal reality. The thesis concludes by suggesting that neoliberal education policy should be subverted and challenged. It argues that education policy discourse both reinforces and exposes power asymmetries - awareness of this is important for anyone seeking alternatives to the neoliberal education regime. The study believes that acts of resistance - such as developing a critical awareness of the power behind policy - may reawaken the moral and ethical pedagogy of teachers and leaders, enabling the profession to re-focus on wider educational values rather than the measurable school improvement agenda of neoliberal education.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all teachers and leaders who have experienced the struggle between the moral purpose of, and the political agenda for, education in England.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Contextual Background to the Research

1.1 Aims and Rationale

The purpose of this research is to explore how neoliberal values are presented in contemporary education policy through a critical analysis of its discourse. A review of literature from the field of education policy and critical policy analysis, identified a gap in the body of research concerned with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of contemporary education policy. Previous research studies have utilised methods of CDA to interrogate English education policy texts from 1972 to 2015 (Mulderrig, 2003; Lumby and Muijs, 2014; Emery, 2016; Maslen, 2019). However, CDA has not been utilised to explore more recent education policy. This study employs an individually developed critical analysis framework based on a form of Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA (2003), to analyse a selected corpus of education policy texts. The following policy texts form the corpus:

- The 2016 White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'
- The 2016 Green Paper 'Schools that work for everyone'
- The 2022 White Paper 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'

The selected corpus provides an opportunity for analysis and comparison of the linguistic and socio-political layers at work in the construction of contemporary education policy in England. Furthermore, as school-specific government papers, the selected policy texts are particularly relevant to my professional role as a primary school teacher and leader, enabling critical reflection from a personal and professional viewpoint.

Although the study refers to the selected corpus as education policy texts, it is important to note that they are only legislative proposals which are not statutory. It is also pertinent to

note that there is a key difference in the purpose of white and green papers. The latter serve the purpose of setting out the broad direction of government policy; they are consultation documents produced by the Government with the aim ‘to allow people both inside and outside parliament to give the department feedback on its policy or legislative proposals’. Whereas white papers are policy documents produced by the Government that ‘set out their proposals for future legislation’ (source <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/green-papers/>). This study critically analyses the proposals laid out in the policy texts, exploring how neoliberal ideology is constructed within the discourse and revealing the dominant values that underpin the recommendations.

This research is undertaken from the critical stance that neoliberalism is corroding the education profession, reducing it to a measurable commodity that can be obtained, marketed and traded. The term neoliberalism is largely used by critics operating in ‘epistemic’ communities - such as universities and non-governmental organisations - to describe a ‘free-market’ approach to ‘human affairs’ (Castree, 2010, p.2). The term refers to a theory of political economic practices that align the liberation of ‘individual entrepreneurial freedoms’ with the advancement of societal well-being (Harvey, 2005, p.2). Neoliberalism is defined by the central tenets of privatisation and marketisation which emphasise the individual’s ‘responsibility for their own affairs’ (Castree, 2010, p.4) rather than a reliance on the welfare state. It is an economic-focussed policy model which favours private enterprise and seeks to transfer the control of economic factors from the government to the private sector. Advocates of neoliberalism support the efficiency and effectiveness of free-market capitalism, where government spending and regulation is limited, and public enterprise is encouraged. However, critics of neoliberalism associate this political model ‘with policies of austerity and attempts to cut government spending on social programs’ (Manning, 2022, p.1). The many criticisms of neoliberalism include ‘its potential danger to democracy’, granting too much power to individual corporations and ‘worsening economic <and social>

inequality' (ibid.). These are the criticisms that this thesis shares in relation to the state of the English education system.

To provide a brief historical context, neoliberal ideas began to pervade political practice in England when Margaret Thatcher came to power as the first British female Prime Minister in 1979. She brought with her the values of neoliberalism and advocated them as 'common sense' (Harvey, 2005, p.39). This 'common sense' mobilisation of free-market competition was transferred into the education system, where the increasing interdependence between education and economics continues to grow. Shortly before the onset of Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal governance, Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan made a famous speech at Ruskin College in 1976. The speech associated the country's economic decline with a decline in educational standards (Smith, 2014, p.36). It is suggested that the Ruskin speech was the precursor to standardisation and England's National Curriculum (ibid.), which was introduced as there was a lack of transparency for parents in terms of what and how children were taught in school. Moreover, it is widely accepted that since this speech, there has been an acute focus in England for education to be more responsive to the needs of industry; the floodgates of educational improvement had been opened allowing neoliberal ideology to pour in.

Under the neoliberal influence of successive governments, the education system developed a 'school as business' mentality where competition, commodification and choice govern (Fielding and Moss, 2012, p.5). This thesis argues that the English education system has become the servant of neoliberal politics in terms of the importance of global competition, the development of future human capital and the increased focus on performance and accountability. In fact, one could argue that 'education is politics' (Ward and Eden, 2009, p.1). The story of contemporary education policy and its relationship with neoliberalism is explored in the literature review.

The critical stance employed by this study led to the generation of a key philosophical question: *Can a teacher's and leader's moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* This question summarises a personal and professional 'struggle' as a teacher and school leader, to undertake practice governed by measures of performance and accountability whilst believing it is fundamentally wrong. Despite this belief, my role as a teacher and leader has been shaped by the discourse of contemporary education policy in England and serves the agenda of neoliberal education. This study argues that education professionals have become instruments of the knowledge economy, delivering a prescribed curriculum in order to create a future workforce that can compete on the global stage. Whilst this public service could be viewed positively in terms of developing future capital, this thesis argues that the dominant culture of neoliberalism eradicates the concept of education as a public good and reproduces social inequalities. This argument is explored further in the literature review.

This thesis builds upon a previous piece of research undertaken as part of my doctoral studies. During a module entitled 'Policy, Research and Truth', I conducted a critical analysis and evaluation of the political speech 'Britain, the great meritocracy' (Wilce, 2019). The 2016 speech was delivered to the nation by Theresa May, the Prime Minister at the time. This small-scale study concluded by reflecting on the political appropriation of the term 'meritocracy'. Michael Young's prophetic account 'The Rise of the Meritocracy' (1958) is a warning that the future of a country driven by competition and capitalism - the key drivers of neoliberalism - is a dystopian society. However, the term has become appropriated by contemporary political discourse as the embodiment of a fair and just democratic system. Meritocracy is a concept which has been transformed across a recent period of political history and is promoted in contemporary policy discourse as a solution for social justice. Nevertheless, it is regarded by some as 'the key means of cultural legitimation for contemporary capitalist culture' (Littler, 2017, p.2).

The linguistic and discursive exploration of May's meritocracy speech generated an interest in the critical discourse analysis of other policy texts and laid the foundations for this research study. The 2016 meritocracy speech coincided with the publishing of the 2016 education Green Paper, 'Schools that work for everyone'. The two texts share similar themes and rhetorical phrases within their discourse, indicating interdiscursive links and the potential for further exploration and analysis. For example, in Theresa May's speech, a utopian vision of a 'truly meritocratic Britain' portrays a '*country that works for everyone*' (May, 2016, p.2). In the Green Paper, this phrase is transformed into the visionary strapline '*Schools that work for everyone*'. It can be contended that these discursively related phrases project an 'ideological fantasy' (Zizek, 2008, p.30) which serves to conceal the underlying neoliberal agenda of competition. This study critically analyses the discourse of the Green Paper, along with the 2016 and 2022 schools White Papers, and explores how neoliberal values are presented through a discourse of 'ideological fantasy'.

Underpinned by Critical Realism, this study applies Bhaskar's concept of a stratified or 'depth' ontology (1978). The research exercises a critical view of education policy as an empirical surface artefact, which conceals the reality of neoliberal agenda beneath a discourse of ideological fantasy. The study utilises a uniquely developed critical analysis framework developed from Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational method of Critical Discourse Analysis (2003). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) allows an exploration into the multiple - potentially hidden - layers of policy text by scrutinising the linguistic and socio-cultural factors involved in the creation of the discourse. Through a CDA-based approach, the research investigates how the policy discourse conjures up a Marxian 'magic trick' - a desirable fantasy which hides from public awareness how the market economy exploits education as a business and fetishised commodity (Bainbridge, 2020, p.744). The study considers how these neoliberal constructs are legitimised and reproduced through narratives of social justice.

It has been argued that there is a need for researchers to understand the language of policy (Taylor, 2004). As part of the study's CDA approach, several layers of analysis help to strengthen the methodology, providing a deeper understanding and interpretation of the links between the linguistic features and the socio-cultural context of the policy discourse. Influenced by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study uses methods of linguistic, interdiscursive and argumentation analysis to explore the layers of discourse at work in the selected corpus of policy texts. Through a CDA-based analytical framework, this research aims to understand the language of contemporary education policy by uncovering 'the ruses of power' (Finnegan, 2021, p.4) and exposing how neoliberal ideology is presented.

The aim for this research is to add to the existing body of work in the field of education policy analysis. It brings an original contribution to the existing field of literature concerned with the critical analysis of education policy through its chosen analytical framework. Furthermore, the context of my professional role within primary education brings a unique positionality to the research. As a primary school teacher and leader, I have direct experience of the relationship between policy and practice in the English education system. This necessitates reflection upon the position from which the research is carried out - which as Chouliaraki and Fairclough suggest is necessary for critical social research (1999, p.66). Therefore, discussion and 'critical commentary' (ibid.) in relation to the impact of education policy upon my pedagogic beliefs and professional practice is woven throughout the thesis; my personal and professional 'struggle' narrative becomes a recurring thread. In summary, the thesis presents a critical reflection upon, and critical analysis of, the dominant neoliberal ideology engrained in the rhetorical fabric of contemporary education policy in England.

The emancipatory aim for the research (an important aspect of critical realist research) is to empower educators to 'reawaken' the ethical and moral purpose of their profession (Ball,

2016, p.1046) by seeing past the neoliberal agenda that shrouds education policy discourse. Employing a critical realist lens, the thesis contends that contemporary education policy facilitates a ‘social wrong’ in that its discourse suppresses and marginalises any alternative political and professional views (Fairclough, 2013, p.243). The study aims to use its unique analytical framework as a ‘strategy for talking back to public discourse, for disrupting its speech acts, breaking its narrative chains and questioning its constructions of power and agency’ (Luke, 1997, p.365). The thesis concludes by returning to the underpinning philosophical question: *Can a teacher’s and leader’s moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* As Ozenbrook found, many educators choose to become a ‘selective rebel’ in order to survive in the English education system and ‘fight the good fight’ (2019, p.iii). This research offers suggestions for how teachers and educators can ‘resist’ neoliberal education and subvert policy agenda by ‘fostering creativity’ and promoting ‘education as a common good’ (Tett and Hamilton, 2020, p.5). The thesis contends that teacher training and continued professional development should be utilised as a ‘resource for hope and making change’ (ibid.), rather than as an instrument of neoliberal politics that mobilises and legitimises a market-driven education system.

1.2 Generation of the Research Questions and Thesis Structure

The research question was formulated after the literature review process which was conducted in two stages. The first stage explores a body of literature focussing on the education policy context in England over the last forty years. This time period was chosen as it is concomitant with the acceleration of neoliberal governmentality and its influence upon education reforms. Furthermore, it directly relates to my lived experience within the English education system - both as a student and a teacher - making the time period selection a deliberate choice. Whilst this may appear to be a decision of convenience, the thesis

contends that the chronological range of the literature selection allows for enhanced criticality through personal and professional reflection.

The second stage of the review examines existing research studies which employ critical policy analysis methods. Utilising a thematic analysis approach, three key themes are identified within the reviewed literature: neoliberalism, problematisation and social justice. As aforementioned, this study defines neoliberalism as the dominant mode of political thought focussed upon free-market consumerism and competition. The review explores how discourse related to neoliberalism is discussed in the literature. The identified theme of problematisation refers to the notions of Freire (1970), and later Foucault (1977). In terms of Freire's conception, 'problematisation is a pedagogical practice that disrupts taken-for-granted "truths"' by putting them into question (Bacchi, 2012, p.1). For Foucault, problematisation is the practice of examining how and why issues become problems (ibid). Within the reviewed literature, research studies explore how existing social issues are 'problematised' then reframed by nuances in policy rhetoric. The third identified theme of social justice refers to how the literature explores 'the ways in which inequalities are produced and reproduced by post-welfarist education' (Gewirtz, 1998, p.469) and how education policy recognises and addresses this. These three identified themes underpin the generation of the over-arching research question:

How does the discourse of contemporary education policy in England present neoliberal values?

Further exploration of the themes identified through the review of literature, led to the generation of three supplementary questions. These assist in scaffolding the CDA approach to the exploration of the selected policy texts:

- ***What issues are 'problematised' in the policy discourse?*** (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977)

- *What are the main arguments or ‘master discourses’ presented in the policy discourse?* (Arnott and Ozga, 2010)
- *How is ‘ideological fantasy’ constructed in the policy discourse?* (Clarke, 2014/2020)

The research approach employs a multi-layered analysis based on Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. Using a combination of linguistic, interdiscursive and argumentation analysis techniques, the study’s uniquely adapted analytical framework serves to investigate the main and supplementary research questions.

The thesis is organised in five main chapters. Each chapter begins with a short introduction to refocus upon the central thread of the study and set out the ensuing structure, before steering the reader through the discussion by sub-headed sections. The rest of this chapter aims to provide a contextual backdrop for the research, in terms of how my personal and professional experience relates to the research journey. Drawing on practice, pedagogy and doctoral study situates the focus of the research. Within this chapter, my theoretical beliefs are explored, and it is clarified how a critical realist perspective steers the research towards the chosen methodology and methods. The chapter ends with a summary of the research approach in which the core and subsidiary research questions are revisited.

1.3 Personal Context: The Journey to Critical Awareness

It is considered that ‘the great majority of topics for study and research questions do not arise out of a vacuum or specious choice but, instead, mesh intimately with researchers’ deepest professional and social commitments’ (Ely et al., 1991, p.30). This research study is intrinsically interwoven with my professional practice, experience and interests. Almost two decades ago, as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), my pedagogical beliefs were rooted in a holistic view of teaching - a moral and ethical duty to the teaching profession. However, now

- as an experienced teacher and school leader - maintaining a holistic view of education has become a challenge. Although the National Strategies (DfE, 1997 - 2011) provided welcome structure and prescription at the outset of my teaching career, the pressures of performance measures and accountability became very apparent as I gained experience. No more so than in my role as a Year Six teacher and Assistant Head of a large primary school. In fact, the further I climbed up the meritocratic ladder of education, the more aware I was of the pressures of performativity, and the more critical of the state education system I became.

Whilst my passion and enthusiasm for teaching remains, and my holistic view of education does somewhat endure, there is no doubt that my practice has been shaped and affected by neoliberal education policy. This has caused a personal and professional tension between policy, practice and pedagogy. It is clear that this tension has implications for the study in terms of researcher bias. Therefore, making this positionality clear throughout the thesis is important as it underpins its critical analysis, discussion and findings. Chapter 3.1.1 further addresses research positionality and discusses issues related to researcher bias which may affect the validity of the study.

1.3.1 Self-realisation: My Teaching Existence Within a Neoliberal Education System

Some of the initial reading during my doctoral studies illuminated literature rooted in critical theory. Reading influential theorists who have a critical voice surrounding education policy and practice, enabled me to draw comparisons with elements of my professional role. For example, one of the many themes that struck parity with practice I have observed in schools is the concept of deprofessionalisation. This draws similarities with the Marxian theory of alienation (1867), where in an educational sense, the teacher becomes detached from the product of their labour (the student). The concept of deprofessionalisation has been explored by Biesta. He argued that teachers 'have lost professional control over what they provide and have become merely the deliverers of centrally prescribed educational strategies'

(2004, p.249). We have lost control over our labour - how we educate our students - and have become detached or alienated from its 'product'.

The critical view of central control and the national homogenisation of education insinuates a loss of freedom and autonomy within the institution. As Bronner suggests, 'critical theory refuses to identify freedom with any institutional arrangement or fixed system of thought' (2011, p.1). It can be argued that the autonomy and agency of the education profession has become more constrained by the institution and is increasingly controlled by the 'fixed system of thought' found in education policy (ibid.). In a similar vein to deprofessionalisation, the concept of 'de-skilling' is related to removing professional autonomy from the teacher (in terms of what is taught) and replacing it with centrally prescribed content. It is contended that as teachers increasingly lose control over how to teach, 'the skills that they have developed over the years atrophy' (Apple, 2014, p. 127). Apple claimed that deskilling is a consequence of the separation of conception from execution - the alienation of product from labour.

Applying this to a recent, personal context, it can be argued that teachers feel under pressure to cover the skills and knowledge content of the new National Curriculum (2014). For example, in my role as a primary school teacher and leader, I have observed excellent practitioners side-lining their freedom and creativity for fear of not covering the statutory objectives for their year group. With an increased emphasis on testing in primary schools, imposed measurable attainment can acutely shape the curriculum and how it is delivered. Current testing regimes such as the Phonics screening in Year One, the Multiplication Tables Check in Year Four and the Statutory Assessment Tests in Year Two and Year Six mean that part of the curriculum for these children has been reduced to the delivery of centrally prescribed knowledge and skills. Furthermore, with the business of education providing off-the-peg teaching packages and government validated schemes such as the systematic

synthetic phonics programmes (DfE, 2022), there is a danger that the skills of good teachers are being homogenised and the profession of teaching becomes that of a technician (Priestly, 2011).

Another critical voice in the field of education policy, who has been of great influence in terms of my self-realisation, is Ball. His critical research and analyses describe the interplay of power and ideology (2017) – constructs which are central to critical theory and to this research study. Ball's critical thinking surrounding educational policy is entrenched in Marxian theory (2003). Much of his writing describes the government's neoliberal agenda to control and commodify education as a capitalist product, rather than a public service. His views depict an ideological curtain of power shrouding an education system which is governed by capitalist economy; and as Brookfield suggests, that 'people are enslaved by the myth of economic success' (2014, p.423).

As well as his Marxian influences, Marcuse's concept of repressive tolerance (1965) can be identified in Ball's critical policy studies. For example, his view of 'performativity' – a notion first developed by Lyotard (1984) – echoes the illusion of democracy and 'masks its repression behind the façade of open, even-handedness' (Brookfield, 2014, p.426). In his powerful account '*The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity*', Ball argues that state regulation and measures of performance produce 'opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications' (2003, p.215). The façade of 'good' performance is scripted by a regime where teachers and schools are being measured by a centrally prescribed set of standards. With such an emphasis on accountability and performance, schools and teachers are under pressure to 'play the game' (ibid., p.221). As a result, this can lead to educational establishments and individual teachers suffering from 'values schizophrenia... where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance' (ibid.).

This research is born out of my own educational values being subjected to a schizophrenic affliction. This sense of ‘values schizophrenia’ has at times caused my pedagogic beliefs to be ‘sacrificed for impression and performance’ (Ball, 2003, p.221). This leads back to the philosophical question which underpins the research journey: *Can a teacher’s and leader’s moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* Like many colleagues and educators, I do endeavour to seek space outside of the pressures of accountability to teach values which I believe stretch beyond the concept of education as a commodified product. But is this enough to uphold the morality of the profession?

Despite the increasingly neoliberal agenda for education policy - critically highlighted across the body of literature - my practice is punctuated with pockets of resistance. This thesis argues that teachers *can* exist professionally ‘within, against and beyond capital’ (Harvie, 2006, p.1). Yet there is no escaping that the business of education is unwaveringly centred on a political regime of market-driven capitalism; it is this neoliberal regime that is in conflict with my moral and ethical pedagogy. From a Marxian perspective, educational establishments have become industrialised. It can be argued that teachers’ labour power - the exchange-value of their capacity to work - serves the reproduction of human capital; the outcome of their labour, or the use-value that is created, represents a commodified product - the nation’s future workforce. Although I may lay out my capital as a ‘school master’ ‘in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory’, this ‘does not alter the relation’ between labour and product (Marx, 1867, p. 355). The Marxian reality of my teaching existence within a neoliberal education system serves as a mere cog in the industrial machine of education, churning out the workforce of tomorrow like factory sausages. *So how does one morally exist beyond the context of the Marxian education machine?*

It can be contended that it is possible to exercise a critical stance towards the English education system whilst simultaneously holding optimistic, moral beliefs. Goodson demonstrates this argument in his work on professional knowledge in the context of teaching and teacher education (2003). His critical analysis of the English education system at a period where the influence of a decade of educational reform was being widely debated, examines perceptions of the teaching profession through periods of educational change, and how teachers' professional knowledge and status has been scrutinised in academic, political and public forums. However, his views upon the teaching profession convey a more emancipatory tone in comparison to Marxian-influenced critiques of the education system. Goodson views teaching and the role of the teacher as a vital profession. He believes that teachers are the midwives of knowledge society and the backbone of the educational system: 'Without them, or their competence, the future will be malformed and stillborn' (2003, p.ix). Goodson's critical-moral dichotomy may be construed as a type of values schizophrenia similar to my own policy-pedagogy struggle. However, I believe that it is an example of how we can concurrently exist within, against and beyond the neoliberal systems that are saturating education policy. Goodson's proposal - and the emancipatory aim for this study - is a call for the need to re-elevate teaching as a 'moral and ethical vocation' (ibid., p.133).

More recently, Ball has written about his belief in the need for educationalists to 'confront the slouching rough beast' of neoliberal education by becoming 'increasingly, critically reflexive <and> politically aware' (2016, p.1046). He urges that teachers should 'reawaken' their ethical and moral pedagogy that they initially signed up for - the 'real educational work' that has become lost in the realms of neoliberal education policy (ibid.). This captures my own journey of self-realisation; through a developed sense of critical and political awareness, I am able to confront the neoliberal beast that governs education and revive my inherent pedagogic beliefs. The intention for this research is to inspire other educators to do the same.

Similar views are held by Biesta and explored in his ‘rediscovery of teaching’ (2017). His rallying call to arms is for teaching to be ‘(re)connected with the emancipatory ambitions of education’ (2017, p.3). This recognition of a need for change seeks to empower teachers in their professional lives and ‘reawaken’ their principles (Ball, 2016, p.1046). For me, the discovery of these modern manifestos advocating the need to ‘flip the system’ and change ‘education from the ground up’ (Evers and Kneyber, 2016), assisted in looking beyond the Marxian ‘school-as-sausage factory’ analogy and towards the moral and ethical vocation that I believed I had originally signed up for. On the one hand, through critical and political awareness, I am able to think and act beyond the demands of an education system which operates as a ‘knowledge economy’ (Hargreaves, 2002, p.1), and towards the importance of the cultivation of children’s personal development and character (ibid., p. 4). However, on the other hand, my deepened critical and political sentience led me to the philosophical question which ultimately frames this research: *Can a teacher’s and leader’s moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* This question underpins the critical reflection and discussion surrounding my positionality within this research study. Moreover, the question encompasses my personal and professional dichotomy - my schizophrenic struggle - to exist within and beyond the ‘slouching beast’ of neoliberal education (Ball, 2016, p.1046).

1.3.2 The Real Journey Begins - The Twists and Turns from Theory to Research

The ‘theoretical friends’ that I have found on my journey to criticality, have motivated my research interests surrounding educational policy and have influenced my perceptions and practice. Reading influential theorists and exploring the critical perspectives surrounding the English education system and its policy, has legitimated my personal and professional ‘struggle’ and deepened my pockets of resistance in terms of existing in an education system seemingly driven by capitalist values. My developing sense of criticality has served to

liberate my thoughts from the circumstances that enslave me as a cog in the educational machine (Horkheimer, 1982). Although I feel that I am now able to see through and look beyond the neoliberal regime of education policy, I realise from a Marxian perspective that I will never completely evade it. It was this realisation that spurred the initial philosophical question which underpins this research journey - *Can a teacher's and leader's moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?*

Ruminating upon this question brought forth multiple ideas for research. At the outset, I was keen to embark on a piece of action research linked to my professional role. However, the research design was forcibly changed due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic (see appendix 1 for a reflective account). All employee and student researchers at Canterbury Christ Church University were advised to review their research-related activities in light of the pandemic. Face-to-face interactions were suspended with recommendations that research should be adapted to remote methods where possible. More significantly, the university's Covid-19 pandemic guidance stated that,

‘the continuation or commencement of any primary research or research-related activity involving interaction with schools and/or the wider compulsory education system (including teachers or students) must be subject to very careful consideration of the impact on a system under considerable pressure.’ (30th March 2020, p.6)

Although this created a barrier to proceeding with the planned research and caused a delay to the thesis timeline, the necessary changes made to the research design has enabled the study to offer a unique and original contribution to the field of research. The adapted research design presents a critical analysis of a selected corpus of education policy texts, by utilising a uniquely developed approach based on Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Critical Discourse Analysis. The research design is described in detail in chapter three.

1.4 Theoretical Framework: My Beliefs and Perception of Reality

Aligning my views with critical theory provides a foundation for this thesis. Over the course of my teaching career and doctoral studies, I have come to believe that teaching is an inherently political act (Giroux 2005). Knowledge itself cannot be deemed neutral; it is motivated by political ideology. Knowledge cannot be separated from its social, historical and political influences. This epistemological belief aligns with the philosophy I exercise in terms of ontological thinking: Critical Realism. This doctrine has come to be most associated with the work of Bhaskar (1979), whose ideas have been widely influential across multiple disciplines (Collier, 1994, p.x) and are central to this study. The view of existence developed by Critical Realism is that it is an ‘open system’ which is determined by a stratified set of mechanisms that interact in ‘complex ways’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2022, p.19). This research is particularly influenced by Bhaskar’s depth ontology which assists in describing this complex interplay of mechanisms that contribute to the ‘open system’ of life. Employing a critical realist perspective, reality is viewed as ‘external and independent’ of our knowledge of it (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.139). Events or actions do not exist before they occur, however, the agent or cause of the event does (Collier, 1994, p.9). Our observation and experience of reality is ‘the empirical’ (Bhaskar, 1979) – constructed by events that are ‘mediated by our perceptions and beliefs’ (Emery, 2016, p.3).

Empirical reality is comprised only of our experiences but not all events or actions are experienced (Collier, 1994, p.43). For example, we may wake in the morning to find our newly planted strawberries have been dug up from their beds. We assume that foxes have returned to plunder the garden for grubs or find hiding places for their food caches, even though we have not witnessed this event. To bring this analogy into the field of education, I recall a personal experience. I arrive back in my classroom after attending a Senior Leadership Meeting to find it has been left in a mess - the floor is littered with pencils,

erasers and miniature paper planes. I assume that the children's behaviour for the Cover Supervisor was not that of my usual expectations for them; at worst, stationery missiles were thrown across the classroom, at best, they ran out of time or were not asked to tidy up at the end of the day. Although I did not witness the events that unfurled within the classroom that afternoon, I employed logical, causal criteria to explain the state of the floor. As it happens, my 'at best' logic was to play out in this particular situation. In order to explain events that we have not directly experienced, we constantly use this type of logical reasoning and explanation. My reasoning - for both the vandalised strawberries and classroom - was based on existing knowledge created by experiencing similar events. Once we discover the reasons behind past events, we can apply this knowledge logically to similar scenarios and infer what has taken place without direct observation. This non-experienced reality exists but operates as a separate domain to empirical reality.

1.4.1 Bhaskar's Three Domains of Reality

Sharing Bhaskar's views, I believe that there are three domains of reality: 'the real', 'the actual' and 'the empirical' reality (see fig.1, 1978). Bhaskar's ontology of Critical Realism has been selected as a theoretical underpinning for this thesis as it aligns with the critical analytical framework that has been developed for the examination of the policy text corpus. Bhaskar's theory advocates that 'the real' reality is detached from 'the actual' reality and independent from 'the empirical' reality which we observe and experience (Bhaskar 1978). Although each domain exists separately, they rely upon each other in a stratified yet symbiotic way. The three domains help to 'establish a depth to reality' (Collier, 1994, p.42) demonstrating Bhaskar's transcendental argument that each domain is independent yet coincides. The domains of reality are linked through an open system of multiple mechanisms. The 'real' stratum is comprised of the mechanisms which generate an event. Mechanisms can be a combination of natural, social, human, physical, political or economic

causes, for example, and are themselves stratified (ibid., p.47). A series of generated events then becomes the ‘actual’ layer of reality which may or may not be observed. The final ‘empirical’ layer is the surface of reality that we perceive.

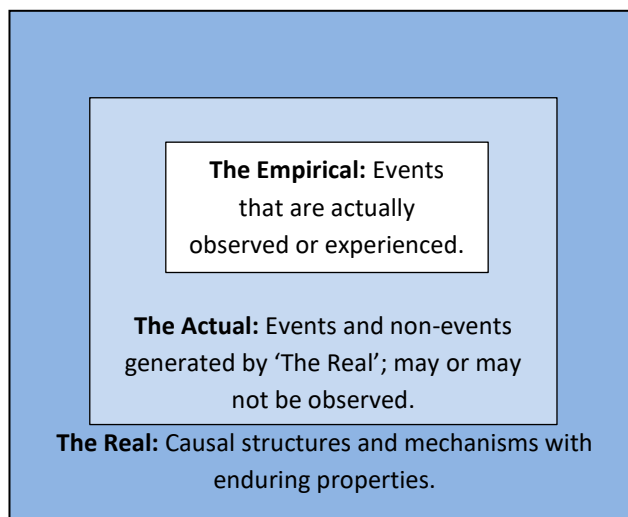


Figure 1: The three domains of reality according to Bhaskar’s ontology of Critical Realism (1978).

One could apply the analogy of a classroom once again to Bhaskar’s tripartite model of reality, where an observed lesson would exist on the surface but be generated by a series of events and mechanisms that are not observed. However, the concept of a theatre production has been chosen to help to visualise how the three domains interconnect, as this will prove useful in the study’s comparisons with education policy. In applying a ‘theatre analogy’, the empirical reality can be likened to a performance that is watched by the audience; the actual reality is comprised of the events that have occurred behind the scenes, such as rehearsals and the construction of scenery and props; the real constitutes the mechanism of the playscript which generates the actual and empirical events of the show.

If the same theatre performance metaphor used for the three domains of reality is applied to the concept of education policy, some interesting comparisons can be drawn. One could liken the empirical reality of education policy to a show for its audience; policy text

becomes the carefully rehearsed and linguistically polished performance which showcases the most desirable version of the actual reality. Then, one could consider that the actual or ‘behind-the-scenes’ reality of education policy (which may or may not be observed before the show) is generated by the multiple mechanisms that constitute neoliberal politics. Finally, it could be argued that the causal effects that permeate the stratified layers of education policy - the ‘real’ reality - are the normalisation of dominant values and the reproduction of societal inequalities. This research investigates the interplay of the three domains of reality in the context of contemporary education policy discourse.

1.4.2 Researching the ‘Realities’ of Education Policy

To a critical audience, the empirical reality of education policy seems detached from its actual reality and even more disjointed from the real mechanisms which generate it. This study proposes that this detachment from reality could be intentional; the policy text received by the audience presents the best, most well-rehearsed version of ‘reality’ in order to put on a good show. Despite these separate realms of reality in the generation, construction and perception of education policy, no single layer could exist without the other. Through employing a critical realist perspective and applying Bhaskar’s three domains of reality, this research peels back the layers of education policy, exposing the discursive mechanisms that operate behind the scenes and how they are carefully rehearsed to produce an audience-worthy policy performance.

It is claimed that ‘critical realists highlight how often our senses deceive us’ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.139). This thesis deems that our senses can be deceived through the manipulation of language. Deception can be created linguistically with carefully crafted words and phrases. When telling stories, we can choose to omit facts or embellish details dependent on our audience, or how we want our story to be received. In the case of education policy, the layer of policy rhetoric - the polished audience-ready

performance that becomes the observed reality - has the potential to be deceiving. Like our stories, facts can potentially be omitted or embellished in order to be the best version of reality for the show.

The very construct of rhetoric in the ethos (credibility and authority), pathos (appeal to emotion) and logos (appeal to logic) of policy text, tends to be awash with persuasive language devices, which assist in promoting political agenda. For example, it can be argued that the very title of the 2016 Green Paper 'Schools that work for everyone' is constructed to create an image of an egalitarian education system. The purposefully selected title can be construed as political propaganda, persuading its audience of a utopian educational future for all of society. However, juxtaposed with this ideology, it can be argued that the policy advocates an education system which is stratified and commodified, where 'every child should be able to go as far as their talents will take them' (DfE, 2016, p.5). Through carefully chosen rhetoric, it seems that the policy paper has transformed what could be deemed as a fragmented and archaic schooling system that creates social segregation, into a meritocratic opportunity for *everyone* - provided that they have talent. This Marxian 'magic trick' (Bainbridge, 2020) attempts to disguise commodification - and the 'ruthless competition' of a meritocratic system - as a fetish (Maslen, 2019, p.609). This brief analytical example provides a tentative flavour of the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) used in this study. The example shows how policy discourse is potentially crafted to present a more favourable version of reality - an audience show. It also demonstrates how the 'real' reality could be magically concealed and even re-imagined as a commodity for society to aspire to. This study utilises a CDA approach to explore further examples of rhetorical phrases and language choices in the 2016 education Green Paper and the selected corpus of texts. The linguistic choices are viewed through the lens of Critical Realism and are discussed in relation to the themes of neoliberalism, problematisation and social justice, identified in the review of literature.

In this section, Bhaskar's three domains of reality have been applied to the generation, construction and perception of education policy to demonstrate a critical perspective. The observed 'audience performance' layer - Bhaskar's empirical reality - can be considered as the 'level of phenomenological awareness' (Finnegan, 2021, p.6) or the layer of first-hand observation and experience that we make meaning from. This study investigates whether the observable, surface reality of education policy is in fact a controlled, ideological representation of education and society, manufactured by carefully chosen rhetoric. Bhaskar's actual reality, the 'level of perceived and unperceived events' and the real, 'the level of activated and unactivated powers', (Finnegan, 2021, p.6) are what this study seeks to uncover in terms of the issues and mechanisms that lie beneath the surface of education policy. Finnegan suggests that 'being critical depends on seeking explanatory depth by moving from surface descriptions to an analysis of mechanisms, powers and structures' (2021, p.6). This is precisely the intention of the research study. Through the lens of Critical Realism, a 'retroductive approach' (Hartig, 2011, p.161) is employed to scrutinise the selected policy texts combining deductive and inductive reasoning. Critical analysis oscillates between inductive observation and deductive theory, moving from the observable surface layer of the policy discourse towards the mechanisms, powers and structures of its interdiscursive reality.

This thesis argues that Bhaskar's stratified ontology of Critical Realism is fitting for a study which seeks to identify the mechanisms, powers and structures that are 'pulling and pushing the discourse, texts and voices' within education policy (Emery, 2016, p.3). This theme of stratification is echoed in the study's research design where the uniquely developed critical analytical framework based on Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is described. The following section summarises the research approach, describing how Fairclough's CDA model can be synthesised with

Bhaskar's three domains of reality, as well as my own tripartite view of the layers of 'reality' within education policy.

1.5 Summary of Research Approach

In order to summarise the research approach, the research questions driving the study are revisited. Following a review of related literature, and influenced by the chosen methodology, a core research question was generated: *How does the discourse of contemporary education policy in England present neoliberal values?*

This was deepened with three supplementary questions which also arose from the review of literature:

- *What issues are 'problematized' in the policy discourse?* (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977)
- *What are the main arguments or 'master discourses' presented in the policy discourse?* (Arnott and Ozga, 2010)
- *How is 'ideological fantasy' constructed in the policy discourse?* (Clarke, 2014/2020)

Driven by my personal and professional 'struggle', generated by the review of literature and focussed by the lens of Critical Realism, these key questions steer the study's exploration into to whether contemporary education policy discourse constructs a fantastical empirical reality, which conceals the actual reality of the government's neoliberal agenda.

The research approach draws upon methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to develop a unique critical analytical framework to explore the discourse of the selected texts. Linguistic and grammatical features are interrogated alongside the wider contextual influences and socio-political motivation interwoven in the text. As Taylor suggests, a policy researcher should think 'relationally', and locate the analysis within the

broader historical, cultural, social (and political) context in which the discourse sits (Taylor, 1997, p.32). As such, the research analysis employs Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA in order to think relationally about the context of the selected policy text.

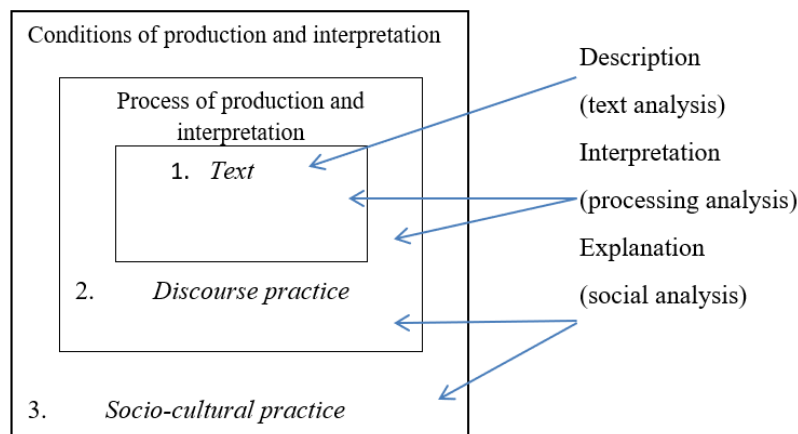


Figure 2: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA (1992)

Fairclough's model is comprised of three nested boxes which demonstrate the interconnection of -and the continuous oscillation between - the layers of analysis (Janks, 1997, p.330). This model fits with Bhaskar's tripartite model of the three domains of reality. Synthesising Bhaskar's ontology and Fairclough's method of analysis in this way demonstrates the generation of a unique, conceptual approach to a critical analytical framework. Like Bhaskar's domains of Critical Realism, each layer of analysis in Fairclough's model can be considered individually yet cannot exist independently of each other. The first layer focusses on the written text and requires the linguistic analysis and exploration of grammatical patterns. The themes that emerge from this text-level analysis then interconnect with the second layer: 'Discourse practice'. Central to this layer of analysis is the interpretation of the situational and intertextual context (Janks, 1997, p.338). This is where Taylor's 'relational' thinking comes into play and further strengthens the analytical framework. Once the text has been interpreted and situated within a relational context, the third layer of analysis explores the socio-cultural and historical conditions that govern the

production of the discourse, with the aim of explaining how it is shaped by - and impacts upon - wider social phenomena.

Although the layers of Fairclough's model are presented numerically, one must not assume that you should begin analysis at stage one, or even conduct the analysis as separate stages at all. Rather than employing an inductive 'bottom-up' (from box 1) or deductive 'top-down' (from box 3) method of analysis, the interconnected layers of analysis within Fairclough's model continuously oscillate, allowing the researcher to move fluidly between description, interpretation, and explanation. As Finnegan explains, 'part of the work of critical research is to explore patterns of relationship and non-relationship between Bhaskar's domains of reality (2021, p.6). It is this 'retroductive approach' (Hartig, 2011, p.161) - the back-and-forth movement between the discursive layers of education policy - that is employed in the analysis of the selected corpus of policy texts.

Fairclough's approach to CDA is described as 'The Dialectical-Relational Approach or 'DRA' (Wodak and Meyer (2009, p.27). Fairclough himself describes this approach in terms of the relations between elements of social processes being dialectically related to each other (2013, p.230). For instance, discourse analysis is concerned with different 'semiotic modalities' - language, visual images and body language - which are dialectically related (ibid.). The discursive features are different from each other but not completely separate. Each 'internalises the others without being reducible to them' (Fairclough, 2013, p.231). These features of semiosis (activities, processes or signs that communicate meaning) are in turn dialectically related to other elements such as power, ideology and cultural beliefs which assist in shaping the discourse. Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA draws comparisons with Taylor's suggestion (1997) that policy researchers should think about texts 'relationally' – considering how their wider contextual associations link with the semiotic modalities of the discourse.

Influenced by Marxian theory, Fairclough's methodology focusses upon the themes of social conflict – particularly the imbalance of power and the dominance of hegemonic ideology. Through CDA, these themes are teased out of the text by identifying their manifestations in the linguistic discourse (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p.27). As Wodak and Meyer explain, 'DRA draws upon a particular linguistic theory – Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985) – which analyses language as shaped (even in its grammar) by the social functions it has come to serve' (2009, p.27). Therefore, in Fairclough's approach to CDA, it is inconceivable to consider the analysis of text without drawing upon the discourse and socio-cultural practice it is shaped by. As part of Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA employed in the study, a toolkit of analysis methods is utilised to interrogate the corpus of policy texts. Methods of textual analysis (including lexis and grammar) and interdiscursive analysis (including problematisation and argumentation) are used to strengthen the analysis and establish an individually developed analytical framework for the research.

In summary, this study builds on existing critical research in the field of education policy analysis. Moreover, it brings an original contribution to the body of research through its chosen combination of theory, methodology and methods, as well as a new analysis of the selected corpus of policy texts through a Bhaskar-Fairclough synthesis of Critical Realism and CDA. By drawing parallels between Bhaskar's tripartite theory of the domains of Critical Realism and Fairclough's tripartite method of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study offers a unique perspective upon the CRCDA fusion. Furthermore, through utilising a toolkit of analysis techniques, the study's CDA-based approach is strengthened through the continuous oscillation between the analysis of text, discourse and socio-cultural practice. The unique critical analytical framework developed for the purposes of this study is described in detail in chapter three.

The CRCDA methodology that underpins this research reflects my positionality and critical view of a neoliberal education system. Employing a critical realist lens, the thesis argues that education policy facilitates a ‘social wrong’ in that it legitimises neoliberal values, suppressing and marginalising any alternative political views (Fairclough, 2013, p.243). It is anticipated that this view will be challenged but it can be argued that CRCDA research cannot be undertaken without such a critical stance. Therefore, the study employs a critically reflexive approach in order to demonstrate how my positionality and beliefs may shape the research (see chapter 3.11). It is expected that the study will generate further questions and present possibilities for future research. Moreover, it is hoped that the emancipatory outcome of the research will be to empower other educators in seeing beyond the political axioms of policy discourse in order to ‘reawaken’ the ethical and moral purpose of their profession (Ball, 2016, p.1046) and become *neolib-rebels*.

Chapter Two

A Critique of the Education Policy Context in England and a Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the form of two distinct parts. In part one, the chapter aims to locate the study within the context of English education policy over the last forty years and provide a methodological rationale for the research. The first section within this part serves to demonstrate my understanding of the history of the topic (Hart, 2018). A discussion of the links between education and politics draws upon the work of social theorists Freire and Bourdieu, whose perspectives on education have deepened my critical thinking surrounding English education policy. This leads to a clarification of my perspective of policy in relation to Bhaskar's domains of reality and my Critical Realist approach outlined in chapter one. This is followed by a discussion surrounding policy text and policy discourse, which draws upon the existing field of literature and assists in further clarifying my perceptions of policy and the intent of this research study. The subsequent sections outline the 'story' of contemporary English education policy and its growing relationship with the concept of neoliberalism, highlighting this doctrine as central to the focus of the research study. Following this, the key themes of meritocracy and social mobility are discussed as constructs that are significant within contemporary education policy. This part of the literature review concludes with a reflection upon the link between education policy and neoliberal values.

The second part of this chapter presents a review of existing research studies concerned with the analysis of education policy. The structure of this section begins with a discussion surrounding the approach to this part of the review, placing it within the context of the research study. The literature search is then presented as a narrowing down process, justifying the selection and rejection of studies to be reviewed. Following this, the selected research studies are evaluated in relation to the discourse of neoliberal ideology,

problematisation and social justice. Within this evaluation, the use of lexical features such as expressive and figurative language are explored. The section concludes by providing the rationale for the main and subsidiary research questions. Literature relevant to the research methods and the critical realist philosophy which informs this study will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.2 Part One: The Education Policy Context - 'Education is Politics'

A policy can be defined as a created system of guidelines which are implemented to steer decisions and achieve desired outcomes. Policies can be viewed as a top-down, authoritative prescription of practices - a dominant 'set of values and ethics' that become operational statements of intent (Ball, 1993, p.14). With regards to education policy, it has been argued that the foundations of this are rooted in social philosophy as it is based on the principles of human nature and social justice, which are the underlying purposes of education (Gingell and Winch, 2004). Indeed, one cannot overlook the goal of social justice and the emancipation from inequality that English education policy promises. However, increasingly, the authoritative prescription of values that contemporary education policy and reform have become, are deeply entrenched in political and economic agendas. As Ball points out, 'education and education policy have become dominated by the perspective of economics' (2017, p.13). The wider social purposes of education have been 'side-lined' by the focus on policy creation for the sake of 'economic competitiveness' (ibid., p.13-14). It is therefore evident that the intrinsic link between education and economics shapes educational policy. Undeniably, we have arrived at a juncture where 'education is politics' (Ward and Eden, 2009, p.1).

The deep-seated relationship between education and politics goes further back than recent tranches of neoliberal agenda. As Arendt points out, 'the role played by education in all political utopias from ancient times' is concerned with a 'dictatorial intervention' to create

a ‘new political order’ (1954, p.2-3). In the view of Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato or Aristotle, the chief purpose of education was to prepare a new generation to grow into an ‘old world’ in order for the societal status quo to be assimilated and reproduced (Arendt, 1954, p.3). This strikes parity with more contemporary theories of social reproduction in education and, in particular, the work of Freire and Bourdieu.

Beginning with Freire’s critical thinking, he argued that education should represent freedom but that traditional modes of teaching lead to oppression and the reproduction of social inequalities. He warned of the dangers of an education system that suffers from ‘narration sickness’ (2017, p.44) where students are turned into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher’ (ibid., p.45). Comparable to Plato and Aristotle’s view of education, Freire’s cautionary analogy describes how new generations of empty vessels are prepared for the future through a dictatorially narrated knowledge of the ‘old world’. One might argue that this is, in essence, the intent of the English National Curriculum. It ‘prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life’ and ‘provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens’ (DfE, 2013, p.4-6). This is a clear example of the intent to prepare a new generation of ‘educated citizens’ by means of a prescribed set of core knowledge and skills. Freire uses the analogy of ‘banking’ to describe this concept of education, where knowledge is seen as a ‘gift’ for the ‘knowledgeable’ to bestow upon students and to be deposited for the future (2017, p.45). But one might ask: who decides which knowledge is best to ‘insert’? (Aldridge, 2018, p.609). England’s National Curriculum ‘introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said’ (DfE, 2013, p.6). However, one can consider this statement of intent to be highly subjective in its nature; it originates from the beliefs and ideologies of those in power and for Freire, this is ‘a characteristic of the ideology of oppression’ (2017, p.45). Following Freire’s critical thinking, the delivery of a compulsory body of knowledge - such as the national curriculum - through a ‘banking’ mode of education, is a means of indoctrination

which ‘mirrors oppressive society as a whole’ (ibid., p.46). He argued that the concept of banking education ‘serves the interests of the oppressors’ as it ‘preserves a profitable situation’ whilst minimising opportunities for students’ creativity and critical thinking (ibid.). In Freire’s perceptions of the traditional narration pedagogy associated with ‘banking’ education, students are mechanically tutored ‘into submission and acceptance of an oppressed and subordinate status’ (Kellner, 2003, p.6). Akin with the Platonic and Aristotelian concept of education, by wielding this power of oppression, the hegemonic status quo of the old world is preserved.

For Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), reproduction in education, society and culture happens in terms of the structure of class, production and power being legitimated and perpetuated. They argued that in education there exists ‘unequal selection’ and ‘exclusion’ according to the possession of ‘cultural capital’ inherited by one’s parents (1990, p.72). The possession of greater social, cultural and financial capital, privileges access to private and selective classes of education, whereas the capially-disadvantaged become marginalised. This is starkly evident in the English education system where the ‘continued reproduction of a class structure’ can be seen in private schooling (Tomlinson, 2001, p.261), and where the operation of systems of selection can lead to social segregation or the creation of an ‘educational apartheid’ (Gillies, 2007, p.28). It can be argued that the very existence of a hierarchical schooling system that employs selection and ranking, maintains and perpetuates the archetypal Platonic status quo of the old world.

Bourdieu’s work supports claims that the replication of dominant values in education, through a hierarchical schooling structure and systems of selection, can lead to the stratification of society and increased socio-economic segregation (see Lu, 2020a; Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018). Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ (1970) helps one to consider the latent agendas behind education policy (and the ultimate purpose of education itself according to

those in power). It can be contended that through education policy, governments shape the skills and knowledge being taught to the ‘citizens of a utopian morrow’ (Arendt, 1954, p.3) to fit the political ideology of the old world in which they exist. The workforce of tomorrow is coerced into the reproduction of an old-world education system where ‘privileged and aspirant social groups’ jockey for positional advantage with ‘ruthless determination’ (Tomlinson, 2001, p.261). The intention of this study is to show how the discourse of contemporary education policy reinforces this divisive social reproduction through the hierarchical school traditions of the ‘old world’, and therefore teaches a new generation to accept social stratification and the reproduction of inequality. However, before delving deeper into the story of English education policy over the last forty years, a discussion surrounding my perceptions of policy in relation to text and discourse ensues.

2.3 Perceptions of Policy: Text Versus Discourse

This thesis recognises that my positionality and perceptions of policy are not neutral; they have been influenced by my doctoral studies and my professional and personal experience within the education system. The aims of this research study are to verify or refute my beliefs through the critical analysis of contemporary education policy and a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the selected corpus of policy texts. As discussed in chapter one, this thesis views education policy as a complex interplay between text and discourse. An analogy of a theatre production was used to liken the formulation and existence of education policy to Bhaskar’s three domains of reality. In summary, the ‘empirical’ or observed domain is the final policy production - the carefully crafted audience show. This has been generated by the events of the ‘actual’ domain - the underlying political levers - and the behind-the-scenes truths of the ‘real’ domain - arguably the social wrongs within society. Employing Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA enables the deconstruction and interpretation of the policy text and discourse in linguistic and sociological terms, as well

as an in-depth critical analysis of these policy domains or layers. To inform this methodological approach however, it is necessary to draw upon the existing body of literature surrounding the meanings of policy ‘text’ and policy ‘discourse’.

Ball states 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’ (1993, p.10). Within the literature surrounding education policy, it is generally considered that for research purposes, there are two different ‘conceptualisations’ of policy: ‘policy as text and policy as discourse’ (Ball, 1993, p.10). In short, the view of policy as text is concerned with its linguistic construction. Whereas the view of policy as discourse focusses on ‘the processes involved in the creation of the text’ (Bacchi, 2000, p.46). This fits with the study’s Bhaskar-Faircloughian approach as the research oscillates between the linguistic and sociological layers of education policy in order to explore and critically analyse the different domains in which they exist and coincide.

The meaning of ‘discourse’ employed by this research is further assisted by the theories of Foucault (2019). Foucauldian discourse analysis focusses on the power relationships in society that are expressed through language and social practices. Foucault perceived discourse to be a system of thought, knowledge and communication which shapes our understanding of the world around us. Essentially, discourse can control how the world is perceived – discourse is power. Whilst it could be thought that different approaches to discourse analysis are incommensurable within a single research study, this thesis argues that the synthesis of Foucauldian theories of discourse analysis with Fairclough’s methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) strengthens the study’s interpretation of discourse as a social practice. Fairclough’s principal goals for CDA are to address the ‘underestimation’ of the importance of language in the construction and reproduction of power in society and to increase awareness of how language can contribute to the dominance of power over others

(Pennycook, 1994, p.121). Whilst Foucault's 'view of discourse is more diffuse than linguistic approaches' to analysis such as Fairclough's, (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2017, p.110), it can be argued that his theories of discourse and power marry well with the aims of Fairclough's CDA approach. Therefore, this study continues to juxtapose Foucault's theories of discourse and power with its Fairclough inspired research approach (see sections 2.10.3 and 3.4).

It can be argued that the policy as text or discourse dichotomy found across literature from the field is akin with the conceptual interplay of Bhaskar's stratified realities; one form cannot exist without the other. Policy cannot be viewed as discourse without the linguistic composition of the text, and policy cannot be viewed as text without the social processes involved in the creation of its discourse. Bearing this in mind, policy text and discourse can never be neutral. In terms of education, it has been argued that policy documents are 'carefully negotiated texts' (Garside, 2020, p.27) that present the reader with a particular view through their rhetoric. This fits with the study's Bhaskarian theatre analogy where the 'empirical' version of policy reality is an audience show. This research aims to show how these carefully rehearsed and negotiated texts transmit the messages of the underlying political agenda in a convincing and irrefutable way, therefore legitimising dominant views and marginalising alternative outlooks. This thesis contends that education policy misappropriates the education system as a vehicle for neoliberal-driven social reform. However, issues of social inequality seem to be perpetuated rather than solved.

The cycle of policy making – which has become subject to a rapid pace of change over the last twenty years – has become increasingly tactical, demonstrating the 'dynamism of government' (Ball, 2017, p.4). This 'fast policy' approach has equated to a 'policy overload' (ibid., p.2) in which Gorard argues that there is no time for a robust evaluation of whether their implementation has worked or has been ineffective - or even damaging (2018,

p.3). Viewed through a critical realist lens, this suggests that the ‘actual’ domain of education policy – the events that are responsible for the construction of the policy text - is predominantly about ‘momentum’ for the political party, rather than genuine solutions for the broader historical, cultural and social context in which the policy is situated (the ‘real’). The next section explores the fast-paced momentum of contemporary education policy and the societal issues it has attempted to address.

2.4 The Story of Education Policy

The purpose of this section is to provide the policy context or background ‘story’ for the research. A historical overview of education policy over the last forty years begins with a discussion surrounding the concept of neoliberalism and how it has permeated education policy. The ensuing sections then focus on key periods of educational reform and the political levers that underpinned the legislative changes. This is followed by a discussion surrounding the key concepts arising from the review of relevant literature, leading to an introduction to the selected corpus of policy texts.

2.4.1 The Neoliberal Outlook - There Is No Alternative

To begin this section, the study’s clarification of neoliberalism is revisited to provide greater context for the literature review. It is once again pertinent at this juncture to establish the critical view of neoliberalism exercised in this research. The study contends that neoliberalism is eroding the moral and ethical values of education, reducing it to a commodified business. Neoliberalism can be defined as the ‘discourse and/or practice of commodification, capital accumulation and profit-making’ (Kneyber, 2015, p.39) underpinned by the market principles of competition. Advocates of neoliberalism may consider it a philosophy of political and economic practices which believes that individual entrepreneurialism and ‘human well-being can best be advanced’ by privatisation, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p.2). For future research purposes, it would be

interesting to explore arguments *for* neoliberalism in the context of education. However, this study has chosen to focus upon the critical views of neoliberalism found within the literature, in order to reflect the thesis' critical stance.

The educational reforms of successive English governments over the last forty years have been increasingly focussed on the neoliberal ideology of market-driven consumerism and global competition. The links between this political agenda and its impact upon the English education system have been critically discussed in terms of its acute focus on test-based accountability, and the comparative performance of students, teachers and schools. For example, Hursh (2005) and Connell (2013) discuss the impact of neoliberalism upon education, comparing the similarities between the English, United States and Australian education systems. Hursh argues that market-driven agendas have shaped education reforms in these countries, transforming education into a competitive, accountability-based business and 'undermining democracy' (2005, p.3). For Connell, the spread of global neoliberalism increases inequality as it privileges income, wealth and elitism. She argues that inequality is at the centre of neoliberal dominant market logic, creating and perpetuating 'pockets of poverty' and social injustice (2013, p.279).

Ball (2003), Boxley (2003) and Perryman (2006) discuss Lyotard's concept of 'performativity' as a mode of state regulation and surveillance that has contributed to the shaping of neoliberal education. In the context of a research case study over the period 1999 - 2003, Perryman refers to the increasing powers of surveillance as 'panoptic performativity' where the regimes of a 'disciplinary mechanism' are normalised (2006, p.147). Boxley points out that the thrust of this performativity pandemic is the neoliberal crusade for 'productive efficiency and international competitiveness' (2003, p.66). However, the synergy between the authors' criticism of this culture is the shared belief that a regime of performativity has been imposed upon educators, elucidating the fact that they are

mechanised cogs in the industrial wheel of a ‘productive process that feeds the global market’ (Boxley, 2003, p89). Ball suggests that this can have a detrimental impact upon the education profession - particularly in terms of teachers’ moral and ethical pedagogic beliefs. His research highlights how teachers can ‘struggle’, finding ‘their values challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity’ (2003, p.216). This concept spurred the philosophical question which underpins this thesis: *Can a teacher’s and leader’s moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?*

This sense of an educator’s ‘struggle’ to exist within a neoliberal education system recurs amongst the field of literature. For example, Moore and Clarke describe this struggle as a ‘cruel optimism’, where ‘teachers’ attachment to professionalism may assist them in undermining the very values they believe it embodies (2016, p.666). Furthermore, Harvie discusses how the classroom can be a site of struggle, where teachers can become alienated from their labour - mere cogs in the industrial wheel of productivity (2006, p.4). His Marxian-influenced critique describes how neoliberalism’s ‘obsession with ‘performance’, ‘efficiency’, external controls and measure (metrics) has the effect of deepening the alienated-and abstract-labour characteristics of concrete teaching activities’ (ibid.). De Lissovoy and McLaren also turn towards Marxian theory to critique the ‘accountability movement in education’ (2003, p.131). They argue that educational accountability through such means as high-stakes testing, reifies the ‘consciousness and creativity of students into simple scores’, following ‘a logic of commodification’ and demonstrating the ‘violence of capitalism’ (ibid.). These illustrative examples from the field of literature concerning ‘neoliberal education’, demonstrate how the dominant doctrine of neoliberal ideology embodies the education system in England.

The broader political and economic impact of neoliberalism has also been widely discussed. Authors such as Harvey (2005), and Cahill and Konings (2017), document and

analyse how neoliberalism has been the dominant economic ideology for over four decades, providing a historical narrative for its ascendancy in political thought. However, theorists such as Giroux (2005) and Fisher (2009) cast a more critical eye over the impact of this hegemonic discipline. For Giroux, the ‘terror of neoliberalism’ signifies societal authoritarianism and the ‘eclipse of democracy’ (2005, p.1). This strikes a parity with Ball’s cautionary writing surrounding neoliberal regimes of performativity within the education system. The ‘terror of neoliberalism’ and the ‘terror of performativity’ are decried by these critical theorists as dictatorial regimes of compliance. Fisher also refers to the dominant doctrine of neoliberalism as a construct to be feared. He argues that the ‘oppressive pervasiveness’ of what he terms ‘Capitalist Realism’ has caused existential crises across global society (2009, p.8).

For Britain, the neoliberal phenomenon of free-market consumerism has been increasingly shaping the agenda of politics since the 1980s. Following the ‘bleak years of economic stagnation during the 1970s’ (Harvey, 2005, p.57), Margaret Thatcher - who was appointed to the Conservative cabinet as secretary of state for education and science in 1970 - also rose to prominence as Leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990. As the first woman to hold the office (and longest serving Prime Minister of the twentieth century), with her, she brought the values of neoliberalism and championed them as ‘common sense’ (Harvey, 2005, p.39). This ‘common sense’ mobilisation of free-market competition pervaded into the education system, where there arose an increasing link between education and economic need.

Thatcher’s Conservative government in the 1980s transformed the concept of education into ‘a matter of political economy’ by shifting state policy from a welfare to a neoliberal model (Ball, 2017, p.2). This shift towards endorsing a corporate rather than a social welfare state, redefined ‘the relationship between the individual and society’ (Hursh,

2005, p.4). There was greater emphasis and expectation that individual citizens should take care of themselves rather than be looked after by a nanny state. After all, the ideological goal of neoliberalism is to create ‘competitive, instrumentally rational’ individuals who strive to participate and contend in the marketplace (ibid., p.5). Thatcher’s belief in this concept was sealed with her infamous quote in an edition of *Woman’s Own* in 1987, stating that ‘There is no society. There are only individuals and families.’ (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.5). It has been argued that Thatcher’s New Right ‘neoliberal outlook’ was ‘an ideological return to Victorian political and economic thinking’ which meant a ‘more market, less state’ approach to policy (Ball, 2017, pp.84-86). Looking back to this ‘old-world’ economy would drive the individualistic, laissez-faire philosophy of neoliberal thought and - like the ‘political utopias from ancient times’ (Arendt, 1954, p.2) - would preserve Thatcher’s desired ideological status quo.

During Thatcher’s three consecutive terms as Prime Minister, her now infamous slogan ‘*There Is No Alternative*’ (T.I.N.A) became the ‘brutally self-fulfilling prophecy’ of ‘capitalist realism’ (Fisher, 2009, p.8) - the established and generally accepted doctrine ‘that no alternative to neoliberal capitalism is possible’ (De Lissovoy, 2013, p.424). Fisher describes the ideological condition of capitalist realism as a ‘pervasive *atmosphere*’; it conditions culture, regulates work and education, and behaves as though it were ‘an invisible barrier constraining thought and action’ (2009, p.16). This rapid infiltration of neoliberal ideology into all corners of society, paved the way for the restructuring of the economy. Three key elements of the country’s economic adaptation to a neoliberal agenda were: deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation. Giving businesses ‘greater freedom from state control’; promoting free-market forms of competition; and ‘the contracting out of public services’ in favour of profit-oriented provision, became Thatcher’s policy legacies (Jessop, 2015, p.23). These key policy drivers also penetrated the education system, creating significant waves of educational reform.

2.4.2 The First Wave of Education Reform: Central Control and Standardisation

The first major shift towards economy-driven education policy was The Educational Reform Act 1988. This substituted ‘the golden age of teacher autonomy’ (Whitty, 2006, p.2) with the concepts of regulation and accountability. With this, the two fundamental instruments of government control were conceived: The National Curriculum and a system of statutory testing. It has been argued that the National Curriculum was implemented in 1988 as a market-driven political agenda, rather than for educational reasons (Whitty, 2006). A prescribed curriculum comprising of the ‘skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce’ (Connell, 2013, p.104) would be the perfect vehicle to construct the next generation of human capital. This would prepare and educate the citizens of the neoliberally-shaped workforce of tomorrow, whilst preserving the knowledge and ideology of the day.

Through the implementation of the National Curriculum as part of the Education Reform Act 1988, Thatcher’s Conservative government had found a way to simultaneously look backwards - to preserve the societal status quo - and forwards - to build a ‘new political order’ (Arendt, 1954, p.3). The education reform ‘package’ was the ‘neoliberal vision’ of education; it delivered control, prescription and accountability which became ‘the infrastructure for an education market’ (Ball, 2017, p.89). Heavier government control was exercised through the standardisation of teaching and learning, and schools were held accountable not only to the government’s Department for Education and Skills (DfES), but to external watchdogs such as Ofsted, and to the growing power of the market consumers - parents. The investment in the business of education, for all stakeholders, had to be seen as ‘value for money’ (Wyse and Torrance, 2009, p.215).

2.4.3 The Second Wave of Education Reform: Raising Standards and Aspirations

Nearly a decade after the introduction of the National Curriculum, the New Labour Government in 1997 introduced a new wave of educational policy that sought to address a

key societal issue that was identified as educational underachievement. Although the Labour Party was once ‘fiercely opposed to Thatcherism’, New Labour Leader Tony Blair’s ‘Third Way’ policies were to be a softened continuation of the neoliberal era - ‘Thatcherism without the rough edges’ (Cahill and Koning, 2017, p.2). Blair’s ‘Third Way’ political plan was to develop an alternative model focussed on empowering people through work and aspiration. This would simultaneously address ‘the social fragmentation and social exclusion produced by neo-liberal marketisation and the bureaucratic collectivism and corporatism of the social democratic welfare state’ (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.5).

Central to Blair’s ‘Third Way’ alternative was the belief that the magic wand of education would raise aspirations and empower society to become the workforce of tomorrow, whilst also resolving educational inequality. Part of this ambitious vision was to be enacted in the development of ‘Education Action Zones’ (EAZs). The EAZ policy was developed with the strategic aim to ‘modernise education in areas of social deprivation’ (Reid and Brain, 2003, p.195). The intentions were to ‘turn parents and local communities into good consumers of education’ and create ‘well-behaved’ school-leavers who were ready for the ‘world of work’ (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.3). Ultimately, the EAZ goal was ‘mission impossible’ as the policy was awash with conflicts arising from ‘neo-liberal, social democratic and Third Way approaches to addressing educational inequality’ (Reid and Brain, 2003, p.195). As Gamarnikow and Green suggest, the discourse of this ‘community-based, bottom-up policy’ disguises ‘the reality of <its> top-down policy implementation’ (1999, p.4). One can argue that the intentions of the EAZ policy were to give the impression to its audience of a focus on socio-economic reform. Blair’s fast-policy momentum was building and so were the ambitious promises to resolve educational inequality. However, was this policy performance simply a political veneer for the ‘actual reality’ of the government’s neoliberal agendas? Despite, the ‘ambition and compassion’ (Fairclough, 2000, p.43) that the alternative ‘Third Way’ thinking pledged, there was no escaping the firm grip of capital

realism upon the country in which the principles of competition lead to social segregation and inequality. Blair's mission for social justice was impossible - *There Is No Alternative*.

The EAZ policy, with its focus on developing communities and tackling social deprivation, masqueraded as a bottom-up approach. However, there was no disguising the top-down implementation of the 'National Strategies' (1997-2011) - a central part of the New Labour government's drive to tackle educational underachievement. This significant wave of educational reform was one of the 'most ambitious change management programmes in education' and was 'designed to achieve accelerated improvement in standards' (DfE, 2011, P.2-3). The ambitious approach, which brought about procedural and productive change, employed a more prescriptive type of intervention, detailing the process of how to teach, as well as stipulating the curriculum content.

The prescriptive National Strategies focussed on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy to ensure that all pupils reached a given level by the end of their primary and secondary education. This meant the imposition of standardised delivery, target setting and monitoring of achievement through pupil assessment. Schools were being 'steered at a distance' (Whitty, 2006, p.6) but New Labour's new wave of central direction was fervently enforced. During this period, test-based accountability through statutory national testing 'became intensified' (Wyse and Torrance, 2009, p.216). The performance of pupils, teachers and schools was rigorously measured in order to demonstrate accountability to all stakeholders in the education business. It has been argued that throughout the National Strategies regime, teachers' professional knowledge and status were scrutinised in academic, political and public forums; the nation sensed the government's mistrust of the teaching profession (Goodson, 2003). Teachers felt restricted and controlled by this new form of surveillance and accountability, experiencing 'high levels of existential anxiety and dread' (Ball, 2003, p.219).

2.4.4 The Policy Pandemic

Like the economic drive behind the Educational Reform 1988, New Labour's thrust for the improvement in educational standards was in response to an increasing neoliberal economic agenda: international competitiveness and globalisation. In 2000, a Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Further highlighting the drive for international competitiveness, PISA's aim was to gain information on student performance across the globe. It was designed to 'measure the comparative performance of education systems based on tests' (Grek, 2009, p.23) which focussed specifically on mathematics, science and reading. Education policy during this time was increasingly developed in response to the 'pressures and requirements of globalisation' (Ball, 2017, p.2). International comparison through performance measures and league tables began to 'steer education policy' (Grek, 2009, p.23). Policies related to accountability, performance and school choice were both exported and imported as part of the GERM – Global Education Reform Movement – a term coined by Andy Hargreaves and Pasi Sahlberg after the publication of the third PISA cycle results in 2000 (Sahlberg, 2015, p.164).

GERM has several manifestations with common characteristics that are evident in education systems across the globe (Sahlberg, 2015, p.164). The first – and most recognisably of neoliberal doctrine – is competition. Increased competition between schools and the offer of more choice for parents means that the education system has become another business governed by the principles of a free-market economy. A relatively recent example of this can be found in The Academies Act 2010. This is a palpable example of neoliberal ideology in action through the belief in 'competition as an engine of advancement' (Sahlberg, 2015, p.164). Implemented by the Coalition Government, The Academies Act aimed to convert all publicly funded schools in England to academies. This would mean greater

autonomy in decision making - such as the freedom to set teachers wages and diverge from the National Curriculum – and increased school choice and competition. The Academies Programme and its underpinning policies echoed approaches from around the globe, such as the Charter Schools in the United States in 2000, and the Independent Public Schools in Australia (Francis, 2014). This demonstrates the spread of GERM’s global policy borrowing and the incubation of a neoliberal policy pandemic.

Sahlberg summarises that the ‘policies and strategies that drive educational reforms have been adjusted to the new realities’ of global competition (2006, p.259). Within England’s education system, structures were created to ‘allow assessing, comparing and rank-ordering national and regional education performances’ (ibid.). Walking upon the narrow tightrope of metaphor, one might suggest that the rapidly growing policy pandemic had thoroughly infected England through its marriage of educational policy to neoliberal values. Unlike Sahlberg’s Finnish education system where ‘a focus on equity’ is of high priority (2015, p.173), it has been argued that the focus on school choice and competition in England does little to address existing social inequalities. In fact, in OECD countries where GERM has taken hold, ‘school choice and greater competition between schools are related to greater levels of segregation’ (ibid.). For Finland and other successful (perhaps non-infected?) school systems, there clearly is an alternative where the utopian concepts of fairness and equity can correlate with high student performance. However, it can be conjectured that, so long as this country is incubating the GERM, there really *is no alternative*.

2.4.5 New Labour’s Third Wave: Teaching Standards and Performativity

Besides school choice and competition, another manifestation of GERM which helped to tighten the neoliberal grip upon education policy is the ‘standardization of teaching and learning in schools’ (Sahlberg, 2015, p.165). After New Labour’s dictatorial prescription of curriculum delivery through the National Strategies, a third significant wave of educational

reform was unveiled, focussing upon a more stringent control of teacher professionalism. A decade after the 'dividends' reaped from the 'systematic improvement' of the National Strategies legacy, the imposition of teachers' 'Professional Standards' in 2007 saw a shift in focus towards the 'behavioural' values involved in the practice or 'process' of teaching rather than attitudinal or intellectual professional development (Evans, 2011, p.867). Initially designed to define the desired qualities required for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), a set of professional standards was introduced for teacher training in England in 2006. The standards were categorised into three key areas: Professional attributes, Professional knowledge and understanding and Professional skills (Goepel, 2012, p.497). In 2007, performance management of teachers became statutory in English schools. The newly-published professional standards for training teachers served to operate in conjunction with teachers' performance management, with the aim to increase 'transparency and efficiency in rewarding teachers and enhancing their professional development' (Evans, 2011, p.852). The drive for efficiency became part of the behavioural values component of teachers' prescribed professionalism and was linked to performance and pay progression.

In her analysis of the 2007 professional standards for teaching, Evans exposes the substantial emphasis on the processes, procedures, productivity and competences required in 'doing' teaching. She concludes that the 'shape' of teacher professionalism is unbalanced, with prominence placed upon performative characteristics over the development of attitudinal or intellectual values and pedagogy (2011, p.861). Similarly, Beck asserts that the 'professional standards clearly embody a competency approach to professional training' (2009, p.7) and are therefore distinctly dominated by performativity. Beck goes on to describe the cumulative effect of the Professional Standards for Teachers as 'profoundly reductive'. He maintains that the establishment of teaching standards insinuates 'that being a professional educator is a matter of acquiring a limited corpus of state-prescribed knowledge accompanied by a set of similarly prescribed skills and competencies' (2009, p.8). This

echoes Freire's warning of an education system suffering from 'narration sickness' where the teacher 'leads the students to memorise mechanically the narrated content' (2017, pp.44-45). It also strikes parity with the themes of 'deprofessionalisation' (Biesta, 2004) or 'de-skilling' (Apple, 2014), where professional autonomy is taken away from the teacher and replaced with prescribed content and central control. These are key concepts which began my journey of self-realisation in terms of an existence within an education system entrenched with neoliberal values (see section 1.3.1). With this new regime of professional standards and accountability, the 'terrors of performativity' had begun to enter the soul of the teaching profession (Ball, 2003, p.215).

Conversely, there are arguments that have been made in support of the imposition of standards upon the education profession. For example, Dickson writes that standards are useful to many areas of society; they are what is necessary for the effective and reliable 'delivery of products for mass consumption' (2007, p.17). The concept of standardisation does have a clear role for quality assurance purposes - particularly in the identification of 'poor educational provision' (ibid., p.4). In her analysis of SITE (the Scottish 'Standard for Initial Teacher Education'), Dickson argues that the list of standards is not 'reductivist' - it 'enumerates a formidable list of features both curricular and pastoral' (ibid., p.12). While this argument has not been publicly made in support of England's teaching standards, one can agree that like SITE, the list of standards comprises of curricular and pastoral elements in order to 'clarify' professional expectations (DSCF, 2007). Dickson believes that while it might have been 'fashionable' to think so, standards and performativity do not necessarily have to strike terror into a teacher's soul (ibid., p.4). Popkewitz (2004) highlights further points that could support an argument for standards. He points out that 'standards were invented to develop the capacity to have direct knowledge and access to what was previously opaque' (2004, p.245). Some would argue the legitimacy of standards in order to 'make legible what schools are doing' (ibid.) for the importance of the community and parents.

Standards allow the hidden opacity of the education system to be quality checked and neoliberally neatened so its stakeholders can have a clear and transparent view.

New Labour's policy acts of standardising the delivery and content of the curriculum, assisted in the growing commodification of education. Their 'new' approach was a cleverly cloaked 'continuation of the neo-liberal politics of the new right' (Fairclough, 2000, p.10). Through the National Strategies and teachers' Professional Standards, a centrally agreed 'how-to' method of teaching was produced, which was easier to regulate and more visible to its educational consumers. The grip of capitalist realism had taken hold, successfully installing a competitive 'business ontology' (Fisher, 2009, p.17) into the domain of education. One could argue that the principle of standardisation had the potential to level the playing field, realising Blair's ambition of educational equity for all. However, as Popkewitz points out, the implementation of standards - particularly in relation to characteristics and capabilities - creates an 'unequal playing field' as they are the 'effects of power' (2004, p.252). The standardisation of practice privileges hegemonic principles and excludes those who do not fit. *There Is No Alternative!*

Amongst the neoliberal necessity to elucidate the opaqueness of teaching and provide a quality-assured educational product, it is apparent that the underlying issues of social inequality were not addressed by New Labour's education reforms - despite policy promises of 'fairness with enterprise' (Fairclough, 2000, p.10). Although Blair's 'Third Way' belief was that 'social justice and economic dynamism' (ibid.) could exist harmoniously, New Labour's socio-educational policies did 'little to disturb the status quo' (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.19). Social inequalities continued to be replicated across the education system through the grip of neoliberal market logic; standardisation and central control became the instruments of hegemony.

2.4.6 New Government, New Standards?

New Labour's approach placed education at the centre of its policy making. Blair's 'Third Way' vision was to invest in human capital in order to compete in an increasingly global economy - the essence of neoliberal ideology. The speed of this 'contemporary capitalism' (Ball, 2017, p.102) saw the implementation of forty-seven education-related policies between 1997 and 2010. The succeeding Coalition government of 2010 maintained some of New Labour's policies and amended others to align with its 'Big Society' restoration agenda. Nevertheless, it continued to operate in accordance with neoliberal ideology. No alternative was considered. The Coalition's 'policies of nostalgia', which linked the concepts of 'excellence and traditionalism to opportunity and social mobility', served to simultaneously give and take away teachers' autonomy and professionalism (Ball, 2017, p.105). Following recommendations in the reports of the Independent Review of Teachers' Standards published in 2011, the thirty-three outcome-oriented statements in New Labour's professional teaching standards were revised. The Coalition's new set of standards echoed the government's restoration campaign to raise the status of teaching by inspiring confidence and instilling public trust. The slim-lined standards also superseded the standards for qualified teacher status (QTS), as well as the General Teaching Council for England's Code of Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers' (DfE, 2011). This new, single set of standards was to be applied to the process of teacher training and the achievement of QTS, as well as becoming the fundamental tool for the appraisal process of newly qualified and experienced teachers. Divided into two distinct sections, the standards described the key principles that teachers 'must' demonstrate in their teaching practice, as well as in their personal and professional conduct.

Part one of the standards focussed on the practice of teaching, setting out rigid expectations under eight key headings. Many of the headings epitomised the fundamental

principles of competition, and the overt regime of performativity, that were embedded in the government's neoliberal agenda. Setting high expectations and promoting good pupil progress and outcomes would ensure effectiveness on the global competition stage; 'planning and teaching well-structured lessons' and carrying out accurate assessment would provide the means for the measurement of performance (DfE, 2011, p.10-13). Furthermore, it can be argued that the standard which insists teachers must manage 'behaviour effectively' reinforces the government's drive for traditional, behaviourist values, which were a central constituent in their pledge to rebuild 'Big Society'. This policy nostalgia signified the 'back to basics' approach of the Coalition - and later Conservative - government (Ball, 2017, p.113).

However, within the standards' policy text, 'carefully negotiated' statements (Garside, 2020, p.27) are woven into the policy 'performance' to create an illusion of greater teacher autonomy. A sense of 'renewed freedom and authority' (Goepel, 2012, p.500) is conjured through an intriguing juxtaposition of traditional and progressive values. The use of language such as 'imparting knowledge' (DfE, 2011, p.11) is reminiscent of the archaic 'narration sickness' that Freire associated with a traditional pedagogy of oppression (2017). Imparting knowledge in order to 'fill' the 'receptacles' of the workforce of tomorrow (Freire, 2017, p.45) serves to reproduce the dominant values of society. Yet it can be argued that the phrase also bestows a sense of trust in the profession. One can allude that the Marxian 'magic trick' (Bainbridge, 2020, p.744) here has disguised the top-down authoritarianism of a centrally-prescribed curriculum with a fetishised sense of teaching autonomy in *how* it could be delivered. Further assisting with this fantasy of freedom is the peppering of idealistic statements which seem more reminiscent of a progressive 'values discourse' rather than the 'technical-rational' position associated with the standards agenda (Dickson, 2007). It can be argued that the standard which requires teachers to 'promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity' (DfE, 2011, p.11) serves to raise the status of teaching by re-framing

the profession as a moral duty. Although the inclusion of such progressive-sounding statements may suggest a utopian image of teaching where greater teacher autonomy exists, it is contended that the teaching standards remain primarily concerned with the technical delivery of ‘classroom practice and knowing how to teach’ (Goepel, 2012, p.499). The standards are clearly designed to be ‘fully assessable’ (ibid., p.500) and continue to serve the neoliberal regimes of accountability and performativity.

Part two of the 2011 Teachers’ Standards summarises in a series of statements that ‘a teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct’ (DfE, 2011, p.14). This focus on ‘personal and professional conduct’ is also highlighted in the preamble to the Teachers’ Standards. Language choices such as ‘honesty and integrity’, ‘positive professional relationships’ and ‘best interest of pupils’ is used to reflect what Evans (2011) described as a shift in focus towards behavioural values. Whilst this values-based rhetoric might suggest liberation from a former ‘profoundly reductionist’ regime (Beck, 2009, p.8) and promise opportunities for the personal development of teachers’ pedagogy and ‘professional status’ (Goepel, 2012, p.500), the underlying neoliberal thrust of the revised teaching standards was unchanged. In Beck’s words ‘there is the iron fist within this velvet glove’ (2009, p.11).

Education policy critics have argued that the Coalition government’s revision of teachers’ professional standards, led to further ‘appropriation’ of the education system to suit a neoliberal political agenda (Beck, 2009, p.3). We were warned that the ‘fully assessable’ statements that constitute the teachers’ professional standards, threatened a type of ‘tick-box professionalism’ born out of an environment of ‘distrust’ (Goepel, 2012, p.500). Through the policy’s juxtaposition of traditional and progressive values, it can be argued that the illusion of freedom and autonomy was marketed to the profession. Like Thatcher’s education reform package of 1988, the revised professional standards look nostalgically backwards for the

preservation of the traditional status quo, and ironically forwards through the promise of a 'utopian morrow' based on traditional values (Arendt, 1954, p.3). Within this policy document it seems that the 'actual reality' of neoliberalism is more prominent. As Smith points out, the standards 'operate to maintain the status quo, but do so far less discretely' than previous teaching standards (2013, p.427). The traditional values underpinning the teaching standards are unashamedly explicit within its rhetoric. Furthermore, the language of competition and performativity pervades the policy, demonstrating the normalisation of neoliberal ideology. The Coalition's revised teaching standards brought with them an overt sense of conservative homogeneity, based on the values of those in power, which was delivered through an 'overarching assimilationist agenda' (Smith, 2013, p.427). *There Is No Alternative.*

2.4.7 The Neoliberal Legacy

It can be construed then that the increased grip of 'market logic' (Connell, 2013, p.279) upon the education system through school choice and competition has caused policy to promote education as a corporate commodity rather than a public good (Knight, 2008, p.174). Under the successive Coalition and Conservative governments since 2010, neoliberal ideology has been intensified by the growing 'trend within policy towards a fragmentation and differentiation of school types' (Ball, 2017, p.217). Faith schools, grammar schools, academies and free schools contribute to the Conservative vision of a 'patchwork' system of schooling modelled on the concept of investment business (ibid.). Within this fragmented system there has been a shift from direct to indirect control; 'from prescription and direction to contracting out and performance management' (ibid.). Although schools are 'steered at a distance' (Whitty, 2006, p.6) – giving the impression of freedom and autonomy for teachers – the irony is that there is more control than before. The metaphor of the magic trick can again be used to expose this neoliberal act of 'violence and deception' (Bainbridge, Gaitanidis and

Hoult 2018, p.346). It can be argued that through the ‘structuring power of ideological fantasy’ (Zizek, 2008, p.30), an inherent form of violence and deception replaces the moral and ethical foundations of the education profession with ‘profit’ and ‘commodified outcomes’ (Bainbridge, Gaitanidis and Hoult, 2018, p.346). Although we may be aware of this ideological illusion, Zizek believes that we blind ourselves towards it in a disavowal of reality. ‘Even if we keep an ironical distance’ from knowing how things really are, we are still guided by the ‘fetishistic inversion’ that structures our reality (2008, p.30) - the promise of an educational utopia.

2.5 Policy Problematisations

The increasingly economic-driven education policy over the last forty years has sought to use education as a tool to address issues of social policy. As Ball points out, for the Conservative Government, education is not just about economics but about social policy, social discipline and ‘nation building’ (2017, p.4). Using education as a way of reframing social issues has been a recurring strategy for successive governments – whether Conservative, Labour or Coalition. Existing social issues are ‘problematised’ (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977) then reframed by nuances in policy rhetoric. These ‘problems’ have been in existence over decades of education policy but rather than addressing them at their root, they are re-dressed and ‘fed to the people by the oppressors’ (Freire, 2017, p.137) in various guises of ‘policyspeak’ (Ball, 2017, p.2).

Gorard views policy as ‘merely an epiphenomenon providing a legislated basis for what already increasingly exists’ (2018, p.209). For example, long-standing issues of social inequality and disadvantage have been ‘rearticulated’ (Ball, 2017, p.2) in education policy over the years. In recent education policy, issues of social justice have been problematised and positively spun as the drivers of reform. An example of this can be found in the 2016 White Paper ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ where education is described as the key to

unlocking opportunity for every child. For Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government (2010 - 2016), although education was 'the engine of social justice' it was also still very much the engine of 'economic growth' (DfE, 2016a, p.5). Similarly, under Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative leadership (2016 - 2019), the 2016 Green Paper, 'Schools that work for everyone', advocated that the engines of social justice should be driven by a market-based economy. The Green Paper proposes that social justice should be addressed by 'delivering a diverse school system' (DfE, 2016c, p.3) based on incentives, competition, accountability and measures of performance. This 'best of both worlds' (Ward and Eden, 2009, p.26) approach is reminiscent of the Third Way politics of the New Labour government, 1997 – 2007. It was thought that addressing social justice through improvement of state-funded resources and increased involvement of the private sector promised a more 'efficient and effective' dualistic approach than relying on the state body entirely (ibid.). In both of these policy examples, issues of social justice have been problematised and positively framed through policy rhetoric to impart an ideological vision of education entrenched in neoliberal values. This research study critically analyses the issues that have been 'problematised' in the policy discourse, exploring how the suggested solutions collocate the promise of social justice with neoliberal ideology.

The most recent chapters of the education policy 'story' use the positively spun political axioms of social mobility and meritocracy – the government believes that education is the engine of change when it comes to these concepts (Gibb, 2016). Each rhetorical re-framing of the existing problems then seeks to offer 'new' solutions; however, it can be argued that none are put in place long enough to determine their effectiveness or implement real change. By rearticulating the underlying issues of social and economic inequality as concepts the education system can solve, the root (or the reality) of the problem is hidden. The 'problematisation' becomes carefully handled – manipulated by the policy makers so it can be digested by the people as a problem that can be solved. However, the manipulated

‘myth’ (Freire, 2017, p.137) will never truly be digested; it will be continually regurgitated by education ‘fast policy’ (Ball, 2017, p.2), whilst it is being fed to the people on the wrong plate. The orchestrated synergy between the views of Freire and Ball seem fitting for this point. Social policy problematisations are recapitulated through the discourse of education policy. Equally, issues of social justice and inequality are re-framed in the arguments of critical theorists. This repetitive tussle between problematisation, policy, critical analysis and theory is locked in a helix of debate with real social change appearing impossible. *There should be an alternative.*

One can surmise that education policy critics consider policy as a platform for conveying political agenda or enhancing party momentum. It is argued that issues within the ‘real’ domain of policy are problematised and many ‘exaggerated’ (Gorard, 2018, p.4) to become ‘crisis narratives’ (Gillies, 2007, p.19). Solutions to the socio-educational ‘crises’ are presented within a layer of carefully negotiated rhetoric, and interwoven with ‘evidence-based’, ‘what works’ strategies ‘based on narrow conceptions of school effectiveness’ (Godfrey, 2017, p.5). Educational reforms and incentives are presented in such a way in policy text that they have the semblance of a dynamic government, ‘tackling problems, transforming systems’ and looking towards a new future (Ball, 2017, p.4). Nonetheless, the underlying ‘conservative attitude’ seeks to ‘preserve the status quo’ of the ‘world as it is’ (Arendt, 1954, p.11) through the rhetoric of social justice and equality. This is particularly evident in the 2016 Green Paper ‘Schools that work for everyone’, which is explored as part of the study’s policy text corpus through Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis investigates the ways in which ‘old-world’ ideology is linguistically dressed as new world solutions to long-standing issues of social inequality. The examination of the policy texts also demonstrates how ‘exaggerated accounts’ (Gorard, 2018, p.4) of educational success can be used to fit a political agenda which simultaneously embraces archaic and neoliberal values as the ideological future of education.

An exploration of the ‘story’ of educational policy over the last forty years has revealed similarities in political drivers – namely the underlying theme of neoliberal politics. As Ball suggests, policies that have been implemented through New Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments ‘address a very similar social agenda’ and can be likened to the ‘dual and contradictory policy imperatives’ of the development of 19th century state education (2017, p.114). This similar social agenda, based on the ‘aspirations and fears of the middle classes’ and the ‘underachievement of various sections of the working class’, (ibid.) has been re-worked in various governmental guises. Each manifestation of this social agenda has employed its own political axioms. As Taylor contends, concepts associated with issues of equity and social justice ‘are highly malleable –with terms and meanings changing over time and according to the political context’ (1997, p.28). Two key terms that frequently appear in contemporary political discourse – and that have been arguably misappropriated by shifting political agendas - are ‘social mobility’ and ‘meritocracy’. The ensuing sections will discuss these two key concepts in the context of education policy. A contextual explanation of these concepts will establish a backcloth for the Critical Discourse Analysis of the selected policy texts.

2.6 Social Mobility

Social mobility can be defined as ‘the movement or opportunities for movement between different social groups, and the advantages and disadvantages that go with this in terms of income, security of employment, opportunities for advancement etc.’ (Aldridge, 2001, p.1). Social mobility therefore is a term for how far up (or down) the socio-economic ladder one is able to climb (or fall). The concept of social mobility has been publicly researched since 1927, when Pitirim Sorokin - an exiled Russian revolutionary working as a Professor in America - published the ‘first major academic work’ which attempted to find mobility patterns ‘over place and time’ (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2018, p.1). During the

1970s, three major national surveys were conducted to research social mobility in England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, demonstrating the concept's popularity in the field of sociology and academic research (Payne, 1989, p.472). Since then, the conception of social mobility has advanced from the somewhat obscure rung of academia and has become a much broader, 'mainstream topic' (ibid., p.471). For the UK, the successive governments of New Labour, the Conservative-Liberal Coalition and the Conservatives have been increasingly preoccupied with the political implications of social mobility; the concept has taken centre stage on the platform of 'political concern' (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2019, p.2). 'The importance of achieving a more mobile society' - and the belief that education is the key to accomplishing this - has been a repeated focus of 'leading ministerial speeches' (ibid., p.3) in successive UK governments over the last twenty years. But what was the political significance of this growing focus upon social mobility?

Aldridge summarises three reasons which can be attributed to the elevation of social mobility within political and public spheres. Firstly, the lack of social mobility denotes an inequality of opportunity across society (2001, p.1). Although many of us may realise that real change in terms of social inequality is unachievable, it can be argued that promoting opportunities for social mobility provides society with an 'ideological fantasy' (Zizek, 2008, p.30). Upward social mobility is promoted through political rhetoric as an aspirational system of opportunity and absorbed into society as a utopian dream. The 'unconscious illusion' (ibid., p.3) of upward aspiration provides the societal conditions needed to build a competitive workforce - a tenet at the heart of neoliberal ideology. Aldridge believes that the second reason for the political focus on social mobility is that economic productivity and efficiency relies upon 'making the best use of the talents of everyone' (2001, p.1). This is candidly alluded to in the discourse of the 2016 Green Paper, 'Schools that work for everyone' where the underpinning principle is that 'every child should be able to go as far as their talents will take them' (DfE, 2016c, p.5). The modality of this statement is pertinent as

it furtively recognises that there are barriers in the way of achieving this upward social mobility. The linguistic choices made in the policy text - and the potential barriers to social mobility that are indicated in its political discourse - are explored in the study's critical analysis of the policy text corpus.

Returning to Aldridge, the final justification of the importance of social mobility to political agenda is that 'social cohesion and inclusion may be more likely to be achieved where people believe they can improve the quality of life' (2001, p.1). If society accepts the 'unconscious illusion' of upward social mobility, then the utopian vision of social cohesion and inclusion will also seem achievable. However, it can be argued that these ideological fantasies become a 'fetishistic inversion' which conceals the truths of social reality (Zizek, 2008, p.30). In reality, the promotion of social mobility as upward aspiration creates a neoliberal culture of competition where social segregation and exclusion are necessary evils. By engendering societal belief in achievable upward social mobility through political manifesto and policy rhetoric, an ideological fantasy which masks the brutality of neoliberalism can be created.

Aldridge's summary of the importance of social mobility has helped to understand its growing focus in successive government's political discourse. These plausible reasons for the promotion of social mobility, in conjunction with a series of official reports and strategy documents evidencing earnings decline, poverty and the disadvantage of minority groups in Britain (Aldridge, 2001, p.2), prompted greater political attentiveness. The vernacular of social mobility, with a 'strong emphasis on education' as the means to achieve it, appeared in the political speeches of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Nick Clegg, David Cameron and Theresa May (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2019, p.3). Social mobility became the popular linguistic veneer of contemporary neoliberal policy making in England.

Key measures of social mobility include wealth and occupation. This is why education was promoted by successive governments as ‘the great social leveller’ (Major and Machin, 2018, p.87), as it can help one to climb the aspirational ladder in terms of career prospects and greater income. The promotion of education as the magic wand of upward aspiration can be viewed as another example of a neoliberal magic trick. This deception champions education as the solution to achieving a more mobile society. However, as Major and Machin point out, the ‘great social leveller’ has been ‘misrecognised’ (2018, p.87). In fact, there is no reliable data to evidence any type of educational establishment consistently reducing ‘attainment gaps, and life prospects, between the rich and poor’ (ibid.). At best - they argue - education acts as a ‘counter-balance’ to offset the existing inequalities that are manifest within the systems of social class and hierarchy that pervade the broader socio-cultural fabric of the country. Education as ‘the great social leveller’ may be considered a ‘myth’ by some (Major and Machin, 2018, p.87). However, the feat of social mobility can be achieved - to some extent - by some individuals in society. Various factors may enable us to climb or slide upon the social ladder, but the social reality is that ‘many of us are destined to end up on the same rungs occupied by our parents’ (ibid., p.4). One’s parental legacy may mean inherited advantage or disadvantage when it comes to the possession and accumulation of social, cultural and financial capital.

Sociologist and philosopher Bourdieu contended that, in relation to the field of education, unequal selection and exclusion exists according to the amount of ‘cultural capital’ one’s parents hold (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.73). Thus, it can be argued that the possession of greater social, cultural and financial capital, privileges access to private and selective modes of education, whereas the capitally-disadvantaged become marginalised and excluded from this opportunity. It has been argued that the English education system reproduces the inequalities of a hierarchical class structure (Tomlinson, 2001, p.266). Private schooling and the operation of systems of selection can lead to social segregation or the

creation of an ‘educational apartheid’ (Gillies, 2007, p.28). Education cannot be ‘the great social leveller’ (Major and Machin, 2018, p.87) if its fundamental structure is founded on inequality. Furthermore, by conflating the concept of social mobility with education, one’s opportunity to move up the socio-economic ladder becomes narrowly focussed upon academic success. This excludes the non-academic members of society and devalues non-academic skills.

As Major and Machin point out, a successful model of social mobility should encourage society to develop all talents and not just focus on the academic (2018, p.220). It is comprehensible then that social mobility can be enhanced or restricted dependent upon the opportunities that social, cultural and financial capital allows - and the access to education that accumulation of this capital affords. However, upward mobility has been promoted by successive governments as an aspirational system of improvement for all - ‘no matter what their background or where they are from’ (DfE, 2016c, p.7). Children *should* go as far as their ‘talents’ and ‘hard work’ will take them (May, 2016, p.2). Despite this pledge, the focus upon social mobility is once again shrouded in neoliberal ideology. The system of aspiration at the heart of the ideological fantasy is the concept of meritocracy.

2.7 Meritocracy

In Michael Young’s 1958 book, ‘The Rise of the Meritocracy’, the term ‘meritocracy’ was associated with a dystopian view of society and used in a pejorative respect. Young’s ‘deeply negative’ view of a future meritocratic society warned of the consequences of emphasising the ‘importance of formal educational qualifications over all other considerations’ (Themelis, 2008, p.428). Young’s prophetic warning considered that a large percentage of society would be unable to access the education system and therefore, limited or rejected from opportunities to climb the socio-economic ladder in future life.

Contrary to Young's cautionary tale of an unfair society, the term meritocracy has been appropriated in contemporary political discourse as a positive axiom describing an aspirational view of society. In neoliberal ideology, 'meritocracy represents a positive ideal against which we measure the justice of our institutions' (Allen, 2011, p.367). New Labour leader Tony Blair was a key figure who facilitated this contemporary positive spin on the vision of a meritocratic society at the turn of the twenty-first century. Much to Young's disappointment, the term continued to be exercised in a positive respect in Blair's 'public vocabulary' (Allen, 2011, p.367) and has become central to the political discourse of succeeding governments, when defining their visions of an egalitarian future. None more so than in Prime Minister Theresa May's 2016 speech, where she aspires for 'Britain to be the world's great meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow' (May, 2016, p.2). In relation to education, a meritocratic system necessitates the reliance upon measures of progress and attainment in order to sort pupils according to their 'talent' and 'hard work'.

It has been argued that despite individuals' efforts and abilities - their measured and perceived hard work' and 'talent' - deeper social inequalities impair their fair chances of going far. The 'meritocracy through education' discourse in recent government policy and agenda 'can potentially conceal inequalities and injustices in contemporary market-driven British society' (Themelis, 2008, p.427). Although education may be considered in political forums as the 'saviour of meritocratic ideal' (ibid.), it is contended that if matters of social justice are not dealt with through the wider issues associated with socio-economic organisation, then education will only ever serve 'the interests of the privileged (in economic and political terms)' rather than enabling true social mobility - where 'working class', disadvantaged and marginalised groups within society escape from their rung of subordination on the social and economic ladder (ibid., p.428).

It is clear that today's vision of meritocracy is a long way from the image of a dystopian society that Young cautioned of when he first exercised the term. However, Littler suggests that today, 'the idea of meritocracy has become a key means through which plutocracy – or government by a wealthy elite – perpetuates, reproduces and extends itself' (2018, p.2). Rather than creating a fair and level playing field, it is argued that 'meritocracy has become the key means of cultural legitimation for contemporary capitalist culture' (Littler, 2018, p.2-3). The Platonic maintenance of the status quo.

2.8 The Policy Story Conclusion

It can be argued that the dominant - or hegemonic - doctrine of neoliberal thought underpins how we operate in society. Market principles of competition combined with the meritocratic discourse of self-improvement and aspiration have become societal normalcy. Global competition and the prerequisite to accumulate capital through market-driven consumerism pervade every corner of our society and have become concomitant with a 'good' way of life. The policies and strategies leading to educational reform over the last forty years have been driven by this increasingly 'one-dimensional' neoliberal ideology (Marcuse, 1964). The ever-tightening grip of neoliberal values upon education policy has created an inextricable link between education and the economy. In England – and in other GERM affected countries – education is economy. Education policy mandates are muddled by political agenda and boundaries between educational and societal need are blurred. Educational reforms and school improvement are portrayed as the magic wand for solving deep-seated issues of social inequality. Moreover, problematising these issues within education policy creates a diversion away from the roots of the problem - these remain firmly planted in societal structure through the reproduction of hegemonic values.

2.9 Part Two: Critical Literature Review of Existing Studies

Part one of the literature review discussed the intensifying neoliberal education-as-economics agenda of successive British governments over the last forty years and has located education policy as central to this doctrine. The second part of this chapter reviews a selection of research studies that critically analyse education policy in terms of its relationship with neoliberal governmentality. The neoliberal discourse of competition and performance; the ideological constructs of social mobility through meritocracy; and the oppression and marginalisation associated with political hegemony are explored by the authors of the research studies through methods of critical analysis. A review of the selected research studies investigates how these concepts are presented in education policy text and explores the arguments surrounding the interpretation of the discourse. Furthermore, the review of existing studies in the field of critical analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis of education policy text will inform the research approach of this study.

2.9.1 Approach to the Review

Drawing upon Cooper's 'Taxonomy of Literature Reviews' (1988), the approach to the review of existing research studies is briefly summarised. Utilising the characteristics and categories from Cooper's taxonomy, the focus of this review is the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to education policy. The goal of the review is to identify the central issues that have emerged from previous education policy analysis - particularly research studies which have employed CDA. The conclusions and assumptions that have been drawn from existing research provide a methodological foundation for the research approach. In the interpretation and presentation of key themes from the review, it is important to re-establish that my perspective is not one of neutrality; therefore, as Cooper suggests, my position must be espoused in order to make my perspective on the field of research clear. Chapter one elucidates that this thesis is written from a critical stance, viewing neoliberally-shaped education policy as a regime of performativity and

commodification. Throughout this review, this positionality is emphasised by relating key issues to personal experience, seeking to justify – or refute – my beliefs.

2.9.2 Research Mining and Gem Extraction

Boote and Beile argue that ‘a thorough, sophisticated review of literature’ is required (2005, p.3). They believe that a rigorous approach to a literature review is needed in the field of education research to suitably grapple with ‘its messy, complex problems’ (2005, p.3). Conducting a search for appropriate and relevant research studies was at times complex and messy. Therefore, a rigorous literature ‘mining’ (ibid.) process was followed in order to narrow the literature for its suitability to the research (see appendix 2 for a detailed account of the process).

From the broad range of articles identified during the ‘mining’ process, further narrowing was needed in order to select the most pertinent for review (see appendix 2). A literature matrix (see appendix 3) was created from the final selection in order to map the ‘key concepts, theories and methods’ from each article (Hart, 2018, p.242). For each study, the matrix ‘map’ identifies the employed methods and methodology; summarises the main arguments and key themes; and lists the core citations used. From this matrix summary, a comparative, thematic analysis was conducted to identify common, significant arguments which were then categorised into three key themes:

Key theme 1: The Discourse of Neoliberal Ideology and Power

Key theme 2: The Discourse of Problematisation and Crisis

Key theme 3: The Discourse of Social Justice

The subsequent sections of this part of the literature review chapter compare and synthesise the critical analyses of the selected research studies, in relation to the three key themes and with a particular focus on language and political rhetoric.

2.10 Key Theme 1: The Discourse of Neoliberal Ideology and Power

Throughout the body of selected literature, the authors discuss how education policy discourse has become ensconced with the values of neoliberal politics. As described in the first part of this chapter, successive governments' increasingly neoliberal agendas have developed a 'business ontology' (Fisher, 2009, p.17) for education, which now governs as 'hegemonic "common sense" discourse' (Emery, 2016, p.2). There is an inescapable link between education policy and economics and a societal acceptance that this is the norm. The control of the nation's economy through the neoliberal ideology of market-driven competition is the hegemonic power that is far reaching across every corner of our society. Understandably, this theme occurs throughout the selected literature, focussing on varying aspects of neoliberal discourse. It is appropriate at this stage to once again revisit the definition of neoliberalism that is employed for the purposes of this research study.

The 'neoliberal agenda' – as Ostry, Loungani and Furceri point out – is 'a label used more by critics than by the architects of the policies' (2016, p.38). As discussed in the policy 'story', the prevalence of neoliberal politics, with its focus on free market competition and privatisation, has become increasingly global. Although policy 'architects' would champion some of the achievements of the neoliberal agenda - such as the expansion of global trade and more efficient provision of services (ibid.) - critics believe that its profit-generating regime has had a profoundly damaging impact upon education and the teaching profession (Ball, 2012; Connell, 2013; Apple, 2016). Sharing similarities with the ancient Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the neoliberal 'view' of education is that its purpose is for the

construction of human capital – to preserve the existing state of affairs and to generate the workforce of tomorrow. As Connell describes, education ‘is the business of forming the skills and attitudes needed by a productive workforce’ (2013, p.104). Such a neoliberal agenda demands that the ‘business’ of education must be managed and regulated to ensure maximum efficiency of service and efficacy of provision. The dominance of neoliberal performative thinking in education policy has been depoliticised and propagated as hegemonic common sense.

The following sections will explore Key Theme 1: The discourse of neoliberal ideology and power, particularly focussing on the argument that policy discourse depoliticises and legitimises neoliberal values. The reviewed studies argue that through the language of ideology, fantasy and illusion, dominant practices and power asymmetries engrained in the political discourse of education policy are hidden, therefore legitimising a social wrong. Linguistically cloaked political agendas demonstrate the power behind contemporary education policy to reproduce dominant values and marginalise any alternative views.

2.10.1 Neoliberal Ideology - The Language of One-dimensional Thought

In his highly influential text ‘One-Dimensional Man’, Marcuse describes the central problem of society as the indoctrination into ‘one-dimensional thought and behaviour’ (1964, p.14). This one-dimensional thought, which is controlled by mass consumerism, ‘is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information’ (ibid., p.16). In reviewing the selected literature, it is evident that neoliberal ideology is construed as one-dimensional thought which controls, shapes and is promoted through the discourse of education policy. For example, Barkas et al., (2019) explore the discourse of marketisation and commodification - concepts which are central to neoliberal governmentality - in their critical account of ‘The Teaching Excellence Framework’ (TEF).

Their analysis reveals the ‘marketisation and employability agendas’ (2019, p.801) that underpin the government’s 2016 Higher Education White Paper (now the Higher Education and Research Act 2017) and highlights the ‘confusing and contradictory discourse’ that attempts to combine two competing ideologies in terms of the role of Higher Education (HE) in society (ibid., p.807). They point out that ‘the rationale for the TEF is cloaked in the words *quality* and *choice*’ and promises more opportunity and access to higher education for ‘disadvantaged groups’ (ibid., p.805). However, they argue that this illusory utopian goal is inherently contradicted by the ‘cost-based strategies’ (ibid.) forced upon universities to gain new entrants. Although the rhetoric of the TEF may appear positive, it is hindered by systems of metrics and bureaucracy which assist in the marketisation of Higher Education and proliferate the university’s role in exploiting the commodification of knowledge (ibid., p.809). The phrase ‘knowledge economy’ directly relates to the commodification of HE and has become normalised within the discourse of its policy. Other examples of the normalisation of neoliberal language within HE discourse include: marketisation, employability, gradueness and quality control (ibid., p.807). Barkas et al. argue that by placing these normalised concepts at the centre of policy, a ‘myopic vision of HE’ (ibid., p.808) is established which is purely focussed upon its economic value to society. This is the one-dimensional language of neoliberalism. ***There Is No Alternative.***

For Barkas et al., a ‘business ontology’ has clearly subjugated the domain of Higher Education and the language associated with neoliberal ideology has become normalised within its policy discourse. Lumby and Muijs discuss how the language of education policy reflects and sustains the one-dimensional ‘corrupt’ ideology of neoliberalism (2014). Drawing on an Orwellian theory, their critical analysis of the 2010 White Paper ‘The Importance of Teaching’ examines how the ‘use of language reflects the state of politics’ and how ‘corrupt language both reflects and further embeds corrupt thought’ (2014, p.524). A central construct of neoliberal thought is the notion of competition within society. Lumby

and Muijs point out that through the use of ‘dead metaphor’, a compliance with the conception of education as a competitive business is coerced upon the audience. Phrases such as ‘the race to the top’ reinforce the neoliberal view of education as competitive. However, as we have become so familiar with such cliched phrases, the metaphor (and its meaning) becomes insignificant to us - dead. Once again, the language of neoliberalism has become depoliticised and normalised in policy discourse. However, unlike the overt use of neoliberal terminology found in the discourse of Higher Education, the use of ‘linguistic ruses’ (ibid., p.536) such as metaphor within the 2010 White Paper, shroud the government’s agenda to reinforce the societal acceptance of their one-dimensional neoliberal thought. In Lumby and Muijs’ critical analysis, their findings suggest that the Coalition Government asserted ‘an heroic stance to act radically to free victimised teachers from the burdens of bureaucracy imposed by the previous government’ (2014, p.523). However, they argue that this was in fact an ‘illusory carapace of change’ (ibid.) which concealed the underlying continuity of neoliberal ideology - the continuing regime of one-dimensional thought.

In a significant proportion of the studies selected for this review, it has been recognised that the neoliberal construct of education as a business permeates the language and rhetoric of contemporary education policy, assisting with society’s indoctrination into one-dimensional thought. The use of business language became particularly prevalent in the discourse of New Labour’s education policy at the turn of the century. In a Critical Discourse Analysis of New Labour’s 2001 White Paper ‘Schools: Achieving Success’ and the 2002 Green Paper ‘14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards’, Mulderrig points out that the language of business is used in the policy rhetoric to demonstrate the relationship between education and economic success - ‘the economic metaphors of ‘stakeholding’ and ‘investment’ illustrate the instrumental, exchange-value logic that underpins’ New Labour’s education policy goals (2003, p.103). Mulderrig argues that education’s function in economic competitiveness is intensified through the explosion of educational strategies

during this period, and the escalation in rhetoric surrounding the relationship between education and economic productivity (ibid., p.99). Although New Labour's policy discourse was awash with the neoliberal values of market logic, there was an attempt to balance these ideas with a 'strong communitarian dimension' and the 'remnants of a statist social-democratic tradition' (Wright, 2012, p.279).

As discussed in section 2.4.5, New Labour's 'Third Way' vision introduced the juxtaposition of economics and social justice. However, as Wright points out in a discourse analysis of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition education policy, the renewed neoliberal agenda of this period sees a shift from a communitarian approach to social problems towards individual 'responsibilisation' (2012). The Coalition vision rearticulated education through the logics of market and a 'fantasy of empowerment'(ibid.). The following section explores the concept of fantasy in relation to policy discourse.

2.10.2 Neoliberal Ideology - The Language of Fantasy and Illusion

The concepts of fantasy and illusion within the discourse of education policy have been critically explored by Wright (2012), Kraftl (2012), Lumby and Muijs (2014), Clarke (2014/2020) and Wood (2019). As aforementioned, Wright examines the education policy of the Conservative-led Coalition government in the context of a critical analysis of its neoliberal market discourse. He argues that through policy discourse, the vision for education is reinvented around neoliberal market-logic coupled with an 'ideological fantasy of empowerment' (2012, p. 279). He contends that the 'empowerment agenda' of the Coalition government's education policy, constructed an ideological fantasy in which parents were empowered through the neoliberal logic of school choice, and teachers were 'freed from legal and bureaucratic constraints forced upon them from central government' (ibid.). However, Wright argues that the government's empowerment agenda served as the direct opposite of its fantasmatic intentions. It was in fact a façade 'for an assemblage of neoliberal

logics designed to provide greater control over the individual' (2012, p.292). This fantasy of empowerment conceals the 'long revolution' of neoliberalism within the discourse of education policy (ibid.).

Wright argues that the empowerment agenda - endorsed by the education policy of the Coalition government - became the 'primary method of legitimising, cementing and reproducing the ideas and practices' of neoliberal politics (2012, p.292). Furthermore, he believes that it assisted in concealing how neoliberalism causes society to become 'more atomised and unequal... driven by greed and avarice' (ibid.). For Wright, societal subordination to dominant neoliberal logic is disguised by the ideological fantasy of empowerment portrayed by the Coalition policy. It can be argued that this portrayed fantasy of freedom and empowerment is another example of a Marxian 'magic trick' - a desirable fantasy which hides the exploitation of education as a business from public awareness and renders it as a fetishised commodity (Bainbridge, 2020, p.744). Alternatively, returning to the study's policy-as-theatre-performance analogy (see section 1.4), the portrayed fantasy could be compared to the polished audience performance, whilst the long revolution of neoliberalism is operating the show from backstage.

Kraftl explores the concept of fantasy through a critical analysis of the government's 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) policy. Launched by the British New Labour Government in 2003, Kraftl argues that the policy constituted an 'allegorical utopia' (2012, p.847). This 'promise-laden' policy was founded upon neoliberal values but delivered a 'fantastical' utopian vision in terms of its 'radical' plans for schooling and society (ibid.). The utopian tone of the policy rhetoric advocated that the design of new school buildings 'would instil transformative change' (ibid.). However, Kraftl argues that the ultimate effect of the policy was to preserve a neoliberal model of schooling which invoked the future generation as the locus of economic investment (ibid., p.850). Through the 'structuring

power of ideological fantasy' (Zizek, 2008, p.30), and the rhetoric of education policy, the inevitability of an education system regulated by neoliberalism was veiled.

Wood alludes to the concept of fantasy in education policy in a differing respect. Rather than deeming that ideological fantasy is constructed and imposed upon society through policy rhetoric in order to conceal neoliberal ideology, she argues that education policy itself is fantasy. In her Critical Discourse Analysis of an Ofsted report in relation to good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage, she contends that 'policy-led evidence' is 'based on flawed and biased research' (2019, p.784). This is reminiscent of the views of Gorard (discussed in section 2.3) where policies are 'rarely based on good prior evidence of effectiveness' (2018, p.3). Wood maintains that by the formal recognition of play as central to children's learning and development through Ofsted's evidence-led policy, the concept of play is assimilated and 'drawn' into a 'policy discourse that is focussed on goals, outcomes and standards' (2019, p.793). She argues that when considering good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the nature of this policy discourse is essentially fantasy. 'Play' cannot be formalised and conflated with the accountability and performativity of the neoliberal education regime.

In Clarke's analysis of the 2016 White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere', he argues that education serves as a key platform to promote and pursue 'fantasmatic ideals' (2020, p.151). Fantasies of 'control; knowledge and reason; inclusion; productivity; and victimhood' (ibid.) are structured as reality within the policy discourse. For example, through the use of assertive language, the policy exercises power and control over its ambition for the future of the education system. Clarke argues that the government's declaration in the policy text that they *will* build capacity, set high expectations and raise standards is a 'fantasmatic assertion of control' (ibid., p.156).

Clarke also discusses how a fantasy of productivity is created through education policy's continual drive for improvement. He points out that 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' links better education to the formation of a better society in terms of productivity and innovation. The reshaping of education as a business with the values of market logic creates the unreachable goal of unlimited growth. The requirement to incessantly improve becomes an unachievable fantasy focussed on the neoliberal regime of measurement and performance.

It can be argued that one of the most illusory fantasies presented in the discourse of education policy is the claim of inclusion. For example, the promise of an ambitious education system that serves the interests of 'all children' is at the centre of the Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper. However, the pledge is made within the neoliberal logics of competition. The very nature of competitiveness is to win - meaning others are inevitably excluded along the way. This fantasy of a meritocratic yet inclusive society built upon a vision of educational 'excellence' disavows 'the realities of historic structural inequalities and the injustices of neoliberal capitalism' (Clarke, 2020, p.160). For Clarke, the fantasies portrayed through education policy are viewed with 'eyes wide shut'. We simultaneously recognise and deny the contradictions that the ideological promises inhibit. He argues that although we are aware of the fantasmatic structuring of reality, we keep 'our eyes wide shut to the distortions and obscenities of power' (ibid., p.164).

2.10.3 The Power Behind Policy

Fairclough makes the dialectic distinction between the 'power to' do things and the 'power over' other people – neither of which are inherently bad (2015, p.26). However, he points out that exerting power over people is subject to critique when the effects are negative, or the power is not one of legitimacy. In terms of the discourse of power, another dialectic distinction can be made between the 'power in' discourse and the 'power behind' discourse

(Fairclough, 2017, p.27). ‘Power in’ discourse constitutes an unequal exchange between participants. A more powerful participant controls and constrains the contributions of a less powerful participant through the content, relations or subject of the conversation (ibid., p.76). ‘Power behind’ discourse is where the entire social structure of discourse is shaped and constituted as a ‘hidden effect of power’ (ibid., p.83). Both of these are examples of exerting ‘power over’ people.

The power over people to do things may well be for the purposes of social good (Fairclough, 2017, p.26) or it could have undesirable effects and promote negative connotations - such as the reproduction of inequalities through the oppression and marginalisation of groups in society. Such an undesirable effect was interpreted by Liasidou (2008) in her critical analysis of inclusive education policy in Cyprus. Following international legislative trends – particularly those occurring in the United Kingdom – Cyprus introduced an education policy designed to focus on inclusivity and the rights of children with special educational needs (SEN). Through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), she sought to investigate how the legislative policy documents constructed and sustained asymmetrical power relations and marginalised children with SEN. Paradoxically, she determined that the policies which were ostensibly designed to promote more inclusivity had the effect of conveying ‘discriminatory attributes’ that evasively affirmed the ‘difference’ and ‘discrepancy’ of children with SEN from their peers (2008, p.484).

Liasidou discusses this policy effect in relation to the concept of ‘othering’; an ‘us’ and ‘them’ image is created through the ‘linguistic veneers that legitimize binary perspectives of normality and abnormality’ (2008, p.484). However, she recognises that policies reflect the ‘underlying ideologies and assumptions’ of society (ibid., p.485). The existing discourse that constitutes this imbalance of power is reproduced in the language of the text. The very term SEN is a ‘discursive artifact’ that represents difference and deficiency (ibid., p.486). In

order to change the language of exclusion, one must interrogate and dismantle the ‘political and normalising technologies of power’ that are hidden behind it (ibid., p.493). Liasidou maintains that in utilising methods of CDA; researchers can wield an ‘emancipatory research tool with the potential to destabilise the authoritarian discourses entrenched in education policy’ (ibid., p.483).

Kennedy-Lewis (2014) discusses power asymmetries in relation to ‘zero tolerance discipline policies’ in the USA. Although her critique is once again based on education policy from outside of the United Kingdom, parallels can be drawn in terms of the neoliberal influence upon United States policy making. She contends that neoliberalism continues to promote market-logic as the most ‘efficient and effective’ method of schooling in the US (2014, p.168). Through critical policy analysis, Kennedy-Lewis explores how zero tolerance legislation portrays educators and students, reflecting neoliberal values and legitimising and reproducing power asymmetries. She examines how through the discourse of safety and equity, policies portray educators as having ‘absolute power’, and students who behave disruptively as ‘inherently bad’ and deserving of punishment. Educators’ power is rendered as absolute rather than ‘subjective, contextually bound, or culturally determined’; students who commit disciplinary offences are depicted as ‘fundamentally flawed’ (ibid., p.165-175). Within the egalitarian and democratic discourse of safety and equity, Kennedy-Lewis maintains that authoritarian values are hidden. Whilst the policies are not overtly oppressive, the power behind this policy discourse enacts inequality and exclusion and legitimises the marginalisation of minority groups.

Mulderrig also explores the concept of power behind discourse in her ‘Critical Discourse Analysis of social actors in New Labour’s education policy’ (2003). Although Mulderrig’s analysis precedes the findings of Liasidou and Kennedy-Lewis, comparisons can be drawn. Unlike Liasidou’s critical analysis, where it is argued that power imbalance is

legitimised within the policy discourse, Mulderrig observes that through the deliberate use of more informal language the 'explicit textual markers of power asymmetries' are removed (2003, p.104). For example, in the New Labour policy text, there is a significant shift to the use of the pronoun 'we' rather than 'the government'. This creates a discourse of democracy - rather than authoritarianism - which is in contrast to Liasidou's 'othering' argument. However, Mulderrig believes that rather than eradicating power asymmetries, the use of 'democratised discourse' merely disguises them (ibid., p.105). New Labour's 'new language' (Fairclough, 2000) was able to spin the discourse of power into an egalitarian vision of shared beliefs. This strikes parity with Kennedy-Lewis' observations of zero tolerance policy in the USA. The democratised discourse of safety and equity identified within the policy text positively frames what could be perceived as an oppressive and authoritarian regime.

The final example of power behind discourse gleaned from the selected studies uses language not to hide power but to exude it. Gillies (2007) investigates the definitions of 'excellence' in New Labour's education policy rhetoric. Despite the emphasis on '*excellence*' in New Labour's policy publications through the use of phrases such as: '*Excellence and Enjoyment*', '*Targeting Excellence*' and '*A Curriculum for Excellence*', Gillies notes that there was little attempt to provide a clear definition of what '*excellence*' actually meant (2007, p.20). However, the term '*excellence*' evokes power and success and has a 'strong, positive connotative value in political discourse' (ibid., p.33). Gillies argues that the reiteration of the term excellence throughout education policy rhetoric reduces the word to a mere 'condensation symbol', designed to evoke positive imagery within the audience and establish 'discursive hegemony' (ibid.). Yet, as pointed out earlier, the true definition of this condensation symbol is in conflict with the utopian vision it signifies. Excellence is concomitant 'with elitism, with selection, ranking and educational apartheid'

and therefore incompatible with educational equity (ibid., p.28). This thesis argues that there can never be ‘excellence for all’.

Despite this stark reality, it can be contended that education policy has continued to keep its ‘eyes wide shut’ (Clarke, 2020, p.151) by promoting fantasmatic egalitarian meritocracy as the solution to societal inequalities. The term ‘*excellence*’ has continued to be utilised as a condensation symbol of power and success within political rhetoric - no more so than in the alliterative title of the 2016 White Paper ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’. Additionally, we are seeing other maxims appearing throughout political discourse that achieve the same rallying yet contradictory paradox. For example, it can be argued that eyes remain ‘wide shut’ to the Conservative conviction ‘Schools that work for everyone’. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of the selected corpus of policy texts, this research study builds upon the body of literature central to this review through exploring how dominant ideology, neoliberal fantasy and hidden power is constructed with the policy discourse. Furthermore, this study explores how the discourse of contemporary education policy in England legitimises and reproduces neoliberal values, therefore marginalising alternative views.

2.11 Key Theme 2: The Discourse of Problematisation and Crisis

The ensuing section focusses on how education policy uses crisis narratives to frame reform. Selected research studies demonstrate how societal issues are ‘problematised’ within policy text, and how education is presented as the solution. The theme of problematisation was identified across the selected literature in relation to the notions of Freire (1970) and later Foucault (1977). They shared a ‘conviction to approach questions differently’ (Bacchi, 2012, p.1), exploring how and why certain issues become problems and questioning the manipulated ‘truths’ that are posed as problems to the oppressed (Freire, 2017, p.125). Authors of the selected studies argue that problematised crisis narratives pave the way for

new incentives, justify educational reform and legitimise the neoliberal agenda. Through carefully chosen rhetoric and selective ‘what works’ evidence, the discourse of education policy is elevated to the level of utopian fantasy and is portrayed as the solution for all potential crises.

2.11.1 Crisis Narratives - Genuine Problems or Rhetorical Spin?

Nicoll and Edwards claim that rhetorical analysis assists in uncovering ‘the politics of discourse’ employed in the policy-making process (2004, p.43). The focus of their study was the 1998 Green Paper ‘The Learning Age’ and 1999 White Paper ‘Learning to succeed’. They argue that through rhetorical analysis, one can discern how problems and possible solutions are ‘framed and fabricated’ within the policy discourse (ibid., p.44). The rhetorical strategies utilised by policy makers frame situations of political importance with a fabricated ‘crisis’ therefore persuading a mobilised audience that policy action is imperative. For example, Nicoll and Edwards observe that phrases such as *‘We are in a new age’*, *‘we have no choice’* and *‘we must equip ourselves’* can be interpreted as a rallying response to a crisis that *‘we’* all face (ibid., p.48-49). Additionally, the rhetorical devices employed within the 1998 Green Paper’s title and contents can be construed as an attempt to ‘mobilise an audience’ (ibid., p.43) and persuade them of the need for a ‘new Britain’ (DfEE, 1998) - suggesting that the old Britain was in crisis. The linguistic choice of the phrases ‘a *renaissance* for new Britain’ followed by ‘the individual learning *revolution*’ suggest that this policy has been created in response to an educational crisis and that the rebirth and revival of learning are crucial for a ‘new age’ (ibid.).

Mulderrig discusses the narration of a crisis in education in relation to the continual ‘fears about falling standards and teachers’ performance’ (2008, p.166). In her Critical Discourse Analysis and corpus linguistic ‘keyword’ analysis of seventeen White Papers from 1972 – 2005, she explores the history of the variation, selection and retention of keywords.

She observes that keywords from Thatcherism became ‘entrenched’ in education policy over subsequent years, repeatedly renewing and reshaping the narrative of educational crisis (ibid.). In the ‘managerial’ discourse of policy under Margaret Thatcher, the emphasis was on what was wrong with education. Mulderrig identified the keyword ‘*standards*’ throughout the policy discourse during the Thatcher period. This fits with the portrayal of educational crisis, suggesting that there was a lack of *standards* in education and therefore a need for increased monitoring and greater central control (2008, p.153). Under the subsequent Conservative leadership of John Major (1990 - 1997), there was a shift towards future-orientated economic-centred discourse. During this period, the keyword ‘*competitiveness*’ was identified throughout policy discourse, suggesting a more global education crisis narrative. Fears of falling standards and teacher performance had now been relocated upon the global stage; *competitiveness* became the solution to the now global crisis and education the key to economic success.

2.11.2 New Labour - Re-positioning Crisis

With the onset of Tony Blair’s New Labour Leadership (1997), Mulderrig notes that many keyword themes apparent in Thatcher’s period reappear. However, the distinguishing feature of the New Labour policy discourse was the ‘marked personalisation’ and ‘representational style’ found in the use of the pronouns ‘*we*’ and ‘*our*’ (2008, p.153). In Blair’s policy rhetoric, ‘*our*’ future workforce was fabricated as the dual educational-economic crisis narrative and framed as an impending problem to be solved through educational policy reform. However, the trepidation of a potential economic disaster was offset with the egalitarian discourse of democracy. ‘*We*’ were positioned as the ‘willing subjects of a workfare regime’ (ibid., p.164) where skills were essential to economic growth and social inclusion. New Labour’s policy once again positioned education at the centre of neoliberal ideology, yet the rhetoric sounded more inclusive. Education was promoted as the

means to ‘motivate’, ‘raise expectations’, ‘prepare young people to be responsible citizens’ and shape the workforce of the future generation (ibid., p.154). Blair’s new spin on Thatcherite neoliberalism promised a crisis-free, socially-just future.

Returning to Gillies’ investigation of the definitions of the term ‘excellence’ in New Labour rhetoric, he suggests that the emphasis on this ‘condensation symbol’ within the policy discourse is in direct response to crisis narratives (2007, p.19). As aforementioned in the previous section on policy and power (see 2.10.3), the term ‘excellence’ evokes connotations of success and fortitude. The promise of ‘excellence’ conjures a vision of ‘future greatness’ (Gillies, 2007, p.23), yet it concurrently cautions us of the potential crisis that would ensue without the pursuit of excellence. To effectively compete in the global market, ‘schools must produce excellence, in terms of their students’ economic potential, so that they are fitted for business which must also produce excellence’ (ibid., p.25). It can be argued that the condensation symbol was utilised to disguise its underlying neoliberal agenda. One might surmise that what New Labour actually meant by excellence was in fact competitiveness. Promoting educational ‘excellence’ through monitoring school effectiveness and implementing school improvement agendas became New Labour’s newly-spun policy solution to the looming threat of future economic crisis.

Like Gillies, Emery (2016) explored the discourse of New Labour policy but with a particular focus on the concept of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). His Critical Discourse Analysis of interview transcripts from English and Welsh policy actors revealed that policy discourse privileges certain ideas, topics and speakers and excludes others. His findings demonstrated a high level of ‘interdiscursivity’ across the interviewees, combining neoliberal and managerial ideology with a ‘discourse of moral panic’ (2016, p.18). The crisis narrative that was woven into the context of SEL focussed upon a ‘deficit model of childhood’ where children were depicted as ‘at risk or damaged’ and ‘in danger of losing

(economic) opportunity’ (ibid.). The solution was framed by the discursive practice of ‘dominant state actors’, demonstrating the ‘power of governance’ through shaping policy with neoliberal values (ibid., p.21). Although the discourse of SEL across schools in England and Wales represented a focus on emotional well-being and social justice, Emery’s findings expose the underlying neoliberal thinking - the one-dimensional thought - of the policy actors at play.

2.11.3 The Coalition - Re-mobilising an Old Crisis

Moving into the Coalition Government period from 2010, crisis narratives were still utilised as a rhetorical device to justify educational reform and implement neoliberal agenda. Francis conducted a discourse analysis with a particular focus upon policy surrounding the Academies Programme in England (2010). She identified a ‘cluster of discourses and rhetorical devices’ that portray the education system as ‘in crisis’ (2015, p.437). Through her analysis of the discourse, she observes the frequent deployment of tropes and phrases which signify a broader, ‘crisis’ policy narrative’ (ibid., p.441-442). The ‘discursive bundle’ upon which she focusses includes the following crisis narratives: ‘an inadequacy/ crisis of education provision; system chaos; and UK falling behind other nations’ (ibid., p.442). She argues that these discourses provide the rationale for policy action and legitimise radical intervention such as the Academies Programme. Furthermore, she finds that discourse from a range of stakeholder groups mobilises rhetoric in order to stake subjective claims and ‘move debates in an intended direction’ (ibid., p.439).

The intended direction of the Coalition Government in 2010 was to mobilise rhetoric surrounding the fears of the UK falling behind its competitors (Francis, 2015, p.443). Emotive phrases such as ‘*consistently lagged behind*’, ‘*outperforms the UK*’, ‘*chronic underperformance in schools*’ and ‘*rapidly progressing nations*’ (ibid.) assisted in creating a crisis narrative surrounding the state of education. Reminiscent of previous Conservative

government rhetoric, this moral panic ‘gained rapid hegemony’ under the Coalition and reinforced England’s ‘falling’ position in the ‘global race’ (ibid., p.443). Akin with Emery’s assertions (2016), Francis contends that such rhetorical strategies assist in privileging certain views and excluding others - there is subjective agency in the promotion of particular narratives. This agentic marshalling of discourse influences the production of policy, and therefore, steers the effects towards a desired outcome. In the case of Francis’ rhetorical analysis, the arguments for policy action utilised to counter this ‘crisis’ focussed upon the need for ‘up-skilling’ human capital in order to keep up with the ‘rapidly changing, globalised world’ (ibid., p.444). Once again, the discourse of competition and neoliberal market-logic is depoliticised and legitimised through education policy in the Government’s response to the education crisis.

In Francis’ enquiry, it is pointed out that rhetorical strategies can mobilise a narrative that serves hegemonic ideology, ‘despite well-publicised challenges to the data’ (2015, p.443). This suggests that research evidence may be disregarded or privileged dependent upon its suitability to the desired narrative. This is a theme that Godfrey explores in his article reviewing the role of research evidence in education policy. Specifically focussing on the English education policy context between 2010 and 2016, his analysis of the 2016 White Paper ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ reveals the government’s ‘over emphasis on a ‘what works’/ ‘evidence-based practice’ model’ (2017, p.433) versus a more empowering vision for the role professional research could play in educational improvement (ibid., p.437). Godfrey warns that evidence-based practice championed by government sources such as the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation, privilege certain types of research evidence - particularly meta-analyses and randomised control trials. This could lead to the over-simplification of the complexities of teaching pedagogy and a set of generalised and prescribed ‘what works’ guidelines, based on ‘narrow conceptions of school effectiveness’ (ibid., p.437). Furthermore, an over-reliance on ‘one dominant form of methodology’ may

‘skew an understanding of the knowledge base’ surrounding the areas of concern (ibid., p.445). Like Francis’ enquiry, Godfrey found that a particular narrative was mobilised in the 2016 White Paper to serve governmental dominant ideology and address the problematised crises in the education system. The discourse of ‘evidence-based’ and ‘what works’ became the rhetorical strategy which underpinned the narrative of the 2016 White Paper and the solution for school improvement.

Morris also discusses the sources and nature of evidence in the context of the preceding 2010 schools White Paper which promoted ‘whole-system reform in England’ (2012, p.89). He argues that the White Paper used selective data and strategically picked the sources of comparison in order to create a ‘façade to legitimate preferred policy options’ (ibid.). Policy borrowing from ‘world-class’, ‘high-performing’ education systems became the 2010 strategy for legitimating the neoliberal agenda of global competition. Morris contends that the paper’s focus on ‘what works elsewhere’ promoted an attractive ‘evidence-based’ rationale for change (ibid., p.90). However, the White Paper’s policy makers selected evidence with a heavy focus on ‘improving the quality of teachers’ (ibid., p.99). ‘The Importance of Teaching’ White Paper promoted how teachers in high-performing education systems such as Singapore and Finland were required to undergo substantial periods of training before working in a school. This evidence was cherry-picked to support the policy action which required new entrants to teacher training in England to have a minimum of a 2:2 degree qualification. Through the selection of this evidence, the paper created the façade that the secret of success for high-performing schools could be narrowed down to simply the quality of teaching.

However, as Morris points out, the use of evidence in this way is methodologically flawed’ (2012, p.104). What the White Paper failed to divulge was the stark difference in the structure of these other education systems in terms of opportunity and equality. The Finnish

education system not only promotes 'high levels of autonomy and respect for a highly professionalised teaching workforce' but emphasises the importance of a comprehensive schooling system (ibid., p.103). The OECD found that school systems which offer similar opportunities to learn for all pupils - regardless of their background - are more likely to be high-performing (ibid.). In contrast, the English education system maintains that its highly differentiated and selective approach is essential in terms of promoting the meritocratic ideology of competition that the country's neoliberal agenda is founded upon. This is maintained in the 2010 White Paper despite evidence from PISA studies that recognise the contrary. Evidence from PISA has revealed that 'highly differentiated and selective school systems have not been associated with better pupil outcomes' (ibid.). It can be construed that this evidence was ignored and omitted from the White Paper as it did not fit with its ideology. Morris concludes that the selective use of evidence and sources by the 2010 White Paper serves to create an ideological façade which legitimates the government's underlying neoliberal agenda. It can therefore be argued that this façade becomes the 'empirical' layer of reality that is projected onto the policy audience. The actual reality, in terms of the full extent of evidence, is kept behind the stage curtains. Leaving the 'real' reality - in terms of the fundamental issues of inequality entrenched in the structure of the English education system - obscured.

2.12 Key Theme 3: The Discourse of Social Justice

This section focusses upon the third key theme extracted from the review of literature: the discourse of social justice within education policy. For the purposes of this thesis, the theme of social justice refers to 'the ways in which inequalities are produced and reproduced by post-welfarist education' (Gewirtz, 1998, p.469) and how education policy frames this within its discourse. Through their research studies and critical analyses, authors highlight how education is portrayed as the 'modern engines of social justice' (Morgan, 2015) and the

solution to societal inequalities within policy rhetoric. The literature discusses how issues of social justice are expressed in contemporary education policy in terms of the goal of - or threats to - 'social cohesion' (Taylor, 2004, p.440). The concept of social mobility is interwoven in policy discourse with the ideological portrayal that a good education can assist in upward aspiration and prosperity. However, it is argued in the literature that true social justice is incompatible with the neoliberal market logic that is being applied to the education system in England (and other neoliberal politically-driven countries). The subsequent discussion explores the critical analyses of the social justice narratives found within education policy discourse.

2.12.1 Aspiration, Character and Resilience - The Answer to Social Mobility

In a critical discourse analysis of the 2014 report 'Cracking the Code: How Schools Can Improve Social Mobility', Maslen reveals how metaphors are used to 'justify, disguise and normalise' the neoliberal focus on competition within the discourse of social justice (2019, p.600). A narrative of healthy competition is woven through the report by the use of rhetorical phrases and sporting metaphors. Tropes such as '*walking the walk*' and '*stepping up to the plate*' - derived from baseball and boxing respectively - help to advocate the '*hard-nosed aspiration*' that is needed to '*crack*' social mobility (ibid., p.605) and therefore prevail in a fair and just meritocratic society. Through purposefully chosen rhetoric, social mobility is transformed into a game of life, where aspiration and a competitive drive are essential attributes for achieving success.

For successive governments, a 'poverty of aspiration' amongst young people has been to blame for falling standards, unemployment and low levels of social mobility (Spohrer, Stahl, and Bowers-Brown, 2018, p.1). For the coalition government at the time of the 2014 report, 'sharper elbows' and a revived sense of Margaret Thatcher's 'competitive individualism' was needed to gain advantage in society and climb up the social ladder (ibid.).

Instilling drive and aspiration into disadvantaged pupils represented the solution to better school performance, higher standards and greater social mobility. However, with the continued focus on ‘ruthless competition’ (ibid., p.609) within the rhetoric of the 2014 report, cracking the code of social mobility suggests that one should rise ‘out of your class, as opposed to rising with it’ (ibid., p.607). It can be argued that this is not a solution for social justice. In fact, advocating a competitive, meritocratic system aids the reproduction of existing social inequalities but shifts the blame upon the low-aspiring individuals rather than looking at the structure of society as a whole.

Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown discuss the concept of aspiration as a ‘technology of government’ in UK policy discourse (2018, p.1). They point out that since the 2000s, successive governments have focussed on raising aspiration strategies as the answer to ‘persisting educational and socio-economic inequalities’ (ibid.). However, it should be recognised that there are many barriers preventing children and young people from ‘realising their talents’ - not simply a ‘poverty of aspiration’ (ibid., p.18). It can be contended that the promise of social mobility through education and aspiration is not achievable for everyone despite their aspirations; there are wider issues at play in the reproduction of societal inequality. It is suggested that the raising aspiration discourse found in education policy portrays young people as both favourably and in a pejorative way. On one hand, young people are shown to have the potential to rise out of their class as advocated by the policy. Conversely, the policy discourse depicts young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as ‘deficient’ and in need of behavioural and attitudinal change. It is argued that this ‘subjectivation’ and ‘formation of identity’ serves as governmental technology which blurs the boundaries between ‘empowerment and manipulation’. Through the discursive mobilisation of raising aspiration within policy text, young people are constituted as neoliberal subjects whose character can be controlled ‘from the inside’ (Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown, 2018). Therefore, it can be contended that the pejorative depiction of a

deficient, disadvantaged youth legitimates the inequalities of a class-based social structure and assists in the reproduction of hegemonic neoliberal values.

Spohrer and Bailey (2020) examine how the call for character education is presented as the cure for social immobility in the 2014 'Character and Resilience Manifesto' (Paterson, Tyler and Lexmond, 2014). Preceding the 2014 'Cracking the Code' Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission report, the Manifesto discusses and presents research on the relationship between character, resilience and social mobility, and makes policy recommendations in relation to early years and school settings, as well as 'transition to adulthood and employment' (Spohrer and Bailey, 2020, p.566). In their analysis, Spohrer and Bailey draw upon Foucault's notion of 'problematization' to investigate how 'problems' and 'solutions' are 'constructed and legitimised' through the 2014 Manifesto (2020, p.561). An individual's innate behaviour, character and nature are problematised and objectified within the Character and Resilience Manifesto (CRM), suggesting that there is a need for intervention and repair in order to build a more prosperous society. This concept became a new version of 'neoliberal individualism' where the lack of character and resilience in individuals was used to rationalise and legitimise social inequalities (ibid., p.562). Once again, this reinstates Margaret Thatcher's sharp-elbowed neoliberal conviction that there is no society - only individuals (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.5).

Spohrer and Bailey also exercise Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics' to define the problems and solutions outlined in the CRM. They argue that the problematised need for a 'cure of character' is presented as a new 'bio-power' which has the ability to reanimate social mobility and solve societal issues such as poverty and idling economic productivity (2020, p.570). Furthermore, they note that the discourse of the Manifesto is couched in 'biological language'. For example, social immobility is referred to as an '*infestation*' that can be '*treated*' through attitudinal change (ibid.). It appears that through intentionally chosen

language, the CRM declares that the blight of social dysfunction can be addressed by an injection of aspiration, character and resilience into the deficient, disadvantaged youth. Spohrer and Bailey conclude that social mobility is increasingly framed by biopolitical neoliberal individualism. Reminiscent of Thatcher's sharp-elbowed politics once again, the management and regulation of the population through targeting human behaviour and demanding 'self-governance' (2020, p.561), enables policy makers to justify the government's political agenda and maintain the hegemonic status quo.

Winton also explores policy problematisations of character in her rhetorical analysis of "Character Matters!", a character education policy of a school board in Ontario, Canada' (2013, p.158). Although the Canadian policy preceded England's Character and Resilience Manifesto and the 'Cracking the code' of social mobility report, similar linguistic strategies are used in terms of problematisation and persuasion within the policy rhetoric. Through rhetorical analysis, Winton identifies that the discourse of 'Character Matters!' appeals to the audience's reasoning and emotions as it persuades them that a student's character is the 'cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society' (ibid., p.166). Furthermore, student achievement, skills and behaviours are problematised as 'areas of concern' (ibid., p.163). Winton contends that this message is reinforced by the use of metaphor throughout the discourse. Metaphors relating to construction, community and journey are used to promote the concept of character as an essential attribute for educational and societal success. Winton suggests that the use of these metaphors construct how the audience perceive character and character education. Within the policy, character is defined as something that can be built, a trait that is needed to function morally within the community and an attribute that 'improves chances for future employment' and economic success. The policy audience are persuaded that 'character matters' by defining it as the solution to problematised public concerns surrounding 'community safety, responsible citizenship, common decency and respect' (ibid., p.167). 'Character Matters!' was the Canadian solution to social mobility in 2003. This

focus on an individual's 'responsibility for their own affairs' (Castree, 2010, p.4) was shared across the pond and became a central tenet of the competitive individualism required for success in the neoliberal vision of society driven by successive UK governments.

2.12.2 Social Mobility as a Shared Moral Responsibility

Returning to the analysis of English education policy, Riddell notes that after the General Election in 2010, the Coalition Government's policy focus on social mobility utilised the concepts of 'fairness' and 'unlocking' opportunities for social mobility within its rhetoric (2013, p.848). As outlined in section 2.6, social mobility refers to the movement between different social groups, and the advantages and disadvantages that are associated with it (Aldridge, 2001). Coalition policy emphasised social mobility as a 'publicly relevant moral issue' and highlighted educational reform as the solution (Riddell, 2013, p.849). The Coalition Social Mobility Strategy spurred an array of 'independent, non-Governmental and private sector organisations to participate in the process of social change' (ibid, p.855). Organisations such as the 'Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission' and 'The Education Endowment Foundation' focussed on raising the educational attainment of children from deprived areas which in turn would improve educational outcomes and the chances for social mobility (ibid., p.856). Whilst the Government's ambition for social change may seem contradictory to the principles of neoliberalism, Riddell points out that the involvement of businesses and organisations in the social mobility strategy, and the establishment of independent bodies to 'monitor and advocate change', are key features of a neoliberal agenda (ibid., p.860). Moreover, through the deployment of a 'Social Mobility Strategy', the Government mobilised and reinforced the hegemonic values of a stratified class-based society where inequality is inevitable. It can be contended that the campaign for social mobility spurred a neoliberal culture of competition where social segregation and exclusion were legitimised.

Owens and St Croix (2020) point out that the ambition to improve social mobility through education was a common theme through successive New Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments. They explore how meritocratic education has become the solution to social mobility despite the ‘cycles of stress, marginalisation and disadvantage’ it places upon students (2020, p.419). They investigate how the concept of meritocracy is characterised as a ‘neoliberal cultural motif that legitimises inequalities’ and imposes significant burdens upon the English education system (ibid., p.403). It is apparent that the meritocratic discourse within more recent education policy has broadened the emphasis from competitive individualism towards the responsibility of schools. Schools have the responsibility to ‘enable hardworking and talented students to succeed regardless of their circumstances (ibid.). Or, as advocated by the then Prime Minister Theresa May in her 2016 speech ‘Britain, the great meritocracy’, schools should enable ‘hardworking’ students ‘to go as far as their talents will take them’ (May, 2016, p.5). Owens and St Croix contend that by exercising this meritocratic rhetoric, where schools are held responsible for shaping the social opportunities of their students, the deeper social inequalities at play in the education system (and society) are obscured (2020, p.403).

Through an exploration of the literature, it can be concluded that schools are depicted as ‘the engines of social justice’ (Morgan, 2015) - responsible for providing aspirational and equal opportunities for all students ‘no matter what their background or where they are from’ (DfE, 2016c, p.7). Although character still matters, there has been a shift in policy discourse from a focus on individual responsibility and a ‘deficit’ view of young people, towards the responsibility of schools to raise the educational attainment of children from deprived areas. Steered at a distance by monitoring from independent organisations, schools are under new pressures to create fair and just educational opportunities, despite existing in a competitive neoliberal education system. It is emphasised in the literature that there is an incongruity in the ambition for social justice within an education system entrenched in neoliberal values.

The discourse of social mobility and meritocracy has in fact become conflated with social justice in contemporary education policy. However, as Reay (2013) argues, social mobility cannot be equated with social justice as it fails to recognise the wider issues of inequality entrenched in society. It is contended in the literature that the discourse of social mobility and meritocracy ‘obscures the effects of structural disadvantages, reproducing social inequalities and perpetuating a cruel and cynical fiction’ (Owens and St Croix, 2020, p.420). It can be argued then that social mobility is an ‘ideological fantasy’ (Zizec, 2008, p.30) - a ‘mirage’ flaunting the ‘hopes and desires for those in the bottom two-thirds of society’ (Reay, 2013, p. 662). The reality of social mobility is in fact a narrow focus on the ‘*levelling up*’ of a ‘hardworking’ and ‘talented’ few.

Through a review of the selected research studies, it has been shown that the discourse of contemporary education policy (particularly in England) legitimises and reproduces hegemonic neoliberal values. It is believed that the discourse of neoliberalism is depoliticised and normalised, marginalising any alternative viewpoints; the discourse of problematisation and crisis ‘feeds’ accepted ‘truths’ to the policy audience; and the discourse of social justice conceals the structural inequalities that are engrained in the fabric of society. These key themes that have been identified from the review of literature underpin the overarching research question: *How does the discourse of contemporary education policy in England present neoliberal values?*

In terms of existing education policy analyses, this question has been answered through a critical exploration of its discourse. Research studies have explored linguistic features such as tropes, metaphors and condensation symbols to reveal how policy rhetoric can be manipulated to suit a desired agenda. Furthermore, through approaches that utilise CDA, the wider socio-political context is investigated, revealing the power behind policy making decisions. Building on this existing research, this study utilises a unique analytical

framework to explore the discourse of a new corpus of policy texts. The extent to which the policies reproduce hegemonic neoliberal values is investigated through a critical analysis of the linguistic, discursive and socio-cultural layers that are involved in the creation of the text. The methods that constitute the analytical framework of the research approach are described in chapter three.

Chapter Three

The Research Approach

3.1 Introduction

Following on from the critical literature review and the generation of research questions, this chapter describes the research approach of the thesis. It begins by revisiting the theoretical framework that underpins the research, with an explanation of the key principles of critical realist philosophy. Following this, a brief discussion of the historical context of CDA takes place. It then defines the study's research paradigm, describing the strengths and limitations of the chosen methodological pairing of Critical Realism (CR) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This leads to a justification of using Fairclough's four-stage Dialectical-Relational Approach to CDA as the basis for the study's critical analytical framework. An overview of each stage of this methodological approach is provided and contextualised by drawing upon examples from the review of literature.

The chapter then focusses on the methods of analysis employed in the study. Using Fairclough's DR/CDA approach as a foundation, a unique analytical framework has been developed for the purposes of this research, which draws upon a range of methods in order to conduct a rigorous and systematic analysis of the corpus of policy texts. Echoing Fairclough's three-tiered approach to analysis, the chapter first focusses on the '*description of text*' (Fairclough, 2015, p.128). At this level of analysis, linguistic analysis comprises of investigating grammatical features such as pronoun use and modality, as well as language techniques such as metaphor. The chapter then moves on to describe how interdiscursive analysis forms part of the analytical framework. This method serves as 'the mediating level of analysis which is crucial to integrating social and linguistic analysis' (Fairclough, 2013, p.290). This is an analysis of how the text and socio-cultural practice in which it exists interrelate. It is this level of analysis that encompasses the '*interpretation*' and '*explanation*'

stages in which the ‘the relationship between text and interaction and ‘the relationship between interaction and social context’ (Fairclough, 2015, p.128) is explored. Following this, problematisation and argumentation analysis techniques are described; these are additional layers of analysis that form part of the study’s analytical framework and assist in strengthening the analysis. The final sections of the chapter include a discussion surrounding the ethical considerations and implications of the study, as well as how positionality may limit and affect the validity of the research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research approach. This chapter aims to demonstrate rigour in the research in terms of following a systematic approach to describe a comprehensive and multi-layered analysis structure.

3.2 The Conceptual Lens - Critical Realism

In chapter one, the theoretical framework underpinning this study was discussed in relation to my ontological philosophy. My view of the nature of reality aligns with Critical Realism in terms of assuming a stratified ontology. Processes, events and constructs are perceived as different layers of social reality which exist independently of each other and yet are linked through a ‘complex interaction’ of causal powers (Fairclough, 2005, p.922). This version of realism is particularly associated with the work of Bhaskar, which is drawn upon throughout this study. In particular, Bhaskar’s ‘depth ontology’ theory (1978) - in which the distinction is made between three domains of reality: the empirical, the actual and the real - is utilised to draw comparisons with key concepts and beliefs. For example, in section 1.4.1, an analogy of a theatre performance is used to compare Bhaskar’s three domains of reality to education policy. The ‘empirical’ or observable layer of the policy ‘performance’ can be considered separately from the ‘actual’ reality generated by the ‘behind-the-scenes’ policy makers. Furthermore, it can be contended that the ‘real’ reality underpinning education

policy lies in the causal structures and mechanisms of socio-cultural practice. This analogy serves to conceptualise the layers of education policy discourse through a critical realist lens.

The term 'Critical Realism' (CR) has been used to describe the philosophical theories of a number of scholars worldwide (Collier, 1994). However, the CR movement is centred in the UK and is a philosophical system of thinking developed by Bhaskar. In collaboration with other British theorists (such as Archer, Hartwig, Lawson, Norrie and Sayer), Bhaskar developed a philosophical theory that addressed the 'shortcomings of positivism and empiricism' (Gorski, 2013, p.659), moving on from this arguably out-moded social ontology. Positivism assumes that scientific knowledge is a 'universal and exceptionless' statement that facilitates the prediction and control of events (ibid., p.660). Bhaskar challenged positivism with heterodoxical thinking, claiming it to be a 'misunderstanding of the natural sciences' (Collier, 1994, p.102). He criticised the positivist philosophy of science as being the dominant ideology of capitalism - a structure viewed through a Marxian lens as an exploitative system of industry (ibid., p.100). Bhaskar's fundamental premises for his alternative philosophy of science are 'the concern for human emancipation' (ibid., p.x) and the belief that obtaining the truth will set us free. Underpinned by this belief, Critical Realism was founded on the following key principles:

- 1) The concept of a stratified or 'depth' ontology where the 'empirical', 'actual' and 'real' domains coexist in an independent yet interdependent manner.
- 2) The notion that causal powers are exhibited in social structures and human agency, and it is the work of social research to explore the relationship between structure and agency.
- 3) The idea that the world is an open system of causal mechanisms that interact with each other in complex ways (Archer et al., 1999, p.12).

Bhaskar's stratified view of reality does not presume that the structures of reality are 'directly observable' (Gorski, 2013, p.659). His 'depth ontology' suggests that there are layers of reality that function independently (without being observed) but work interdependently with the causal powers and mechanisms that shape them. Unlike positivist 'covering laws' (ibid., p.660) where scientific knowledge predicts and controls events, Critical Realism (CR) professes reality to be an open network of interacting powers and mechanisms where the interplay of structure and agency continually oscillates. Bhaskar's work had the initial aim of solving ontological problems within the philosophy of science. Although the doctrines of interpretivism and constructivism have also attempted to do this, CR provides an alternative approach based on the emancipatory practice of seeking the truth. As a result, CR is now regarded by some academics as one of the most widely influential philosophies in the human and natural/human sciences in contemporary times (Collier, 1994).

Some critics of CR argue that it 'is both too critical and not critical enough' (Sellars, 1924, p.385). For example, Hammersley illustrates the belief that CR is deliberately critical, suggesting that the phrase 'critical realism' goes beyond the sense that *all* research should be critical and subject to scrutiny. He argues that CR 'requires that the phenomena <itself> being studied, and the societies in which they are found, are subjected to criticism' (2009, p.1). Assuming this view, CR can be seen as a philosophy for diagnosing and rationalising societal 'defects' and deriving conclusions 'from descriptive and explanatory evidence alone' (ibid., p.2). Focussing on what is wrong with society may prove to be too critical for some in terms of social science research.

To address the contrasting argument, some believe that a flaw of CR is that it is not scientifically rigorous in its explanatory claims. Critics argue that CR 'does not try to justify its belief in things by reasoned argument' rather, it 'founds itself completely on instinctive belief' (Sellars, 1924, p.385). The seemingly *a priori* philosophical founding of CR

establishes the argument for some that it is not critical enough. However, in defence of CR, it can be reasoned that criticality does not need empirical observation or experience in order to be viewed as knowledge or reality. Bhaskar's depth ontology (1978) illustrates this in the sense that the 'empirical', 'actual' and 'real' layers of reality exist independently of each other yet are also interdependent. One does not have to have experienced the phenomena in order to understand its existence. This substantiates the philosophy's rejection of positivism - the arguably one-dimensional realm of empirical scientific enquiry.

Bhaskar and his advocates argued 'that the ontological theories of critical realism provide principles that can usefully guide social inquiry' (Magill, 1994, p.114). However, critics of CR suggest that this is not the case. Magill asserts that CR is unable to 'provide workable general guiding principles for the social sciences' (ibid., p.113). He believes that there is no need for such guidance, as a 'universal ontology' may 'produce zealotry and a sectarian inability to hear differing views other than on its own terms (ibid., p.133). It can be argued then that a limitation of CR is its legitimisation of researcher bias and subjectivity, and its potential marginalisation of views that come from outside the critical orientation of the research. Hammersley suggests that critical researchers often 'fail to explicate the basis for their critical orientation' (2009, p.2). The societal deficits that are identified for the purpose of research - and the need to change them - can be posed as if they 'were immediately obvious' (ibid.). Therefore, it is important that in this study, the basis for its critical orientation is explained in order to justify the necessary 'value assumptions' that are involved in the research (ibid.). The following section explores the application of Critical Realism as a framework for research, discussing its strengths and weaknesses as a philosophical foundation.

3.2.1 Critical Realism and Research

Critical Realism (CR) has grown in popularity as a philosophical framework for social-science research over the last few decades. It is accepted by some academics that CR operates well as an underpinning standpoint for research. As Sharp believes, 'it provides very useful and fertile starting points for orienting the researcher to ways of conceptualising what there is to study and for setting up productive and exciting research designs' (Archer et al., 1999, p.12). Critical realist research seeks to 'explain and critique social conditions' with an aim to 'produce concrete policy recommendations and definitive claims for action on social problems' (Fletcher, 2017, p.27). Recommendations are based on the causal mechanisms that are identified through analysis. However, CR acknowledges the fallibility of all explanations and recommendations, ensuring that they remain corrigible. One of the central tenets of CR is that ontology 'cannot be reducible to epistemology' (Fletcher, 2017, p.4). Human knowledge of reality only sits on the surface of a 'deeper and vaster reality' where causal mechanisms exist (ibid.).

It has been suggested that research is a necessary undertaking for critical realists. Although not a critical realist himself, Woodiwiss believes that research is compulsory for all realists as knowledge has to be obtained through the examination of the 'intransitive realm' (Archer et al., 1999, p.16). CR claims that there is a crucial distinction between the intransitive 'realm of being' and the transitive 'realm of knowing' (Scott, 2014, p.24). The realms of being and knowing operate in an open system of causal mechanisms where ontological depth fluctuates between the observable and non-observable reality. CR research explores these layers of reality, fluctuating between observation and interpretation. In order for social-science research to progress, it is thought that there should be more of 'a dialogue between theoretical work and empirical work' (Archer et al., 1999, p.16). The theoretical and philosophical world of CR should continue to engage with the world of research. However,

CR research has to be rigorous, systematic and explicit in order to stand up to the ‘scientific reference’ of its philosophy (ibid.).

It is suggested that for Critical Realism to work as a methodological framework for research, there ought to be ‘consistency between... the two ends of the research process’ (ibid., p.15). There should be a clear, ‘systematic’ and ‘explicit’ link between the conceptual ontology underpinning the research and the ‘shape and texture of the research findings’ (ibid.). The ‘shape and texture’ - or interpretation - of research findings will also be influenced by positionality; the critical stance brought to this research has implications for the validity of its conclusions (see section 3.11). This study endeavours to make the ontological link to its research explicit through the underpinning critical realist concept of a stratified reality. For example, metaphorical comparisons are made between the theory of a stratified ontology and my experiences and beliefs; my interpretation of education policy is defined as a stratified entity with complex causal processes involved in its production - this parallels a critical realist view of reality.

In relation to this study’s research approach, Critical Realism serves as a ‘general methodological framework’ rather than determining an alignment with a rigid set of methods (Fletcher, 2017, p.4). Therefore, a pluralist research approach fits with a critical realist philosophy since utilising a variety of methods serves to ‘tease out the different levels of analysis and the real, deep causal processes at work’ (ibid., p.12). As such, the analytical framework employed by this study combines different methods of analysis to explore the layers of policy text and the causal processes at work within its discourse. The process of engaging in causal analysis renders Critical Realism beneficial for ‘analysing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change’ (ibid., p.5). The emancipatory aim for this research is not necessarily to propose solutions for social change, but to explore the social issues that are ‘problematized’ (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977) by education policy and reveal

the hidden dominant, neoliberal ideology of successive governments which serves to marginalise any alternative views. The analytical framework utilised to accomplish this is a unique hybrid of methods rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis. The next section provides a brief historical context for CDA, before the chapter moves on to focus upon how this approach can be successfully combined with Critical Realism.

3.2.2 A Brief Historical Context for Critical Discourse Analysis

During the 1970s, there was an emergence of ‘interest in relation to the study of discourse to social events’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.365). Although the critical study of discourse can be attributed to much earlier work (for example Dubois’ theory of double consciousness, 1903; Saussure’s theory of linguistics and semiology, 1916; Volosinov’s work on Marxism and linguistics, 1930; and Wittgenstein’s language games, 1953), the 1970s saw the synergy of linguistic studies with social sciences. One linguistic theorist in particular - Halliday (1975) - developed a theory of systematic functional linguistics which went on to inform the development of CDA. Halliday’s ‘linguistic methodology’ is upheld as central to methods of CDA as it presents ‘clear and rigorous linguistic categories for analysing the relationships between discourse and social meaning’ (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p.454). Halliday’s ‘social-semiotic’ theories were particularly influential in the evolution of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The materialisation of the term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be accredited to Fairclough’s 1989 publication ‘Language and Power’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.365). Fairclough described his approach as ‘an alternative orientation’ to that of other modes of language study (1992, p.92). His ‘social theory of discourse’ aimed to combine linguistic-focussed discourse analysis with socio-political concepts (ibid.). By integrating these fields, Fairclough’s approach employed a comprehensive analysis of language which he argued

enabled a deeper understanding of the ‘power relations and ideology’ involved in discourse (Henderson, 2005, p.11).

There are, however, a variety of approaches to CDA. Wodak’s ‘discourse historical method’ and Van Dijk’s focus on the discursive reproduction of racism by ‘symbolic elites’ are examples of two different perspectives of CDA which have developed their own set of analytical tools. Other approaches include post-structuralist French Discourse Analysis (FDA), developed by highly prolific authors such as Deleuze, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault and Althusser in a post 1960 period (Williams, 2014, p.1), as well as social semiotics and multi-modal methods - the main work of Hodge and Kress (1988) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). Each of these different perspectives on CDA have been utilised to research social problems across a range of disciplines, to include: ‘policy, social work, linguistics, and education’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.375). Although they bring their own set of analytical tools to the field, different CDA perspectives do share common features. For example, all CDA perspectives assume that discourse ‘constitutes society and culture’ and is ‘situated and historical’ (ibid., p.370). Furthermore, all forms of CDA acknowledge that it is ‘interpretive, descriptive and explanatory and uses “systematic methodology”’ (ibid.). The following sections demonstrate how CDA can be synthesised with Critical Realism to form a robust theoretical and analytical research framework.

3.2.3 The Research Paradigm: Critical Realism and Critical Discourse Analysis

As well as providing a theoretical underpinning for this research, Bhaskar’s stratified, or ‘depth’ ontology (1978) has become particularly influential to the study’s research approach. For example, in section 1.4, parallels are drawn between this fundamental facet of Critical Realism (CR) and Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1992), with the aim to justify how a CR perspective fits with a CDA-based analytical framework. In Fairclough’s CDA model, text, discourse practice and socio-

cultural practice are layers of analysis that can be considered individually but are intrinsically linked (see fig. 3). This study contends that this parallels the individual, yet interdependent nature of Bhaskar’s empirical, actual and real domains of reality. For example, Bhaskar’s ‘empirical’ reality can be compared to Fairclough’s ‘description’ or ‘text analysis’, the ‘actual’ reality can be seen as the ‘interpretation’ stage of analysis and the ‘real’ as the ‘explanation’ or ‘social analysis’ stage. This thesis argues that structurally and conceptually, the synthesis of Bhaskar’s critical realist ontology with Fairclough’s approach to CDA, offers a robust theoretical and methodological pairing and provides a clear foundation for the development of the study’s uniquely designed analytical framework. Figure 3 illustrates this synthesis:

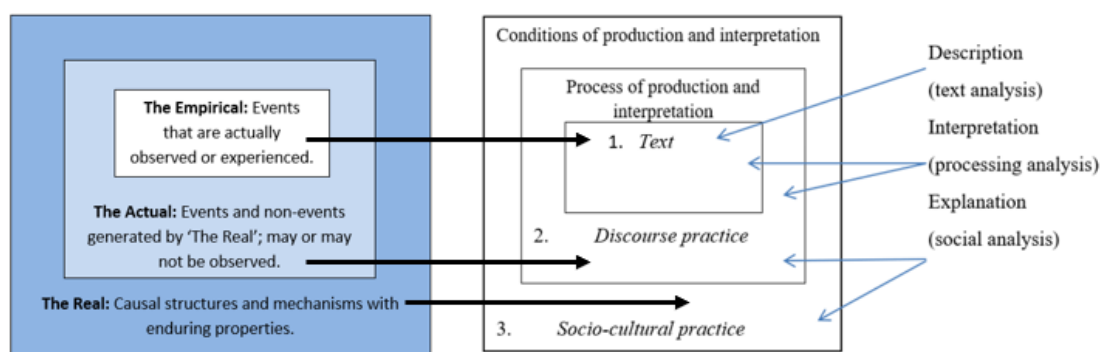


Figure 3: The synthesis between Bhaskar’s ‘Three domains of reality’ in Critical Realism ontology (1978) and Fairclough’s ‘Three-Dimensional Model of CDA’ (1992)

It must be pointed out here that like the development of this study’s critical analytical framework, the historical evolution of CDA is not based on a singular approach or method; it has many facets and there are numerous guises to its form. CDA is an inter-disciplinary approach to discourse analysis which has been applied to research from various theoretical backgrounds (El-Sharkawy, 2017). Theorists such as Van Dijk and Wodak have made significant contributions to the field of CDA and have been influential in terms of the

discussion, debate and development of varying CDA practices. Van Dijk particularly focussed on the study of the discursive reproduction of racism by (whom he terms) the 'symbolic elites' - 'groups involved in power abuse or domination' (1999, p.146).

Conversely, Wodak was instrumental in the development and elaboration of the 'discourse-historical approach' (DHA) which is an interdisciplinary approach involving theory, methods, methodology, research practice, and practical application' (2015, p.2). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this research study, the work of Fairclough is of particular significance as he is 'the only major figure in the field of CDA to explicitly work with CR [Critical Realism]' (Flatschart, 2016, p.23). Therefore, the decision to utilise Fairclough's form of CDA as a basis for the study's analytical framework was made as his CRCDA amalgamation reflects this study's research paradigm.

Fairclough's definition of Critical Realism (CR) is that it aims to explain 'social processes and events in terms of the causal powers of both structures and human agency and the contingency of their effects' (2005, p.923). He assumes a stratified view of ontology concomitant with CR and applies this to his version of discourse analysis (ibid., p.924). Akin with his view of CR, Fairclough sees CDA as a mode of discourse analysis concerned with explaining social processes and events - particularly 'the often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes' (1993, p.135). Fairclough's version of CDA is therefore committed to exploring the practices, events and texts that are formed by structural relationships involving hegemony, power and control. This demonstrates that a CDA-guided research approach is compatible with a critical realist philosophical stance.

3.2.4 The Risks, Limitations and Justification of a CRCDA Framework

Newman believes that 'critical realism can act as a steady foundation from which to conduct discourse analysis' (2020, p.3). Furthermore, he suggests that a critical realist

approach to discourse analysis can ‘contribute to the clarity of the findings and outputs of research’ (ibid.). However, he points out that many theorists believe there to be issues with the application of CR to CDA. It is considered within the field of CR that there are significant problems with the foundations of a critical realist approach to CDA - particularly Fairclough’s model - as its ‘metatheoretical framework remains heavily contested’ (Flatschart, 2016, p.23). Flatschart recognises that Fairclough’s approach to CDA is one of the most progressive as it explicitly aligns itself with CR (2016, p.22). Nonetheless, he believes the approach to ‘lack metatheoretical rigour’ (ibid., p.21) with respect to the articulation of key CR ontological concepts. It is argued that CDA can lack conceptual clarity on the distinction between discourse and other aspects of social reality, and the distinction between ‘the causal power of structures and the causal power of agency’ (Newman, 2020, p.2). Although CDA does analytically separate the two concepts, it is considered that these distinctions can often be ‘lost and confused’ within a CDA-steered research approach (ibid., p.3). Flatschart believes that this ‘analytical dualism’ is particularly problematic in terms of distinguishing the two ‘senses of structure’ in CR ontology (2016, p.26). The analytical dualism of structures and events found in CDA is perceived as a form of reductionism in terms of the philosophy of CR ontology. It is suggested that key CR theoretical concepts may become ‘willingly or unwillingly’ tangled by discourse analysts (Newman, 2020) in an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for their research. It is important then that this study strives to avoid this entanglement by clearly identifying how the conceptual theory of CR fits with the CDA-based analytical framework that it employs.

Flatschart asserts that discourse has never been at the vanguard of critical realist philosophy and social theory (2016, p.22). However, it is argued that Critical Realism cannot afford to ignore discourse (and therefore discourse analysis) in its approach to understanding the relationship between discourse and social reality, and the causal powers of structure and agency (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2002). Although CDA has often been viewed as a

pragmatic research method lacking in methodological and philosophical grounding, it is now more recognised as a legitimately '*realist and critical* enterprise' (Flatschart, 2016, p.23). Researchers and theorists globally are working to develop a more metatheoretically sound CR approach to CDA in an attempt to avoid the 'ideological blurring' of central issues (ibid., p.21). However, this does not necessarily mean that CRCDA cannot be utilised as an analytical research framework in the interim.

Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer (2002) believe that critical semiotic analysis (otherwise CDA) is compatible with Critical Realism and also offers significant insights into the role of semiosis (or discourse) in social structuration - the theory of the creation and reproduction of social systems. Viewing texts as elements of socio-cultural processes is just as important as the construction of the linguistic components of the text itself. Therefore, a CR approach to CDA is concerned with the relationship and tension between the socio-cultural, semiotic and linguistic layers of a text (Fairclough, 2005, p.923). This study employs an individualised CRCDA framework to explore the linguistic, semiotic and socio-cultural layers of a selected corpus of policy texts, demonstrating the successful synthesis of a CR philosophical approach with methods of CDA.

The distinguishing difference between critical realist discourse analysis and other forms of discourse analysis is that it 'acknowledges the distinction between the 'discursive' and the 'non-discursive' aspects of social reality' (Norman, 2000, p.6). The fundamental purpose of critical realist discourse analysis is to explore the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive practices involved in its creation. This is particularly facilitated when applying Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational CDA approach to the analysis of policy text. There is a continual oscillation between the analysis of the discursive practices (the production, distribution and consumption of the policy) and the non-discursive practices (socio-cultural practices involving ideology and hegemony) that are at play in the

construction of the policy text. These interrelating layers of analysis provide the ‘critical’ component of CDA, distinguishing it from other methods of discourse analysis.

Through employing CDA, critical realists are able to ‘reconstruct the operation of... causal mechanisms at play in particular events’ (Jones, 2004, p.44). Transversely, Critical Realism offers CDA an opportunity to situate language and discourse within a ‘causally efficacious’ or particular context (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2002, p.3). There are clear advantages in combining CDA with CR as a research paradigm. For example, researchers can endeavour to ‘uncover issues of power, representation and subjectivity’ (Jones, 2004, p.44). Through a uniquely designed CRCDA framework, this study seeks to uncover the issues of power behind education policy; the representation of ideological fantasy within policy discourse; and the subjectivity of dominant values that the policy audience are being exposed to.

It is clear from the body of literature that a CR approach to CDA is believed to be theoretically and methodologically compatible. Furthermore, it is argued that the study of semiosis - a central tenet of CDA - is strengthened by viewing discourse analysis research through a CR lens (Fairclough, 2013, p.218). However, it is also clear that there remains uncertainty and dispute surrounding the application of CR as a theoretical framework for methods of CDA. It is contended that CDA ‘is built upon an unsatisfactory understanding’ of two key principles of CR (Newman, 2020, p.30). The relationship between discourse and social reality (which I will refer to as D:SR), and the relationship between structure and agency (S:A) are perceived to be blurred by CDA - particularly in Fairclough’s CRCDA approach. Bearing this in mind, it is important for this study to recognise this observed ‘unsatisfactory understanding’ as a limitation of its chosen philosophical and methodological approach. As such, this study endeavours to make the D:SR and S:A distinctions clear by

drawing parallels between theory and research methods. The following section aims to achieve this.

3.2.5 Dialectical-Relational Parallels Between Theory and Research Methods

Drawing parallels between key concepts of CR and the research methods this study employs, demonstrates the successful synthesis of CR and CDA. Viewing policy analysis in conjunction with Bhaskar's depth ontology, serves to strengthen the CRCDA-based analytical framework of the research and clarify 'central metatheoretical' issues that are in danger of 'ideological blurring' (Flatschart, 2016, p.21). For example, in comparing Bhaskar's 'empirical', 'actual' and 'real' stratified view of reality to the linguistic, semiotic and socio-cultural layers of policy text, the relationships between discourse and social reality (D:SR) and structure and agency (S:A) - key concepts in CR theory - can be understood. In terms of the D:SR relationship, the textual and semiotic practices of a policy text represent the empirical and actual realities observed by the policy audience and policy makers. These constitute the discourse element of the D:SR relationship. The social reality (SR) of the policy text represents Bhaskar's 'real' stratum of reality. Thinking 'relationally' (Taylor, 1997) and exploring policy text at a deeper level, the 'real' social reality can be seen to exist independently of the discursive practices of policy texts, yet it is (as Fairclough would describe) dialectically relational.

This study argues that there is a clear distinction between the layers of discourse and social reality that are at play in the production of the policy texts. Akin with Bhaskar's depth ontology, each layer is distinct from the other - yet a single layer cannot exist independently of the others. The D:SR distinction can be consolidated further by employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. The research draws on this model, in conjunction with Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational CDA approach, as the foundations for its analytical framework. The discourse (D) practices of a policy text can be analysed discretely.

However, the socio-cultural practices (SR) involved in the production of a policy text must also be considered in the analysis. The D:SR relationship is an essential element to be examined when employing a CDA-based framework, as the socio-cultural and historical conditions that the policy exists in, shapes the production of the discourse, which in turn affects social practices. Although an analytical dualism has been made between discourse and social reality here (which may be viewed as a reductionist practice), this study argues that it assists in conceptualising the D:SR relationship rather than narrowing the complexities of the philosophical construct.

To explore the relationship between structure and agency (S:A) in relation to policy text, the thesis draws upon Bhaskar's 'duality of praxis' (1983). As Bhaskar states, 'social structure and human agency are seen as existentially interdependent but essentially distinct' (1983, p.18). Society is a 'continually reproduced' consequence of human action or 'agency', and 'human agency' is the 'production and reproduction of the conditions' that create society (ibid.). Therefore, society is both the vehicle for, and outcome of, human agency. In applying Bhaskar's duality of praxis to the critical analysis of policy discourse, the S:A relationship that is inherent in the construction of the policy texts can be made clear. For example, like social structure, a policy text is a continually reproduced outcome of human agency. Furthermore, human agency is responsible for the production and reproduction of the conditions that determine the creation of the policy text. Therefore, policy texts and human agency are 'existentially interdependent' whilst being 'essentially distinct' (ibid.). Although once again an analytical dualism has been made in terms of the S:A relationship, the thesis argues that it assists in providing clarity for the purposes of this study.

The S:A relationship can be further explored through a CDA-based analytical approach by considering the 'orders of discourse' and investigating the interdiscursivity of the policy texts (Fairclough, 2013, p.176). Orders of discourse are a key construct in

Foucault's post-structuralist theorising of social practices (Rogers et al., p.370). They are viewed as the network of structures or social practices that 'control linguistic variability' in different areas of society (ibid., p.294). They are associated with the political concept of hegemony in that a particular order of discourse may be dominant, therefore marginalising alternatives. 'Orders of discourse' are categorised into three key areas: genres, discourses and styles. These categories constitute the semiotic aspects (how meaning is communicated) of different social practices. Genres are modes of regulating the social practice or action. For example, the social practice may take the form of a political speech or an interview.

Discourse - as a semiotic aspect - refers to how the social practice is represented. This may be related to different stances or positions (the party-political positioning of a speech for example). Style refers to identity or values. This can be identified implicitly or made explicit by the social practice. For instance, the style and tone of Tony Blair's New Labour discourse was starkly different to that of Margaret Thatcher's previous rhetorical approach, despite the similarities in the discourse themes and underlying political ideology (Fairclough, 2000). Examining genres, discourses and styles enables an interdiscursive analysis of a specific social practice (in the case of this study - policy texts). This mode of semiotic analysis, which is integral to the study's CDA-based framework, facilitates the exploration of the S:A relationship within a policy text, highlighting the continual oscillation between the two constructs in relation to its production.

This part of the chapter has aimed to describe how the conceptual lens of Critical Realism relates to a CDA-based research approach and lays the foundations for the development of a unique critical analytical framework. The next section clarifies what CDA is, in terms of its key principles as a research method.

3.3 What Is ‘Critical’ About CDA?

As previously stated, the interrelating layers of analysis involved in CDA assist in providing its ‘critical’ element, distinguishing it from alternative methods of discourse analysis. However, a further layer of ‘criticality’ within CDA lies with the researcher. It is argued that researchers who employ critical methods of analysis cannot remain unbiased and separate their work from their political stance. This can be seen as a limitation of the approach, particularly when the researcher’s interpretive, descriptive and explanatory methodology is situated in their critical and political beliefs. As Bucholtz states, CDA is ‘engaged in a politics that privileges the analyst’s viewpoint’ (2001, p.168). Critics of the methodological approach believe this bias to mean that research findings tend to be ‘predicted in advance’ (ibid.). However, this thesis argues that the ‘reflexivity and relevance’ (ibid., p.179) of an analyst’s viewpoint - particularly when their experience is intrinsically linked with the subject of the research - can strengthen the critical analysis and provide insightful interpretation into the wider context of the studied discourse.

The essence of a CDA approach is the acknowledgement of and focus upon social problems, and particularly the function of discourse in the ‘production and reproduction’ of power asymmetries and dominant ideology (Bucholtz, 2001, p.168). A researcher does not have to assert a specific political stance to be critically aware of social problems and acknowledge that there is an imbalance of power within society. However, some CDA researchers believe that they should ‘take an explicit socio-political stance’; they should ‘spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large’ (Van Dijk, 1993, p.252). Nonetheless, this thesis contends that issues of social inequality have existed in, and have been perpetuated by, successive contemporary governments in England - hence my stance can remain neutral in terms of political party alignment, but not objective in terms of my wider socio-political views. The

‘critical’ element of CDA then can be seen as the researcher’s interest in identifying and understanding issues of power and justice, rather than voicing an ‘overt political commitment’ (ibid., p.167). These issues can either take the form of oppression or liberation within the discourse, depending on its underlying agenda. As such, critical researchers can never assume that texts (and their interpretation of them) are neutral.

CDA can be summed up as ‘discourse analysis with an attitude’ (Van Dijk, 2001, p.96). The researcher is able to bring their positionality and beliefs to the context of their research and use their reflexivity and relevance to enhance the interpretation, description and explanation of their research findings. Whilst the ‘critical’ nature of CDA carries political associations, CDA methodology ‘allows political positions to arise from the data rather than being read into them’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.387). The aim for this study’s CDA-based approach is to explore the wider historical, cultural and social context behind education policy discourse through layers of analysis, in order to expose its underlying neoliberal agenda. Critics might think that this intention is politically biased and that the research findings have been ‘predicted in advance’ (Bucholtz, 2001, p.167). However, this study seeks to establish *how* the policy discourse presents neoliberal values and enable a critical view to arise from its findings.

3.4 What Does ‘Discourse’ Mean In CDA?

Discourse as a concept can be problematic to define as there are many overlapping and often opposing meanings that derive from different disciplines. For example, in the field of linguistics, ‘discourse’ can sometimes be used to refer to spoken dialogue rather than written ‘texts’ (Fairclough, 1992, p.3). A ‘text’ is viewed as the product - an element of the wider discursive process it is constructed from. The term ‘discourse’ can also be used to describe different genres of language or the social situations they exist in. For example,

‘newspaper discourse’, ‘classroom discourse’ and ‘advertising discourse’ (ibid.) are different types of discourse that comprise of uniquely different properties.

Moving from linguistic definitions of discourse and into the field of social theory, ‘discourse’ in this context represents a multidimensional social practice that draws upon wider contextual circumstances in addition to (and not reducible to) spoken language or written text. Foucault’s post-structuralist theories of discourse reject the ‘binary distinctions between constructs’ such as speech and language found in the field of linguistics, in favour of the notion of multi-faceted discursive practices that evolve in society and within institutions (Rogers et al., 2005, p.369). An interrelating network of social practices, or in Foucauldian terms ‘orders of discourse’, combine under certain cultural, historical and social conditions to create complex discourses with multi-layered meanings (Fairclough, 1992, p.43). It might be contended that different approaches to discourse analysis are incompatible within a single research study. Nonetheless, this thesis argues that Foucault’s post-structural concept of the ‘orders of discourse’ is a key construct which helps CRCDA researchers to understand the relationships within and amongst the discursive practices in society.

Discourse researchers in the United States, however, might turn to Gee for a theory of discourse (1996). Like Foucault, his theory views all discourse as a social (and ideological) practice. Although, the distinguishing aspect of Gee’s more contemporary theory is the differentiation between ‘little d’ and ‘Big D’ discourse. This distinction encompasses the definitions of both the linguistic and the social theory disciplinary worlds. In essence, ‘little d’ discourse refers to the linguistic elements of discourse and ‘Big D’ discourse refers to both the linguistic elements ‘and to the cultural models that are associated with Discourses’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.370). This is similar to Fairclough’s understanding of discourse in which he combines the ‘social-theoretical sense of discourse’ with the ‘linguistically-oriented’ sense (1992, p.4). He sees this concept of discourse as ‘three-dimensional’ in terms

of any instance of ‘discourse’ simultaneously existing as a ‘piece of text’, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice’ (ibid.). Viewed in this way, discourse cannot be considered in isolation as a language utterance, or a written text product without the ‘orders of discourse’ and contextual factors surrounding it. Furthermore, discourse ‘cannot be considered neutral’ due to the historical, ‘political, social, racial, economic, religious and cultural’ associations it carries (Rogers et al., 2005, p.369). Fairclough’s ‘three-dimensional’ perception of discourse bears relation to his ‘Three-dimensional model of CDA’ (1992) and echoes the critical realist concept of a stratified reality. It is this view of discourse (and of reality) that informs my own perspective.

Fairclough acknowledges that discourse is ‘a notoriously problematic and confusing term’ (2013, p.290). Therefore, he suggests that ‘semiosis’ might be a less obfuscating term to utilise in the context of CDA research. As previously indicated, discourse can be used to refer to the language or text associated with a specific socio-cultural practice, social perspective or an aspect of the social process itself (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.81). Semiosis, however, is defined as ‘the intersubjective production of meaning’ and is utilised by Fairclough as a preferred term for ‘language’ or ‘discourse’ (2013, p.290). It is felt that ‘semiosis’ more accurately depicts the combination of verbal and non-verbal communication that language is composed of. Furthermore, it offers a clarity in the intention of meaning that ‘discourse’ does not (ibid., p.220).

One can recognise the messiness surrounding the multiple definitions of ‘discourse’ and the desire to utilise a less obfuscating term; therefore, it is appropriate at this juncture to clarify the interpretation of ‘discourse’ employed for the purposes of this research study. The term ‘discourse’ is taken to mean a combination of linguistic and social factors at play in the construction of a discursive event. Like Fairclough, the study views discourse as a multi-dimensional entity shaped by its linguistic and social contextual factors. And like Gee, the

study believes that discourse can exist as a ‘small d’ linguistic construct and as a ‘Big D’ socio-cultural construct. The Latin root of the word discourse is “*discursus*”, meaning “to run to and fro” (Rogers et al., 2005, p.369). This aptly sums up the definition of discourse exercised in this study as it depicts the ‘back and forth’ movement, or oscillation, between the ‘orders of discourse’ that construct the social world (ibid., p.369). The Latin term ‘*discursus*’ also aptly describes the study’s CDA-based analytical framework as it facilitates a ‘back and forth’ process of analysis between the interrelating layers of education policy discourse. Like Fairclough’s approach to CDA, the developed framework brings together linguistic analysis with social theory and can be defined as a ‘textually oriented approach to discourse analysis’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.369).

3.5 What Forms the ‘Analysis’ of CDA?

As it has been established, there are many approaches to CDA, to include Wodak’s ‘discourse historical method’, Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach and the French discourse analysis of Foucault and Pecheux (Rogers et al., 2005, p.370). However, as previously explained, Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational (DR) approach to CDA was chosen as the basis for the study’s methodological approach due to its compatibility with Critical Realism. Fairclough’s DR/CDA approach has a distinguishing set of analytical tools which are explored in the following sections.

Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational CDA methodology was developed with Lillie Chouliaraki (1999) and based on Bhaskar’s ‘explanatory critique’ (1986). This Fairclough/Bhaskar link further demonstrates the synthesis of a CRCDA methodological framework, justifying it as a research approach. The suggested analytical stages in Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational CDA methodology are as follows:

- Stage One: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect

- Stage Two: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong
- Stage Three: Consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong
- Stage Four: Identify possible ways past the obstacles (Fairclough, 2013, p.235)

Each of these stages are explained in relation to this research study as part of the analysis in chapter four. However, a summary of each stage here, using an example drawn from the literature review, assists in providing an overview of this methodological approach.

3.5.1 Stage One: Focus Upon a Social Wrong, in its Semiotic Aspect

The first stage of analysis in Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational CDA approach is the identification of a ‘social wrong’ (2013, p.235). Social wrongs are described in general terms as ‘aspects of social systems... which are detrimental to human well-being’ that have the potential to be acted upon and even ‘eliminated’ (ibid.). For example, in one of the research studies explored as part of the literature review, the author identifies oppression, marginalisation and exclusion as the social wrong pervading the discourse of inclusive educational policies in Cyprus. Through CDA, Liasidou (2008/2011) explores how legislative policy documents construct asymmetrical power relations within their discourse; she argues that children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are constructed and positioned by the discourse in an unequal and discriminatory way. In identifying this social wrong, she questions whether children’s human rights are being silenced.

3.5.2 Stage Two: Identify Obstacles to Addressing the Social Wrong

This stage requires the researcher to question what it is about the organisation of societal life and structure that prevents the social wrong ‘from being addressed’ (Fairclough, 2013, p.237). During this stage, Fairclough suggests that three steps of analysis should be conducted which together, form a crucial feature of the Dialectical-Relational CDA methodology. Firstly, the ‘dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements’

should be analysed (ibid.). This includes exploring the dialectical-relational links between ‘structures’ and ‘events’ (ibid., p.243). Step two focusses on the selection of relevant texts and developing categories for their analysis. Step three is to carry out the analysis of each text - this involves both linguistic/semiotic and interdiscursive analysis which are explained in subsequent sections. Returning to Liasidou’s CDA study, specific policy texts were selected in order to uncover the perceived unequal power relations within inclusive education policy making. Through a discursive analytic approach, Liasidou identifies a dominant discourse of ‘normalcy’ and ‘social order’ and the concept of ‘othering’ which demonstrates power abuse and injustice/ inequality (2008/2011). Through a method of CDA, she analyses the structure and agency of the policy discourse at work in creating and perpetuating the identified social wrong.

3.5.3 Stage Three: Consider Whether the Social Order ‘Needs’ the Social Wrong

Stage three requires the researcher to consider whether the social wrong is an ‘inherent’ factor of the ‘social order’ (Fairclough, 2013, p.238). Does the organisation of societal life create the conditions for the social wrong? Can the social wrong be addressed within the current social order? Or does the social order have to be changed for the social wrong to be addressed? Once again, returning to Liasidou’s research (2008), her findings suggest that the fundamental fabric of ‘Special Education Law’ in Cyprus needs to change in order to address the social wrong identified in Inclusive Education Policy. In this case, the identified social wrong *is* an ‘inherent’ part of the social order that constitutes special education policy making in Cyprus.

3.5.4 Stage Four: Identify Possible Ways Past the Obstacles

This stage focusses on the emancipatory goals of CRCDA research. The principal aims of CDA research are to reveal, analyse and explain the ‘establishment, reproduction and

change of unequal power relations in ideological processes and how this affects “human ‘well-being’” (Strick, 2020). Subsequently, the process of engaging in the critical analysis of ‘social wrongs’, and the causal mechanisms that are at work in creating them, assists in the endeavour to rectify the social wrong and suggest ‘solutions for social change’ (Fletcher, 2017, p.5). The ultimate intention of CDA research is to identify ways to address the uncovered inequalities. However, adopting a more critical realist approach, as per the approach of this study, might mean accepting ‘the inevitable inequality of social life’ and suggesting ways to ‘adapt accordingly’ (Strick, 2020). Liasidou’s emancipatory aim for her research study was to ‘challenge the unassailability and innocuous nature of linguistic veneers that sustain and perpetuate the special educational status quo in inconspicuous yet pervasive and disempowering ways’ (2011, p.903). She recognises that CDA is ‘an emancipatory research tool’ that can be used to subvert dominant, ‘authoritarian discourses’ ingrained in contemporary education policy (2008, p.483). Therefore, through exposing the ways in which ‘children with presumed SEN are disempowered’ by the language of policy text (ibid., p.887), she has made suggestions for future policymakers and has given a voice to those who have been marginalised and oppressed.

In relation to this research study, the four stages of Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational CDA Approach were followed; this process is described in the next chapter. Within these stages, specific methods of analysis are utilised. The next sections explore the DR-CDA analytical toolkit advocated by Fairclough, as well as providing an overview of additional analysis techniques that are incorporated in the study’s individually developed analytical framework.

3.6 Layers of Analysis

As part of the study’s interpretation of Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational CDA approach, several layers of analysis help to strengthen the methodology, providing a richer

picture of the links between the linguistic features and the socio-cultural context of the policy discourse. The following sections explain each method of analysis, using examples from the literature review to provide context. Although each layer has been separated for the purpose of explanation, the divisions between the analytical topics are not clear-cut as they overlap. For instance, one cannot consider a text without referring to the discursive practice and social practice it exists in (Fairclough, 1992, p.73). However, the broad (and interrelating) layers of analysis that have been chosen to use and describe in the subsequent sections are linguistic analysis (including lexis and grammar), interdiscursive analysis, problematisation and argumentation analysis.

3.6.1 Textual Analysis - Linguistic

The ‘textually oriented’ nature of CDA is where it differs from other forms of discourse analysis. Fairclough’s DR-CDA approach particularly demonstrates its link to SFL theory (Systematic Functional Linguistics) by bringing together ‘social theory and textual analysis’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.370). A strength of the CDA approach is its use of the linguistic methodology of Halliday, whose ‘systemic-functional’ and ‘social-semiotic linguistics’ provide ‘rigorous linguistic categories’ for the analysis of discourse and its relationships with socio-cultural practices (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p.454). These categories can be split into two broad topics: lexis and grammar.

3.6.2 Lexis

For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term lexis to refer to a broad concept of language consisting of collocations and phrases, as well as individual words associated with the definition of vocabulary. The category of lexis fits into policy discourse analysis at a textual level. However, it cannot be analysed without considering the wider socio-cultural and political context. Therefore, one can argue that lexis cannot be neutral. The use of

tropes, phrases and metaphorical expressions carry ideological significance. Lexis can be loaded with ‘*experiential*’, ‘*relational*’ and ‘*expressive*’ value (Fairclough, 2015, p.130). The ‘*experiential*’ value of lexis relates to the ‘knowledge and beliefs’ of the ‘text producer’ (ibid.). In terms of education policy, this can be viewed as the ideology that is conveyed through the text by the policy makers. For example, one can ascertain from the research studies explored in the literature review, that the ‘*experiential*’ value of lexis found in contemporary English education policy largely relates to the systems of knowledge and beliefs that are linked to the values of neoliberalism. This underlying dominant ideology is ‘coded’ by the experiential value of the chosen lexis (Fairclough, 2015, p.131).

‘*Relational*’ value can be understood as to how lexis is selected to create and foster relationships with its audience. For instance, in relation to contemporary education policy, Wright points out how the ‘empowerment agenda’ of the Coalition Government’s discourse, pledged to offer greater parental choice and ‘free’ teachers from the ‘bureaucratic constraints previously forced upon them from central government’ (2012, p.279). Although Wright believes this to be a ‘fantasy of empowerment’ (ibid.), it demonstrates how the relational value of a chosen lexis can seek to negotiate a ‘relationship of trust and solidarity with the assumed readership’ (Fairclough, 2015, p.134). Finally, the ‘*expressive*’ value of lexis relates to ‘subjects and social identities’ (ibid., p.130). Here, the use of persuasive language, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions may be used in order to speak personally to the reader. It is important to note that any linguistic feature may exhibit all of these values concurrently.

Metaphors and expressive phrases are also to be considered in the lexis category of linguistic analysis. Far from being mere devices that can be found in poetry and literary works, metaphors are utilised across a wide range of language and discourse and are used to represent ‘one aspect of experience in terms of another’ (Fairclough, 2015, p.136). Applying

Crystal's definition, a metaphor is 'a mapping between a better-known, more concrete conceptual domain (the 'source domain') and the conceptual domain which it helps to organize (the 'target domain')' (2008, p.98). The use of metaphor has been observed as a stylistic effect used within the public oratory of political leaders (Fairclough, 2000) and has become a regular feature of political speeches, contributing to the implied meaning within the discourse. The use of metaphorical soundbites and other expressive phrases, which carry certain connotations, are then transferred into the discourse of education policy and reports. For example, Maslen identifies the use of sporting metaphors in a critical discourse analysis of the 2014 report 'Cracking the Code: How Schools Can Improve Social Mobility' (2019). It can be argued that the sporting tropes and metaphors used throughout the report reinforce its underlying neoliberal ideology of competition and globalisation. As Maslen points out, neoliberal concepts can become 'normalised' through the use of metaphor, making them seem 'common-sensical' (2019, p.599). He believes the use of metaphor to be an 'involvement strategy that may blind us to the reality behind the discourse it supports' (ibid., p.605).

3.6.3 Grammar

Grammar is the second category that fits within the textual layer of analysis of the study. In linguistics, grammar can be defined as the system and structure of a language. It can also be understood as 'the study of the way words, and their component parts, combine to form sentences' (Crystal, 2008, p.218). Essentially, the rules of grammar help us decide the order we put words in and which form of a word to use. However, a deliberate and controlled choice in how sentences are put together can carry certain connotations and have ideological significance.

In a similar way to lexis, grammatical features can also have experiential, relational and expressive values. Experiential features of grammar entail how events or relationships in

the world are coded by the manipulation of grammatical structure. For example, sentence structure can be a powerful tool that can be manipulated in order to remove the agency from the text. As Fairclough advises, one should be aware of the potential (and deliberate) ‘ideologically motivated obfuscation of agency, causality and responsibility’ within a text (2015, p.140). Another way of rendering causality and responsibility grammatically unclear is through the use of nominalisations. By converting a process, event or idea into a noun, the opportunity for meaning-making is reduced (ibid.). Further experiential aspects of grammar can be attributed to the use of active or passive sentences and the use of positivity and negativity. The former can once again remove agency from a sentence, deliberately avoiding causality and responsibility. The latter can have a powerful persuasive effect on the audience. Framing events in a positive or negative light can shift audience’s perceptions. For example, reference to ‘educational crises’ under previous governmentality and comparisons with ‘flourishing’ economies of more successful nations are to be found across the body of research explored in the literature review.

Examples of the relational values that grammatical features can possess are the use of pronouns and the use of modality. Firstly, as we have seen in the review of literature, pronouns can be used to demonstrate a sense of unity with the audience. Tony Blair’s use of ‘*we*’ and ‘*us*’ transformed the political rhetoric of his leadership to a more personalised ethos. Conversely, the use of pronouns such as ‘them’ and ‘those’ can have the opposite effect of ‘othering’ (Liasidou, 2008/2011). The modality of a sentence determines its degree of possibility and truth. Modal auxiliary verbs such as ‘*should*’, ‘*might*’, ‘*must*’ and ‘*will*’ indicate varying degrees of possibility and can demonstrate the amount of conviction and belief in the message being delivered to its audience. Use of modality is also an example of the expressive values that grammar can exhibit. As Fairclough states, ‘the ideological interest is in the authenticity claims, or claims to knowledge, which are evidenced by modality forms’ (2015, p.144). An example of this can be found in the 2016 Green Paper

‘Schools that work for everyone’. The phrase ‘every child *should* be able to go as far as their talents will take them’ (DfE, 2016c, p.5) is repeated throughout the Green Paper. Yet, the choice of modality creates doubt and weakens the conviction of the statement. A full exploration of the described grammatical features was not possible within the constraints of this study (see chapter 4.3.2). However, such a forensic approach to linguistic analysis provides many paths for future CDA research.

3.7 Textual Analysis - Interdiscursive

The concept of interdiscursivity concerns the amalgamation of different ‘genres, discourses, or styles associated with institutional and social meanings’ that occur within the same text (Wu, 2011, p.96). Intertextuality is a similar phenomenon, however, it is concerned primarily with ‘how a text refers to other, prior texts’ (Koskela, 2013, p.389) rather than the wider ‘orders of discourse’ involved in the creation of a text. For example, an education policy may contain visual images, speech soundbites from political leaders, quotes from research studies and statistical graphs in addition to the main body of text that constitutes the policy paper. Therefore, its interdiscursivity is constructed by its ‘hybridity’ of verbal and non-verbal content from different discursive practices; ‘the mixing of verbal message and visual art, and the blending of information and persuasion’ (Wu, 2011, p.96). Thus, interdiscursive analysis searches for influences of different genres, discourses and styles within and between texts. It enables the exploration of how a text can manipulate genre, discourse and style to form ‘particular articulations’ (Fairclough, 2013, p.12). This research study investigates the degree of interdiscursivity within and across the policy texts, exploring whether the discourse draws upon particular genres or styles in its textual articulation. Furthermore, the study investigates whether a particular discursive style is shared between the texts - does the discourse reveal implicit or explicit connections? The

research explores how policy rhetoric and political ideology is generated, assimilated, appropriated and transformed interdiscursively.

3.8 Problematisation

In section 1.2, the concept of problematisation was defined in relation to the theories of Freire (1970), and later Foucault (1977). Although Freire conceived the notion of problematisation years earlier, the Brazilian educator formally articulated it in academic literature in 1970. He introduced problematisation as a method of critical analysis which enables the questioning of a human's existence and role in the world. This was in response to his criticism of 'banking education', where students passively receive 'structured knowledge without the capacity to produce, apply, or transform it' (Montero, 2011). Freire established problematisation as a strategy to counter educational oppression and empower students to develop 'a critical consciousness' (Akor, 2015, p.77). His theory of problematisation served as 'a pedagogical practice that disrupts taken-for-granted "truths"' by putting them into question (Bacchi, 2012, p.1).

Foucault's conception of problematisation can be defined as the practice of examining how and why issues become problems. His method explores the questions that generate the issues, the circumstances that contextualise the issues and how the issues are 'classified and regulated' (Akor, 2015, p.77). Akin with Freire's campaign for critical thought, Foucault's post-structural approach facilitates a critical mode of thinking, where 'common practices' are 'reanalysed' (Akor, 2015, p.77). For the purposes of this study, elements of Freire's theory of problematisation are amalgamated with Foucault's approach in order to develop an analytical tool to critically investigate the corpus of policy texts. This research questions the 'taken-for-granted truths' that are presented in the policy discourse. Furthermore, it explores the socio-political context that generates the issues and analyses how they are presented. Problematisation is employed to strengthen the study's CDA-based analytical framework and

further explore the socio-cultural context of the policy discourse in relation to the research questions. This approach serves to enhance the reflexivity involved in the analysis which is ‘an important agenda for CDA research’ (Rogers et al., 2005, p.381).

3.9 Argumentation Analysis

A final layer of analysis which completes the CDA-based approach of this study is argumentation analysis. Although this method of analysis was not specified in Fairclough’s original CDA toolkit, it has become a matter of ‘central concern’ for more recent variants of CDA (Fairclough, 2015, p.19). Argumentation analysis seeks to identify and reconstruct key elements of the linguistic structure of a text. It is a particularly useful method for the analysis of policy as ‘practical argumentation’ is the ‘primary activity’ occurring in political discourse (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.86). As aforementioned, policy texts are interdiscursive in the sense that they are ‘constructed and presented in texts, speeches and other public forms’ (Arnott and Ozga, 2010, p.339). Therefore, one can expect to find policy text awash with practical argumentation.

Argumentation analysis assists in identifying what Arnott and Ozga refer to as the ‘master discourses’ (2010), or the main claims that are being mobilised by the policy text. The analysis method involves a reconstruction of the arguments identified in the policy text. This includes the policy’s claims and calls for action; the circumstantial premises that the claims are based on; the value premises that underpin the claims and the means-goal/ goal premises that propose to solve the problems (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.88-89). An adapted flow diagram represents the interpretation of the structure of practical argumentation utilised for this research (see fig.4). It demonstrates how the individual elements of practical argumentation are interconnected in the context of education policy. For example, agentic values and socio-cultural circumstances underpin claims and goals, which in turn promote values and create socio-cultural circumstances. This back-and-forth movement parallels the

interdiscursive construction of policy text and is similar in concept to the stratified ontology of Bhaskar, and Fairclough’s Three-dimensional model of CDA.

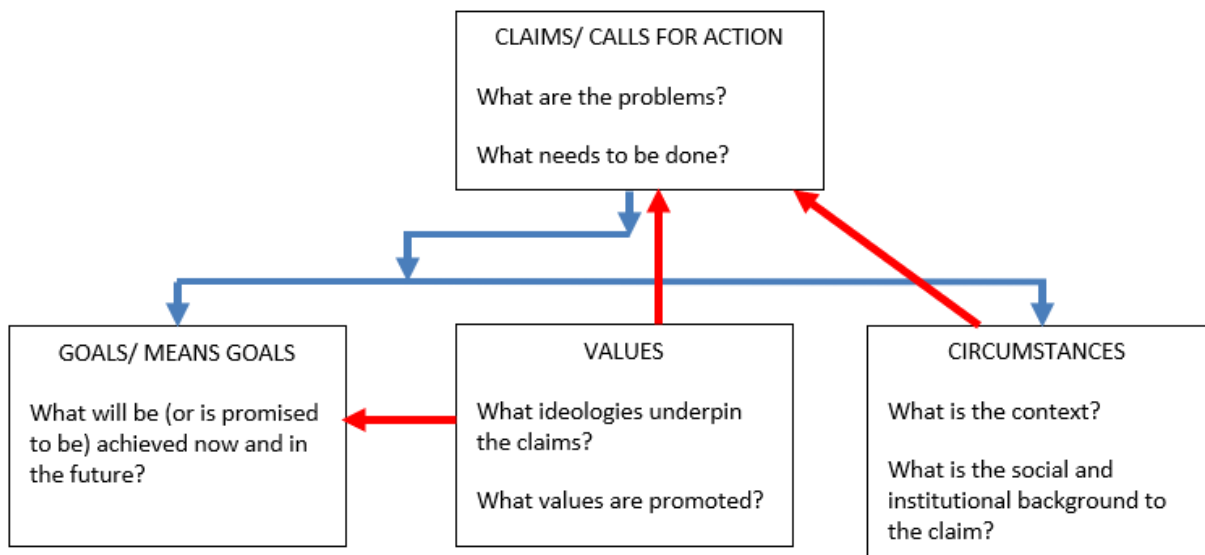


Figure 4: A model for the structure of practical argumentation in the context of education policy (based on Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012).

The analysis and evaluation of arguments can strengthen the textual analysis layer in CDA and increase its capacity to extend ‘critique to discourse’ (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.78). Furthermore, this method enriches the opportunity for reflexivity involved in the analysis, which is an essential element of CDA-based research. Through employing a layer of argumentation analysis, this study identifies the underlying dominant values and the socio-cultural issues that underpin the claims and goals presented in the corpus of policy texts.

3.10 Ethical Considerations and Implications

This research study has evolved since the time of its conception and has been led by the ambition to delve deeper into issues that were highlighted through the literature review. During the review process, literature concerned with the analysis of contemporary education

policy in England was explored, leading to a change in the research design and methodology (see chapter 1.3.2). The initial intentions for the research were to gather primary data from participants through qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus group questionnaires. If these methods of data collection were employed, they would need ethical consideration. For example, the process of recruiting volunteers, gaining consent (from the gatekeeper and participants), and ensuring participant confidentiality, requires ethical review and approval before commencing data collection. However, the direction of this research study was shifted from its initial design and intentions towards a desktop-based approach. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the study was revised to focus solely on the collection of secondary data which was already held in the public domain (see appendix 1 for a reflective account of changes made). As the current study does not involve any participants, the process of ethical review and approval is not applicable (see ethics application statement in appendix 4).

It can be contended that the CDA-based research approach of this study is more rigorous and tightly focussed than the originally intended methods of primary data collection and analysis, involving questionnaires and interviews. The employment of these qualitative approaches could have led to issues of bias, affecting data validity. Despite the absence of participants in the revised research design, the implications of bias - and my positionality within the study - must be heeded. It can be argued that the personal and professional link to this thesis constructs the researcher (myself) as a participant. Therefore, the intimate and subjective nature of my 'struggle' narrative, which is woven throughout the thesis, has ethical implications to consider. For example, as the sole 'narrator' and 'constructor' of the research, the authenticity and honest presentation of my voice must be considered (Bignold and Su, 2013, p.408). My recollections and experiences of my career in education are exposed through the narrative of this thesis and must be accurately depicted. Furthermore, my personal narration must preserve the integrity and anonymity of the educational establishments that I have worked for, and the professional colleagues with whom I have

worked with. Ethically speaking, exposing my personal narrative in this way could have adverse implications for my future career. The recognition of my own bias and positionality within the research is discussed further in the ensuing section.

3.11 Positionality - Research Limitations and Validity

A potential limitation of the chosen research approach is my own positionality. In chapter one, my personal context and journey towards this research study was narrated. My relationship with education policy, and my personal and professional ‘struggle’ to maintain my moral and ethical pedagogy within a neoliberal educational institution, was described. It was also recognised that this has implications for researcher bias. Bias can be defined as ‘any trend or deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication which can cause false conclusions’ (Šimundić, 2013, p.12). Intentional bias in scientific research is considered to be immoral and conducting and publishing research with unintentional bias ‘equally irresponsible’ (ibid.). However, it is recognised that in social science research, ‘the nature of qualitative research studies’ entails the researcher’s own values shaping the way in which data sets are analysed and ‘resultant conclusions’ are drawn (Dean et al., 2018, p.273). Therefore, bias - in terms of the researcher’s opinion and subjectivity - will occur. The nature of this study does not involve qualitative primary data collection; therefore, researcher bias is not an issue to be considered at this stage. However, the research focusses on the critical analysis and interpretation of secondary data already in the public domain, which necessitates researcher subjectivity and reflexivity. Whilst the research is not driven by intentional bias or a pre-conceived hypothesis, a critically reflexive approach is taken throughout the analysis in order to recognise any unintentional bias and ‘to improve the robustness’ of the research (Baldwin et al., 2022, p.1). Being aware of how the study’s positionality and values might shape the research provides the reflexivity that is integral to Critical Discourse Analysis.

It must be recognised that this research study has evolved from personal and professional interests; therefore, my positionality cannot be removed. It must also be recognised that the chosen research methodology confirms my interest in exploring issues of power and oppression involved in the creation of contemporary education policy in England. Whilst this thesis does not profess to align with any party-political views, it is unfeasible for it to remain completely apolitical. Viewed through a critical realist lens, it can be acknowledged that there are inequalities within England's social structure, and it can be argued that they are being reproduced by systems of governmentality. This study contends that over the last few decades, the increased emphasis on neoliberal values has engulfed the education system and that education policy has assisted in the perpetuation of social inequity. This position must be acknowledged as it is central to the CDA- based research. However, the danger of confirmation bias must be heeded as it can affect research validity. One must be wary of 'the tendency to focus on evidence that is consistent with one's beliefs' as this 'can lead to analytical choices and selective reporting' (Baldwin et al., 2022, p.1).

Relating this study to Bhaskar's depth ontology (1978), the 'empirical', 'actual' and 'real' layers of education policy discourse that are analysed, rely on the researcher's subjective interpretation. This is based on pre-conceived knowledge of mechanisms and events, and informed by the knowledge gained through critical analysis at a descriptive, interpretive and explanatory level. Whilst some might argue that subjective interpretation leads to bias and is a limitation of social science research, others contend that bringing your own 'members resources' (Fairclough, 1992) to the field of research strengthens reflexivity - which is essential for methods of CDA. This study has developed a unique analytical framework to explore the 'cultural model' (Gee, 1999) of the world that has been acquired through my personal and professional experiences. Through a CDA-based approach, the research is committed to the exploration of *how* dominant neoliberal values are presented in contemporary education policy. To further demonstrate the validity and integrity of this

research, a summary of CDA commitments has been adapted and related to the aims of this study:

1. ‘CDA is socially committed research.’

This research is committed to understanding and challenging the social problems that are believed to be caused or exacerbated by education policy.

2. ‘CDA is interdisciplinary and calls for flexibility and diversity in its approaches and methods to tackle complex issues and problems.’

A unique analytical framework drawn from methods across disciplines has been developed in order to analyse the issues that are problematised in education policy discourse.

3. ‘CDA takes into account the interests, expertise, and resistance of those groups that are subjected to discursive injustice.’

This research aims to create awareness of ‘discursive injustice’ by exposing the dominance of neoliberal values in education policy and the suppression of alternative views. The study is intended as a platform for the voice of future resistant research.

4. ‘CDA stresses researcher reflexivity.’

My positionality within this research cannot be ignored; it is believed that by immersing my thinking in the doctrine of Critical Realism and drawing upon my own personal and professional ‘struggle’, the study’s discussion and synthesis will not be tainted but enriched (Lin, 2014, p.221).

3.12 Research Approach Summary

This chapter has justified the choice of Critical Realism as an underpinning philosophical framework and has demonstrated its successful synthesis with a CDA-based research approach. Furthermore, the methods that constitute the research’s analytical framework have been explored to provide an overview of the layers of analysis involved.

The chapter has illustrated the rigorous and systematic methodology that shapes the study's research approach, discussed the ethical implications of the research and highlighted issues of positionality that may affect research validity. In summary, the methodological approach of the study demonstrates a uniquely developed analytical framework which provides an original contribution to the existing body of research.

Chapter Four

Critical Analysis of the Corpus of Policy Texts

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the critical analysis of the policy texts. Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational CDA stages are used as a framework for the study's approach to critical analysis (see chapter 3.5). The stages, derived from Bhaskar's explanatory technique (Fairclough, 2013, p.235), provide a systematic and rigorous foundation for the unique analytical framework that has been developed for the purposes of this research. In the first sections of this chapter, stages one and two are followed in order to carry out the critical analysis of the corpus of texts. Throughout the analysis, discussion and synthesis occur. Stage three is then applied at the end of this chapter, where initial conclusions are drawn and suggestions for future research are made. The final chapter of this thesis uses stage four to reflect on the research findings and the thesis as a whole, critically discussing its implications and its call for a *neolib-rebellion*.

4.2 Stage One: Focus Upon a Social Wrong, in its Semiotic Aspect

Following the DRCDCA approach, the first stage of analysis is the identification of the 'social wrong' (2013, p.235). This is integral to the focus of the research and the critical realist lens through which it is viewed. This thesis contends that the social wrong at the centre of this research study is the suppression or marginalisation of alternative political views in education policy through the legitimisation and reproduction of dominant neoliberal values. In its semiotic aspect, the study focusses upon how the language of neoliberalism is 'depoliticised' through education policy rhetoric, reducing wider socio-political concerns to a matter of 'technical efficiency' and competitiveness (Clarke, 2012, p.1). This conception of a

‘social wrong’ was generated through the review of literature and has evolved throughout this research study, leading to the formulation of the over-arching research question:

How does the discourse of contemporary education policy in England present neoliberal values?

4.3 Stage Two: Identify Obstacles to Addressing the Social Wrong

During this stage of analysis, the dialectical relationship between semiosis and other social events and practices underpinning contemporary education policy was explored. Once again, this stage was largely formulated through the review of literature. Studying the body of research surrounding critical policy analysis and the contemporary English education policy ‘story’ enabled the identification of the main obstacles to addressing the social wrong. It can be argued that education policy is locked in a business agenda which is unwaveringly focussed upon economic success and global competition. This neoliberal focus has created a ‘patchwork’ education system in England, where social inequalities are permitted to be perpetuated (Ball, 2017, p.217). As this neoliberal grip on education continues to tighten, it appears that *no alternative* strategies for education systems are being acknowledged in political forums. Although many educators and scholars have provided alternative outlooks for education systems which could serve to address existing social inequalities, (see Fielding, 2001; Evers and Kneyber, 2016; Rycroft-Smith and Dutaut, 2018), these views are missing within the discourse of contemporary education policy in England.

4.3.1 Selecting the Corpus of Policy Texts

The second step of stage two of the analysis is selecting the corpus of texts. The selection of texts for analysis was decided upon through the literature review process, as well as taking into consideration my professional background. The specific inclusion criteria which determined the final selection of policy texts is as follows:

- English education policy documents
- Green or White Papers published within the last ten years
- Specific to my professional role within the state primary education system

Using these criteria, all possible policy texts were included in the corpus selection.

Green and White papers were chosen as they have potential implications for the English education system as a whole, rather than the implementation of specific strategies. For example, the 2017 ‘Rochford Review recommendations’ paper targets improvements to primary school assessment (DfE, 2017), and the Ofsted ‘Research review series’ focusses on curriculum and pedagogy ‘systems at subject and school level’ (2022). The following discussion provides a background context for each policy paper, relating its choice to the key themes of the research.

In chapter two, the review of literature aimed to demonstrate that over the last forty years, education policy has been increasingly engineered through the political rhetoric of neoliberalism. It can be argued that the language of neoliberalism became more acute in the last decade, where key government policy texts such as The Academies Act (2010), The Importance of Teaching (2010) and the 2011 Education Act have emphasised the political enterprise to privatise the education system, valorising competition in the marketplace. In the political climate during this period, economically-driven concepts such as accountability and parental choice became the solution for raising educational standards. The public, media-spurred acceptance ‘that educational standards are still not high enough’ resulted in the political and economic agenda of ‘greater competition between schools’ which relied upon ‘private sponsorship and entrepreneurial drive’ (Chitty, 2014, p.261). Consequently, the underlying themes of educational policy during this period were diversity, choice and the measurement of progress (ibid.). These themes were the key drivers of the 2016 White

Paper, 'Educational, Excellence Everywhere' and were re-imagined by then Prime Minister Theresa May in the rhetoric of the 2016 Green Paper – 'Schools that work for everyone'.

After replacing David Cameron as the country's Prime Minister in July 2016, May set out her 'mission to build a country that works for everyone' (DfE, 2016c). Central to this mission was the tenet of 'Schools that work for everyone'. The proposals for this idealistic vision were set out in the Green Paper, which was launched three days after the then Prime Minister's meritocracy speech. Both 2016 policy texts are critically analysed and compared as part of this study, in terms of their linguistic and interdiscursive similarities and differences. However, with the desire to bring the research into the realms of more current education policy, a third policy text was added to the corpus: the 2022 White Paper, 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'. The inclusion of this paper in the policy text corpus afforded an excellent opportunity for critical analysis and comparison with the 2016 papers.

It is pertinent here to provide a socio-political context for the lead up to the paper's publication in March 2022. A key change to the socio-political backcloth came with another change in the Conservative Party leadership. In July 2019, Boris Johnson was elected as the country's new Prime Minister. Along with this new leadership came a renewed neoliberal rhetoric which described Johnson's vision for the country. The Prime Minister's freshly shaped soundbite at the time portrayed his future vision of Britain as 'enterprising, outward-looking and truly global' (Johnson, 2019) rather than 'a country that works for everyone' (May, 2016). The language of Johnson's strapline was crafted carefully in relation to the ongoing Brexit negotiations that he would take over and eventually finalise. However, the Prime Minister's global (but non-EU), outward-looking, enterprising Britain became locked in the grip of the Coronavirus pandemic during March 2020. Understandably, Covid-19 'infected' all new education policy as schools needed guidance with firstly, operational

procedures and then, school closure. Despite the progress in the country's response to the pandemic with regards to the vaccination programme, Covid-19 continued to have a significant impact upon all areas of society, and it can be argued that the effect upon the education system will be felt for years to come.

Returning to the 2016 White Paper, according to the Secretary of State for Education at the time of its release (Nicky Morgan MP), the policy text set out government plans over the ensuing five years, to build on and extend 'reforms to achieve educational excellence everywhere' (DfE, March 2016). Therefore, a new White Paper should have been published in 2021. However, the new schools White Paper was not published until March 2022. It can be postulated that the Coronavirus pandemic might have played a significant role in the paper's delay. In the lead up to the release of the new schools White Paper, the Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP was serving as education secretary. He outlined the intentions of the paper in his address to the Association of Colleges Conference in November 2021. In response to emerging from 'the dark age of Covid' (Zahawi, 2021), it was pledged that the main focus of the White Paper would be to 'tackle innumeracy and illiteracy' (ibid.). Zahawi promised that as education secretary, his decisions would be led by evidence and that there would be a relentless 'focus on what works' (ibid.). He also pledged that the White Paper's aims would be to 'relentlessly drive-up standards building back a better and fairer school system' (ibid.). This statement combines the language of neoliberal values with the ideology of social justice - a trend that has been developed in education policy discourse by successive governments over the last few decades.

The 2022 White Paper's title 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child' strikes immediate parity with the linguistic style and rhetoric of the 2016 Green Paper 'Schools that work for everyone'. For example, the 2022 policy focus to drive up standards and build a fairer education system bears the same paradoxical juxtaposition of

neoliberal values and socialist ideology. This study compares and contrasts all three policy texts, in order to critically analyse their linguistic and interdiscursive composition. Furthermore, this research questions whether the 2022 schools White Paper is the newest manifestation of the neoliberal-social justice paradigm, where dominant values are reproduced under the guise of ideological fantasy.

The following table sets out a contextual description of the three selected policy texts, enabling an initial stage of comparative analysis:

| Policy text | 2016 White Paper | 2016 Green Paper | 2022 White Paper |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Title | Educational Excellence Everywhere | Schools that work for everyone Government consultation | Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child |
| Published | March 2016 Crown copyright 2016 | Launch date 12 September 2016 Respond by 12 December 2016 Crown copyright 2016 | March 2022 Crown copyright 2022 |
| Distributed | Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education by Command of Her Majesty Printed in the UK by the Williams Lea Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. | https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/schools-that-work-for-everyone Facebook Department for Education (@educationgovuk) / X (twitter.com) | Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education by Command of Her Majesty Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office |
| Authors | Department for Education | Department for Education – School System Consultation Team | Department for Education |
| Intended audience | Parliament All areas of the education sector Local authorities Open public - parents | Schools and representative bodies Higher Education Institutions and representative bodies Local authorities and faith bodies Children, young people and parents | Parliament Open public – parents All areas of the education sector Local authorities |
| Length | Pages: 128 Words: 44,444 | Pages: 36 Words: 10,153 | Pages: 68 Words: 19,299 |
| Structure and organisation | Foreword by the Secretary of State for Education Chapter 1: Our vision for educational excellence everywhere Chapter 2: Great teachers – everywhere they're needed Chapter 3: Great leaders running our schools and at the heart of our system Chapter 4: A school-led system with every school an academy, empowered pupils, | About the consultation Introduction and rationale Four main sections – Independent schools, Universities, Selective schools, Faith schools | Foreword from the Secretary of State for Education Key facts (tabular form) Executive summary Introduction Chapter 1: An excellent teacher for every child Chapter 2: Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance Chapter 3: Targeted support for every child who needs it |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | <p>parents and communities and a clearly defined role for local government</p> <p>Chapter 5: Preventing underperformance and helping schools go from good to great: school-led improvement, with scaffolding and support where it's needed</p> <p>Chapter 6: High expectations and a world-leading curriculum for all</p> <p>Chapter 7: Fair, stretching accountability, ambitious for every child</p> <p>Chapter 8: The right resources in the right hands: investing every penny where it can do the most good</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>Annex A: Department for Education Strategy Overview 2015-20</p> | | <p>Chapter 4: A stronger and fairer school system</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>Figure 1: What this white paper means for your child</p> <p>Figure 2: England's teacher development system</p> <p>Figure 3: Benefits of the Future Curriculum Body</p> <p>Figure 4: Our Parent Pledge</p> <p>Figure 5: Roles and responsibilities in a fully trust led system</p> |
| Presentation and style | <p>Official White Paper. HM Government logo under title.</p> <p>Passport sized image of Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan) in foreword.</p> <p>Discourse sets out government's 5-year plan for education reform.</p> <p>Shares discourse with accompanying speech by Nicky Morgan.</p> <p>Font main body: Arial 12 Font headings: Arial 18</p> | <p>Each main section contains key questions for the intended audience consultation response.</p> <p>The discourse shares goals from the 2016 Prime Minister's speech, 'Britain, the great meritocracy'</p> <p>Font main body: Arial 12 Font headings: Arial 16</p> | <p>Official White Paper. Small HM Government logo above title</p> <p>Large inclusive image of children/ young people in primary secondary school settings on first 'cover' page – demonstrating pupil diversity.</p> <p>Larger HM Government logo on following title page</p> <p>Image of Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi) in foreword.</p> <p>Discourse sets out government's 5-year plan for education reform.</p> <p>Shares discourse with accompanying speech by Nadhim Zahawi.</p> <p>Font main body: Arial 12 Font headings: Arial 18</p> |

Table 1: Comparative table showing contextual description of the three selected policy texts.

Initial comparative analysis of the three selected policy texts reveals key points of interest in terms of their evolution:

- Length – the 2022 White Paper has been reduced in size by almost half in comparison to the 2016 White Paper.

- Distribution – the 2016 Green Paper was only distributed online as a consultation document.
- Presentation and style - the 2022 White Paper includes an initial cover page image and more information in tabular/ figure form – much of which features dual-coded text and graphics.

The differences could reflect a consideration for the intended audience in terms of the adaptations made. For example, the 2016 Green Paper is a consultation aimed primarily at schools, Higher Education establishments and Local Authorities, therefore, there was no requirement for it to be officially presented to Parliament. However, its online distribution could have prevented it reaching a wider audience as intended. Moreover, the presentation of the 2022 White Paper in comparison with the 2016 White Paper is less formal and more manageable to read in terms of length, style and content. Although it is still an official paper presented to Parliament, this change may reflect a greater consideration of the intended audience. The presentation and style appear to be targeted towards a more public, parent-oriented readership, rather than parliamentary or educational establishment based. There is also a clear difference in the nature of the language used for chapter headings, reflecting an evolution in the juxtaposition of neoliberal values with a social justice narrative. For example, the language of the 2016 White Paper chapter headings focusses on school improvement, tackling underperformance and a ‘world-leading’ curriculum where ‘every penny’ is invested in the ‘right hands’. This reflects the three key mechanisms of neoliberal agenda that this research identifies: global competition, development of human capital and performance and accountability. On the contrary, the language of the 2022 White Paper chapter headings projects a more palatable view of the neoliberal regime. For example, it refers to the accountability and standards agenda as ‘targeted support’ and recognises the need for ‘a stronger and fairer school system’. These initial analyses and reflections assist in

contextualising the policy texts in relation to the key themes of the research. The ensuing sections describe and critically discuss the textual and interdiscursive analysis stages.

4.3.2 Textual Analysis of the Corpus of Policy Texts - Linguistic

Following the selection of texts, the next steps in the second stage of Fairclough's (2013) analytical framework are to develop categories for analysis and to carry out the actual analysis of the texts. This involves both linguistic/semiotic and interdiscursive analysis. This section of the chapter focusses on textual analysis at a linguistic level. For this layer of the analytical approach, a number of categories were developed based on strategies drawn from the literature review. The following aspects - relating to lexis and grammatical features - constitute the initially designed linguistic analytical framework of the study:

- 1. Choice of lexis: frames, metaphor and figurative language (experiential, relational and expressive vocabulary)**
- 2. Agents of discourse/ 'othering' (the use of pronouns and related lexical selections)**
3. Choices of modality and relation to polarity/ pronoun use
4. Use of tense (the construct of how things were/ are and the vision for the future)
5. Evidence of the locutor's 'truth-telling' or 'parrhesia'
6. The use of passive voice, intransitive verbs and existential claims
7. The use of nominalisation

(Source of analytical categories drawn from Janks, 1997; Peters, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006; Liasidou, 2008; Fairclough, 2013/ 2015; Wodak and Meyer, 2016; Uzuner-Smith and Englander, 2015; Clarke, 2020)

The intention for this study was to fully explore each of these linguistic aspects in relation to each policy text. However, this in-depth, forensic approach could not be carried

out fully within the constraints of the study. Therefore, it was decided to select only the first two emboldened categories of analysis to explore in this thesis. This may be construed as a limitation of the research. Nevertheless, this study contends that it was important to undertake interdiscursive analysis alongside the selected textual analysis categories in order to demonstrate a more robust and rigorous method. Furthermore, analysis of the remaining linguistic categories will provide a pathway for future research.

Interwoven with linguistic analysis is the identification of the socio-cultural factors at work in the construction of the policy discourse. This demonstrates the study's methodological synthesis of Bhaskar's depth ontology and Fairclough's three-dimensional model for CDA, where the analytical oscillation between the linguistic and socio-cultural influences of a text allows for a deeper exploration and interpretation of the layers of discourse involved in its production. The following discussion incorporates findings from the micro, linguistic analysis of the policy texts with macro, interdiscursive observations.

4.3.3 Framing Neoliberal Agenda

The three policy texts selected for analysis all employ several expressive tropes and phrases which 'frame' the proposed goals and intentions. In linguistic terms, the use of frames and metaphors 'determine how people see reality' (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.94). Linguistic framing can drive the reader or listener toward an interpretation of how reality is viewed. Or in the case of education policy, the 'reality' that is projected. A recurring lexical selection used across all three policies is the term *spreading*. Although the general term has been used in education policy discourse before (see the Department for Children Schools and Families 2009 White Paper), it is more frequently used in the 2016 White Paper, 'Educational excellence everywhere', and arguably carries certain connotations. *Spreading* is used to describe the policy's goal to build capacity and raise standards. The paper's vision for educational reform is to achieve educational excellence everywhere by

spreading the ‘best practice’, ‘high standards’ and ‘evidence on what works’ across the country. By definition, *spreading* means to expand over an increasing area. However, the expressive term could conjure metaphorical connotations for the reader in terms of *spreading* a virus, or of a military infiltration or take-over. This is particularly pertinent when used in conjunction with the policy’s goal to convert all schools to academies. The paper’s drive to *spread* the practice of existing Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with the aim of total assimilation implies that ‘change is inevitable and irresistible’ (Fairclough, 2000, p.33). The recurring use of the term *spreading* frames the neoliberal agenda as an ‘all powerful’ (ibid.) agent of change.

An interesting lexical selection that appears in both the 2016 Green Paper and the 2022 White Paper is the term *menu*. The terms are used respectively as a *menu* of options for the expansion of selective schools, and a *menu* of ‘recommended evidence-based approaches’ for schools to choose from when making decisions about the ‘Pupil Premium spend’ and the ‘Parent Pledge’ (DfE, 2022, p.39). In each case, the use of *menu* implies choice which suggests that freedom and empowerment have been betrothed upon the schools by the government. However, the *menu* of recommended options is restricted, and school choices controlled and measured. For example, the ‘Parent Pledge’ outlined in the 2022 White Paper is a ‘promise’ that ‘any child that falls behind in English or maths should receive timely and evidence-based support to enable them to reach their potential’ (p.37). By working ‘closely with Ofsted to *spread* examples’ of schools successfully implementing this catch-up tuition programme, the paper assures its readership (and parents) that ‘there is strong accountability for all the elements within the pledge’ (ibid., p.39). The short-lived ‘fantasy of empowerment’ (Wright, 2012, p. 279) created by the concept of a *menu* of choice for schools is swiftly dispelled by the threat of Ofsted inspections and parent power. It is therefore clear that neoliberal values remain at the core of this tranche of the *levelling up* mission.

An interesting shift in the use of lexis is the description of the education system. In the 2016 White Paper, the system is portrayed through the metaphorical language of machinery and construction. References to education being an *engine*, along with the paper's repeated mantra for the need to *drive* up standards, creates the sense of an automated entity being centrally steered and controlled. Furthermore, support for schools is described in relation to *scaffolding* and the *building* of an *infrastructure* in order to develop a *pipeline* of 'great school and system leaders'. The nature of this metaphorical framing serves to depersonalise the education system and describe it through the corporate language of neoliberalism. In the 2022 White Paper, lexical choices linked to construction are also used to describe the policy's mission. *Building*, *cementing* and *strengthening* are terms used to refer to the *infrastructure* of 'an effective system'. However, the system itself is portrayed in a more organic way. A new *cadre* - rather than a *pipeline* - of leaders are to be *deployed*, and support for schools is to be led by the '*guardian* of evidence' - The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). The construction of the EEF as a '*guardian* of evidence', personifies the organisation as an all-powerful gatekeeper - a custodian of knowledge - which has the coveted answers to school improvement. The paper also refers to the investment in the future workforce in a more animate way. The mission to level up the country will 'support the skills *ecosystem*, ensuring that our pupils are equipped with the vital knowledge and skills they need for their future careers' (DfE, 2022, p.25). These more personified and organic-sounding terms change the corporate language of neoliberalism in an attempt to recognise education as a human construct rather than a mere instrument of business.

4.3.4 Agents of Meritocracy - 'Allowing' Academic Success

As previously indicated, the 2016 Green Paper shares interdiscursive links with a speech delivered by the Prime Minister at the time, Theresa May. Her vision for Britain as 'the great meritocracy' was an ideological ambition to achieve a 'country that works for

everyone' (DfE, 2016c, p.5). The concept of a meritocratic society filtered into the government's vision for education and was appropriated by the education Green Paper. The rhetorical slogan was transformed into the paper's strapline 'schools that work for everyone' (ibid.). The Green Paper pledged to 'create an education system that would allow anyone in this country, no matter what their background or where they are from, to go as far as their talents will take them' (ibid., p.8). An interesting lexical selection here is the use of the term *allow*. The nature of this word connotes a sense of power asymmetry and creates a feeling of 'othering' (Liasidou, 2008) within the discourse. These issues are tackled in the ensuing discussion.

The concept of othering has its roots in postcolonial theory and the 'critical analysis of racism' (Thomas-Olalde and Velho, 2011, p.27). The term 'othering' is increasingly used in relation to the 'phenomena of stereotyping and racialisation' (ibid.). However, it can be described as a process in which different subjects are discursively formed. In the 2016 Green Paper context, the discourse distinguishes between subjects in different social conditions. It inadvertently refers to different social classes using such phrases as, 'most disadvantaged' and the 'privileged few' (DfE, 2016c). The use of this language has the effect of simultaneously recognising and legitimising social stratification. Although the intention of the discourse was to demonstrate support for 'those who are just about managing' (ibid.), the chosen language separates this social group from the government, creating an '*us*' and '*them*' divide, and exerting power over '*them*' (Fairclough, 2017). A second '*them*' group, distinct from the government, is also constructed in the discourse. 'The privileged few' are discursively formed as a separate entity who enjoy the 'benefits' of independent schools, which 'have a world-wide reputation for excellence' (DfE, 2016c, p.12). This shows a distinct polarisation between the perceived 'ingroup' and the 'outgroup' (Van Dijk, 2006). The inherent message is that the former 'enjoy a far greater chance of academic success' (DfE, 2016c), whilst the latter do not.

The following table shows the other lexical selections used to describe different social groups found in the 2016 Green Paper’s discourse:

| Subject | Pronouns/ lexical selections in relation to the subject |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Subject – locutor/ addressees | We Us The government |
| Subject - wider audience/ society | They Them These people Ordinary families Ordinary working families Disadvantaged Most disadvantaged Families/ those who are just about managing Those who are insufficiently wealthy to pay fees Less-privileged backgrounds Under-privileged backgrounds Pupils from lower-income households Below-average income pupils |
| Subject – wider audience/ opposition | More modest incomes and backgrounds The privileged few Those who do well at grammar schools are more successful at getting into university. Those children that attend selective schools enjoy a far greater chance of academic success |

Table 2: Table showing the agents of discourse/ ‘othering’ in the 2016 Green Paper ‘Schools that work for everyone.’

This discursive positioning of the ‘ingroup’ and the ‘outgroup’ serves to create further distance between the different echelons of society which are defined and legitimised throughout the policy discourse. This is compounded by ‘expressions of righteous sympathy’ (Littler, 2018, p.97) about the ‘outgroup’, which are included within the rhetoric through the use of demonstrative pronouns and arguably pejorative lexical selections. For example, phrases such as ‘those who are insufficiently wealthy to pay fees’ and ‘those who are just about managing’, combined with adjectives such as ‘ordinary’ and ‘poor’ (DfE, 2016c), evoke a tone of pity. It can be contended that throughout the discourse, this in group-out group dichotomy serves to legitimise the inequalities of a class system rather than tackling them.

The sense of ‘othering’ created between ‘ordinary working families’ and ‘the privileged few’ (DfE, 2016c), assists in the construction of power asymmetry within the

discourse. The discourse frames ‘the privileged few’ as the dominant group in society for the ‘under-privileged’ to aspire to. By pledging to create an education system that will *allow* pupils from ‘less privileged backgrounds’ to access the education of the wealthy, the discourse not only legitimises the position of ‘the privileged few’ but places them in a position of power. The linguistic choice of the word *allow* insinuates that the most disadvantaged members of society, from ‘lower-income households’, must gain permission in order to access the educational benefits that the wealthy enjoy - providing they are talented (ibid.). Concealed by the concept of meritocracy, the rhetoric establishes the government as an ethereal gatekeeper, taking pity upon ‘those who are insufficiently wealthy to pay fees’ and *allowing* them access to the educational benefits of the ‘privileged few’ (ibid.). On the surface, the discourse of the 2016 Green Paper gives the impression that its main concern is to address social inequity by supporting the less-privileged members of society through a ‘fair’ system of meritocracy. However, it can be argued that the ‘power behind’ its discourse (Fairclough, 2017, p.27) serves to reproduce the dominant values of neoliberalism, preserving the economic and societal status quo.

Another example of ‘othering’ can be found in the discourse of the 2022 White Paper. The policy proposes to *deliver* ‘great teaching’ through a ‘new arms-length curriculum body’ that is ‘designed in partnership with *teachers* and *experts*’ to provide ‘free, optional, adaptable digital curriculum resources to *deliver* a rigorous, high-quality curriculum’ (DfE, p.9). This pledge is designed to empower teachers, reducing their workload and allowing them to ‘focus on responding to the needs of their class’ (ibid.). However, by linguistically separating the roles of ‘*teachers*’ and ‘*experts*’, a sense of othering is achieved. Through critical interpretation, this conceptual separation suggests that *teachers* are not *experts* - an ‘arms-length curriculum body’ must be created by *experts* and merely *delivered* by teachers in order for them to become ‘great’ (ibid.).

4.3.5 The Evolution of Political Rhetoric - From Meritocracy to Levelling Up

The 2022 White Paper utilises the phrase *levelling up* to describe its educational ‘mission’ for the country. Similar to the 2016 Green Paper, there are interdiscursive links with the government’s wider agenda for social change. The phrase *levelling up* is borrowed from the government’s broader plans ‘to transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity to all parts of it’ (GOV.UK, 2022). The *levelling up* rhetorical ‘mantra’ describes the government’s ‘ambitions for addressing longstanding local and regional inequalities’ - particularly in the areas of society that have been ‘left behind’ (Tomaney and Pike, 2020, p.43). However, it has been argued that the *levelling up* agenda was a mere ‘modest twist on existing policies’ despite its convincing rhetoric portraying a new vision for the UK by 2030 (ibid., p.45). In fact, *levelling up* can be thought of as an evolved version of May’s bid for a great meritocracy. Critical analysis of the 2022 White Paper shows that a number of linguistic devices are utilised which assist in depoliticising the underlying neoliberal values associated with *levelling up*. The following discussion demonstrates how the 2022 vision for education reform is couched in more socially-just sounding rhetoric.

The re-invention of meritocracy as a mission to level up society is constructed in the discourse through a shift in agency. There is a greater emphasis on a collaborative and inclusive approach to creating opportunities for societal up-lift, rather than the competitive individualism that is enshrined in the rhetoric of the 2016 Green Paper. There is still evidence of ‘othering’ within the discourse, identifying ‘those from disadvantaged backgrounds’ (DfE, 2022, p.17) as the main focus for the country’s levelling up mission. However, the construction of *disadvantage* in the discourse of the 2022 White Paper does not explicitly focus on lack of privilege and low income. Instead, the term *disadvantage* is softened to include phrases such as ‘those who are behind in English and maths’ and ‘those children that fall behind at some point on their educational journey’ (ibid.). By omitting the

explicit economic link to *disadvantage* in the rhetoric and focussing more on academic poverty, the underlying neoliberal themes are mollified and the concept depoliticised.

The paper's construction of *disadvantage* is also broadened to include 'those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)' (ibid.). Once again, the inclusion of vulnerable pupils and SEND removes the neoliberal agenda behind 'levelling up' and has the effect of depoliticisation. In the 2016 Green Paper, the discourse promoted the 'ruthless competition' (Maslen, 2019, p.609) of a meritocratic system through insinuating that only the hardworking and talented should be *allowed* access to educational excellence. Whereas in the 2022 White Paper, a greater sense of inclusivity is promoted through its linguistic choices. *Disadvantage* is also positioned in relation to the pandemic, identifying 'those children worst affected by Covid-19' as a priority for '*levelling up*' (DfE, 2022, p.35). The identification of Covid-19 as a cause of educational disadvantage can be seen as a relational strategy. The linguistic framing removes the overt sense of 'othering' and creates a sense of solidarity with the policy audience, as the pandemic was experienced by everyone. It could be intimated that the inclusion of a pandemic narrative throughout the paper serves the neoliberal political agenda well.

4.3.6 Evidence-based Persuasion

There are many references to the importance of *evidence* across all three of the policy papers. '*Evidence*-based training', '*evidence*-based support' and '*evidence*-based practice' underpin the papers' visions for school improvement. The pledges to '*reform*', '*spread*' and '*embed*' strategies based on '*evidence* of what works best', suggests a tried and tested approach, inevitably leading to school improvement. The repeated use of the term *evidence* throughout the papers' discourse establishes a knowledgeable tone which commands influence over the readership. It can be argued that this linguistic use of *evidence* serves as a

persuasive device, convincing the policy audience - and the policy makers' - of belief in its claims.

Despite the continual references to the importance of *evidence*, none of the policy texts specify the kind of *evidence* that is championed as the magic wand of school improvement. Instead, the term is generalised and related to the research findings of quasi-independent organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). The intentions of the EEF are 'to meet the long-term demand for robust *evidence* on school improvement' (Gorard, See and Siddiqui, 2017, p.8). As a result, the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit was designed to provide evaluations of interventions, highlighting the most effective way to close the attainment gap - particularly for the 'most disadvantaged 20% of the school population' (ibid.). The Toolkit provides schools with a *menu* of recommended *evidence*-based approaches' (DfE, 2022, p.39) to select the best way to spend their Pupil Premium funding. However, it has been argued that such organisations, who rely on government funding 'in order to pay the salary of the staff employed to do the evaluations' are more likely to produce results which are favoured by the funder (Gorard, See and Siddiqui, 2017, p.9). Therefore, it can be insinuated that the 'acceptable' *evidence* is selective and biased towards the neoliberal agenda of the policy makers. Although '*evidence*-based' approaches may sound like a convincing path to educational equity, this neoliberal policy agenda fails to acknowledge that there is much more to education' than '*evidence* for its improvement, efficacy or equity' (Gorard, See and Siddiqui, 2017, p.3). This thesis argues that 'education is a lifelong process' (ibid.) which should be more concerned with the 'happiness of individuals' and 'their preparedness for life other than work' (ibid., p.128).

4.3.7 Conclusions from Linguistic Analysis

Linguistic analysis of the policy texts - on an albeit peripheral level - has shown that vocabulary and grammar are manipulated to project a desired ideology. Linguistic choices are made to promote and strengthen the policy's belief in its convictions, persuading its audience that these will lead to future school improvement success. This mode of linguistic manipulation appears across many texts and genres and is not a surprising finding. However, some lexical selections within the policy texts indicate how language can be used as a tool to reproduce and maintain power asymmetries. For example, the use of the term *allow* in relation to accessing a good education emphasises a power imbalance between the *disadvantaged* and the 'privileged few'. This reinforces the neoliberal construct of education as a commodified service which is controlled and regulated, rather than existing as emancipatory public good for all. Beyond this study, the intention is for further analysis to be undertaken in order to explore the remaining vocabulary and grammatical features that constitute the full linguistic analytical research framework. However, for the purposes (and constraints) of this thesis, the chapter moves onto the interdiscursive layer of analysis.

4.3.8 Interdiscursive Analysis - Problematisation, Argumentation and Ideological Fantasy

A crucial element of textual analysis is the nature of interdiscursivity. This involves identifying and comparing the similarities in discursive features within and across texts, as well as considering influences in genre and style. Using methods of comparative analysis, the study examines the interdiscursive nature of the three policy texts, and considers the government agenda and the wider socio-political, historical and cultural context at the time of publication of each paper. The first part of this section addresses the first of the subsidiary research questions: What issues are 'problematised' in the policy discourse? (Freire, 1970/ Foucault, 1977). A comparison of the circumstances that are problematised within each

policy leads to a discussion surrounding the wider socio-political, historical and cultural context of the texts. Following this, the model of argumentation analysis described in chapter three is used to explore the second subsidiary research question: What are the main arguments or ‘master discourses’ presented in the policy discourse? (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). The adapted model of argumentation analysis is applied to each policy text, in order to critically compare and contrast the main claims, circumstances, values and goals. Finally, the third subsidiary research question is addressed: How is ‘ideological fantasy’ constructed in the policy discourse? (Clarke, 2014/2020). An exploration of the ideological themes, tropes and phrases that are used within the discourse reveals discursive similarities across the corpus of policy texts. The section concludes by summarising the findings of the analysis.

4.3.9 SRQ1: What issues are ‘problematized’ in the policy discourse?

In this section, a critical analytical technique which blends elements of Freire’s theory of problematisation with Foucault’s approach (described in chapter 3.8) is employed to investigate the corpus of policy texts. This research questions the ‘taken-for-granted truths’ that are presented in the policy discourse and explores the socio-political context that generates the issues. For each policy text, the main problems were identified and critically compared. Table 3 shows a comparison table designed to identify the problematized issues in each policy text:

| Policy Text | 2016 White Paper - EEE | 2016 Green Paper - STWFE | 2022 White Paper - OFA |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Problematisations | <p>The government inherited an education system where 1 in 3 children left primary education unable to read, write and add up properly.</p> <p>Far too many schools <i>were</i> failing.</p> <p>Education standards remained static whilst other countries moved ahead.</p> <p>There still remains too many pockets of underperformance.</p> <p>Areas of the country have unacceptably low/ chronic underperformance.</p> | <p>For too many children a good school remains out of reach.</p> <p>The demographic pressure for good school places is increasing.</p> <p>A number of institutions are prohibited or not incentivised to create new school places (e.g. Independent Schools, Universities, Selective School and Faith Schools)</p> | <p>There are areas of the country where schools suffer from entrenched underperformance.</p> <p>The educational and emotional impact of the pandemic has exacerbated this.</p> <p>Currently, only 7/10 children achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.</p> <p>Disadvantaged children fared worse during the pandemic.</p> <p>Too many children leave education without key knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Outcomes between regions vary.</p> <p>There are poor standards of attendance and behaviour.</p> <p>The worst system structures stifle progress.</p> <p>Improvements are not uniform.</p> <p>The system is messy and confusing.</p> |

Table 3: Problematism Analysis Comparison Table

In the 2016 Green Paper, the main issue presented is the need for more ‘good’ schools. The paper defines the term ‘good’ in relation to the percentage of schools rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted in 2016. For a school to be judged as ‘good’ by Ofsted, four key categories are assessed: the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal

development and leadership and management. According to the DfE Analysis of Ofsted Good and Outstanding Schools, 85% of all schools were categorised as good or outstanding in August 2016 (2019, p.5). Nevertheless, the Green Paper suggests that the ‘demographic pressure’ of an increasing population means there is a demand for more ‘good school places’. This arguably ‘taken-for-granted truth’ (Bacchi, 2012, p.1) serves as the paper’s rationale for its proposals to expand selective schools. The paper’s vision to create more ‘good’ school places also looks towards the independent schooling sector. The solution is for independent schools to be incentivised in order to create partnerships with state-maintained schools and academies. These proposals carry a clear ideological message; selective and independent schools are ‘good’ and should be aspired to for the purposes of school improvement. This ideology assists in legitimising the preservation and expansion of a stratified schooling system where social segregation and inequality are perpetuated. This thesis argues that the problematised issue facilitates the reproduction of dominant values and protects the neoliberal status quo.

The circumstances surrounding this issue - and arguably the real problem behind the policy - was the fact that a ‘number of institutions’ (i.e., grammar schools) were not permitted to expand. Since 1998, legislation has prohibited the creation of new grammar schools and the expansion of existing establishments. This was clearly a problem for the government at the time of the 2016 Green Paper’s publication, as it did not fit with the ideology of ‘good’ education. The paper’s vision was to create more ‘good’ schools, including selective schools, in order to achieve ‘an education system that will allow anyone in this country, no matter what their background or where they are from, to go as far as their talents will take them’ (DfE, 2016a, p.8). This socially-just sounding mantra seems to mask the neoliberal drive for competitive individualism at the root of the paper’s meritocratic vision. Despite sounding like a bid for utilitarianism, the agenda served to perpetuate an education system which reproduces inequality through social stratification. It can be contended that the paper’s

problematisation of the need for more good school places is a ruse for the real agenda behind the policy - the perpetuation of a 'diverse' school system in order to preserve the hegemonic ideology of 'good' education and maintain the stratified social status quo.

The ambition to open up new grammar schools reared its head again under the short-lived Conservative leadership of Prime Minister Liz Truss (September to October 2022). In September 2022, she 'pledged to replace failing academies with new selective schools during her leadership campaign' and tasked her newly appointed Education Secretary, Kit Malthouse, to draw up plans for new grammar schools to be opened in England (Whittaker, 2022). This re-ignited campaign was not only fuelled by the ideology of grammar schools as 'good' but through the neoliberal driven concept of parental choice. It was reported that 'quite a lot of parents' in 'some parts of the country' have expressed the desire for more grammar schools to open. According to Truss' Conservative cabinet, it was suggested that the 'benefits' of the 'educational ethos' of grammar schools 'make everyone happy' (Whittaker, 2022). This serves to perpetuate the dominant ideology that equates grammar schools with 'good' education and legitimises a schooling system where inequality is reproduced. As Professor Becky Francis makes clear in Whittaker's article, there should be a focus on 'evidence not ideology' as grammar schools are 'unlikely to reduce education inequality' (2022).

This acute focus on the need for a diverse school system and the expansion and creation of grammar schools is not reflected in the 2016 and the 2022 White Papers. Instead, the shared problematised theme is educational underperformance. In the 2016 White Paper, this is ascribed to the state of the education system that the government 'inherited' in 2010, 'where 1 in 3 young people left primary school unable to read, write and add up properly' (DfE 2016b, p.3). The discourse positions this blame firmly in the past, at the foot of the preceding Labour governmental reign which ended with the Conservative-Liberal Democrat

Coalition in the 2010 general elections. In the 2016 White Paper foreword, Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, uses the failings of previous governments (including the Coalition) to outline the issues and justify the paper's new proposals for educational reform. Morgan describes the efforts of the last Parliament as allowing educational standards to remain 'static... whilst other countries have moved ahead' (ibid.). However, she also celebrates the 'bold reforms' that were put in place during the Coalition government which aimed to 'drive up standards in schools' (ibid.). Following this, in an arguably relational bid to gain support from the policy audience, Morgan thanks the 'hard work of thousands of teachers, headteachers and governors' for the 'huge progress' already achieved, before problematising the present state of education in 2016 where 'too many pockets of educational underperformance' remained (ibid.). In the space of three short paragraphs, the discourse identifies who is deemed responsible for the problem, defends the 'bold' efforts of the preceding government in attempting to tackle the problem, and champions the education profession as the driver of progress and the solution to the problem. This multi-layered problematisation is carefully structured in order to lay the foundations for the paper's proposed educational reforms and justify the continued neoliberal campaign to 'drive up standards' (ibid.).

The 2022 White Paper is also concerned with the 'entrenched underperformance' suffered by schools in some areas across the United Kingdom (DfE, 2022, p.3). However, unlike the 2016 White Paper's approach, the blame is not overtly directed at previous governments. Instead, the pandemic is used to problematise educational underperformance and justify the government's perpetual neoliberal focus on raising standards. The paper identifies that the Covid-19 pandemic has 'exacerbated' the problem of underperformance where 'too many children leave education without key knowledge and skills' (ibid.). It also identifies that 'disadvantaged children fared worse' during the pandemic (ibid.). This

problematism establishes the rationale for a renewed drive to ‘level up’ society, but the 2022 agenda is spun with a greater emphasis on concerns for social justice.

The reincarnated (and socially just) mission to drive up standards legitimises the neoliberal vision of a ‘fully trust led system’ where ‘systematic improvement’ can be easily ‘spread’ (DfE, 2022, p.50). The case for full academisation by 2030 is strengthened by the further problematisations portrayed in the 2022 White Paper. For example, the paper identifies the fact that educational outcomes vary between regions, and that improvements are not ‘uniform’, creating an education system which is ‘messy’ and ‘confusing’ (ibid., p.46). The paper suggests that the ‘worst’ system structures (i.e., those that are not trust led) ‘stifle’ progress (ibid., p.44). However, this ‘taken-for-granted truth’ (Bacchi, 2012, p.1) is not substantiated with research evidence - a crucial ingredient in the paper’s proposals for school improvement.

Evidence-based training and practice is (quite rightly) championed by the paper as being at the heart of teacher development. The ‘world-class’ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) - an ‘independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement’ - is drawn upon throughout the paper as the solution to tackling the ‘entrenched underperformance’ suffered by schools in some areas. The evidence ‘assured’ by the EEF is intended to be instrumental in the improvement of teaching quality, as well as the delivery of the curriculum and targeted support for children. The paper’s focus on evidence-based practice and the development of ‘great teachers’ conveys an ambition to place more value in the teaching profession. The discourse creates a relational sense of empowerment for teachers and leaders which some might contend to be fantasy (Wright, 2012). Underneath this ‘fantasy of empowerment’ it can be argued that the real agenda is once again entrenched in the neoliberal values of performance and competition. This time,

the perpetual neoliberal mission to raise standards is masked by the contextual circumstances of the pandemic.

Identifying and comparing the issues that have been problematised in the policy texts has enabled an investigation of the political agenda behind the papers. The 2016 and 2022 White Papers share discursive features in their avowed missions to achieve ‘educational excellence everywhere’ and ‘level up’ education standards. However, the contextual drivers that provide the rationale for this underlying neoliberal agenda differ. Although the issues problematised in the 2016 Green Paper do not explicitly focus on driving up standards, identifying a need for more good school places in the discourse implies that some schools are not good enough and therefore, standards must be raised. The recurring ‘problem’ of standards has been reframed in the discourse according to the wider socio-political context of each paper. The solutions presented by each paper conveys the impression of a dynamic government keen to tackle problems and facilitate social justice through education reform. However, the underlying neoliberal ‘conservative attitude’ seeks to ‘preserve the status quo’ of the ‘world as it is’ (Arendt, 1954, p.11) through reinforcing an ideology based on competition. This collocation of neoliberal values with the discourse of social justice allows the standards agenda to be reimagined and re-‘fed to the people by the oppressors’ (Freire, 2017, p.137).

4.3.10 SRQ 2: What are the Main Arguments or ‘Master Discourses’ Presented in the Policy Discourse?

This section explores the main claims or arguments that are presented in each of the policy texts. Employing a method of argumentation analysis adapted from Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), the ‘master discourse’ (Arnott and Ozga, 2010) of each paper is identified and critically discussed. The adapted method of argumentation analysis (described in chapter 3.9) reveals the claims/ calls for action and the goals/ means goals of each policy paper, as

well as the ideological values and wider socio-political circumstances that underpin them. This thesis proposes that the use of the study’s uniquely developed method of argumentation analysis strengthens the critical analysis of the discourse and further enables the exploration of interdiscursivity within and across the texts. The adapted model for argumentation analysis is first applied to the 2016 Green Paper, ‘Schools that work for everyone’.

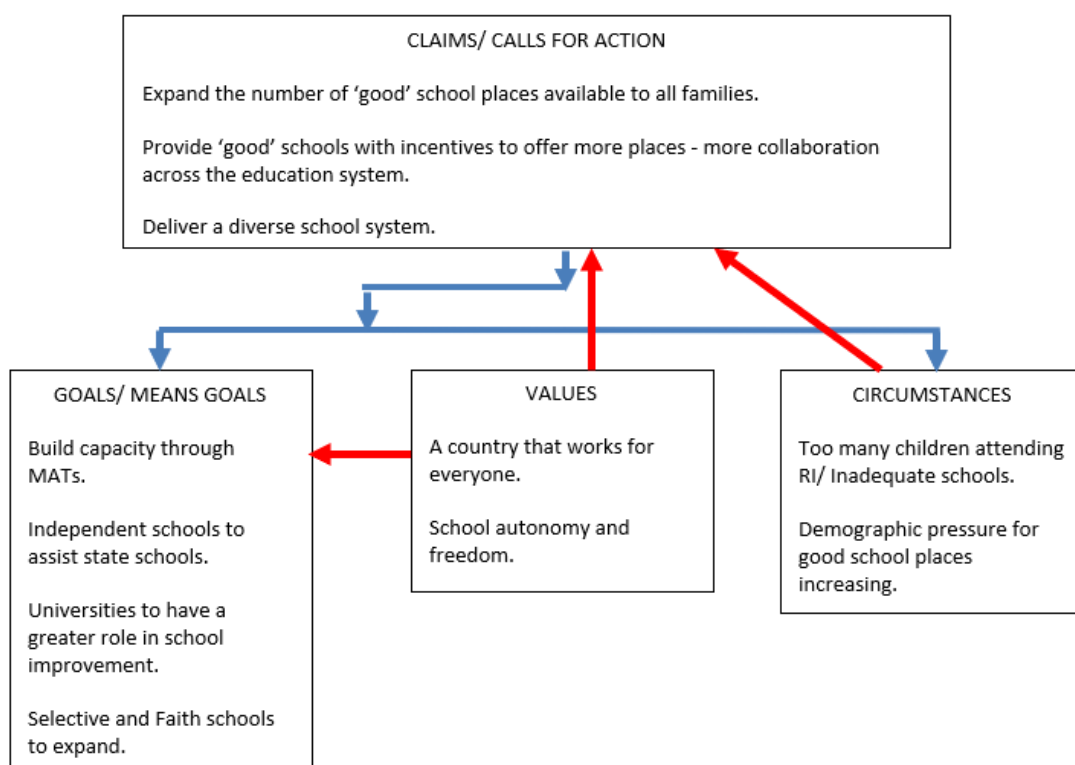


Figure 5: Argumentation Analysis of the 2016 Green Paper, ‘Schools that work for everyone’.

The main claims or ‘master discourse’ (Arnott and Ozga, 2010) underpinning the 2016 Green Paper is driven by the belief in a diverse schooling system and the need for more ‘good’ school places. The paper defines the term ‘good’ in relation to the percentage of schools rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted in 2016. It also recognises the economic link between parental income and getting your child into a ‘good’ school. The discourse distinguishes between the education opportunities for ‘ordinary families, who have a job but

do not always have job security; have their own home, but worry about paying the mortgage' and the good or outstanding education of the 'privileged few' (DfE, 2016c, p.10). The paper acknowledges that 'children from these families are not necessarily well-served by the education system' (ibid.). However, it appears that the solution is not to address the fundamental issue of societal inequality (the 'real' reality behind the education system) but to perpetuate it through retaining a 'diverse' and stratified education system (maintaining the status quo). The paper's aphorism 'schools that work for everyone' evokes the ideological tone of a concern for social justice. However, the concept is based on a model of stratification, where independent, selective and faith schools are permitted to continue their arguably discriminatory practice, provided they share their 'expertise' and 'assist the state funded sector more directly' (ibid., p.6). Although it is not made explicit, the discourse suggests that the independent and selective schooling enjoyed by the 'privileged few' is the model for an 'excellent' education that all children are entitled to - providing their talents will *allow* them.

The paper's credence in the 'fragmentation and differentiation of school types' (Ball, 2017, p.217) served to intensify the neoliberal ideology of competitive individualism. It can be debated that this 'patchwork' system of schooling, modelled on the concept of investment business, has done nothing to address social inequality (ibid.). Contrary to their profession as the 'modern engines of social justice' (Morgan, 2015), schools have become the servants of neoliberalism, where competitive individualism and social segregation are normalised in order to shape the workforce of the next generation and preserve the societal status quo. It is tangible from the discourse of this policy that education is no longer considered to be a public good; instead, it is a public service - a commodity - which is acquired through the 'myth of meritocracy' where 'wealth inequalities arise from natural genius and hard work' (Tett and Hamilton, 2021, p.xvii). This ideological fantasy is in conflict with empirical arguments which contend that most wealth is not earned but 'inherited intergenerationally' (ibid.).

The paper legitimises the underlying neoliberal discourse of meritocracy and competitive individualism through the rhetoric of social justice and the ideological declaration of ‘schools that work for everyone’ (DfE, 2016c). It recognises that there are inequalities within the country’s schooling system, yet the solution is to maintain a socially segregated schooling system and promote a meritocratic vision of society, where ‘every child should be able to go as far as their talents will take them’ (ibid.). The Prime Minister at the time Theresa May, professed an oxymoronic vision of a meritocratic Britain which would address issues of social mobility through education. This arguably ‘fantasmatic’ (Clarke, 2020) ideology suggested that ‘education can interrupt social reproduction’ (Ball, 2017, p.197) and serve as ‘the great social leveller’ (Major and Machin, 2018). However, it can be contended that this seems paradoxical when the government’s proposals supported a diversified school system, that promotes school choice and selection, which assists in creating ‘educational apartheid’ (Gillies, 2007, p.28) and social segregation within and across schools.

The government’s claims were to deliver a stronger partnership between different parts of our education system in local areas, to raise standards across the system and ‘to create new good school places in areas where they are needed’ (DfE, 2018). The projected values portray a narrative of social justice, yet the goals - and means goals - of the policy sit firmly within a neoliberal agenda. It can be construed that the social justice narrative woven into the paper’s rhetoric was developed as a gesture to recognise the social injustice of what can be perceived as a profoundly unequal education system, masking the underlying agenda to preserve the neoliberal status quo.

The Green Paper sets out a utopian vision of a meritocratic education system where ‘every child should be able to go as far as their talents will take them’ (DfE, 2016c, p.5). It can be insinuated that the phrase assists in depoliticising the concept of competition, concealing the underlying neoliberal agenda of the paper. The Green Paper also describes the

Government's dedication 'to making Britain a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few' (ibid.). This declaration clearly acknowledges that there are issues of inequality within the education system – and wider society. Nonetheless, it can be argued that inequality is simultaneously reinforced through the policy discourse. This study contends that the uniting declaration advocated by the paper's title – 'Schools that work for everyone' - is a disavowal of the reality of the English education system.

The same model of argumentation analysis was applied to the 2016 White Paper with the intention to identify its 'master discourse' (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). Although the White Paper's publication precedes the Green Paper, it was decided to discuss the policy texts in this order due to the emergent themes and issues. Discursive features (i.e., the policy's claims and goals) and non-discursive features (i.e., the values and circumstances that underpin the policy) are explored and compared in relation to the 2016 Green Paper.

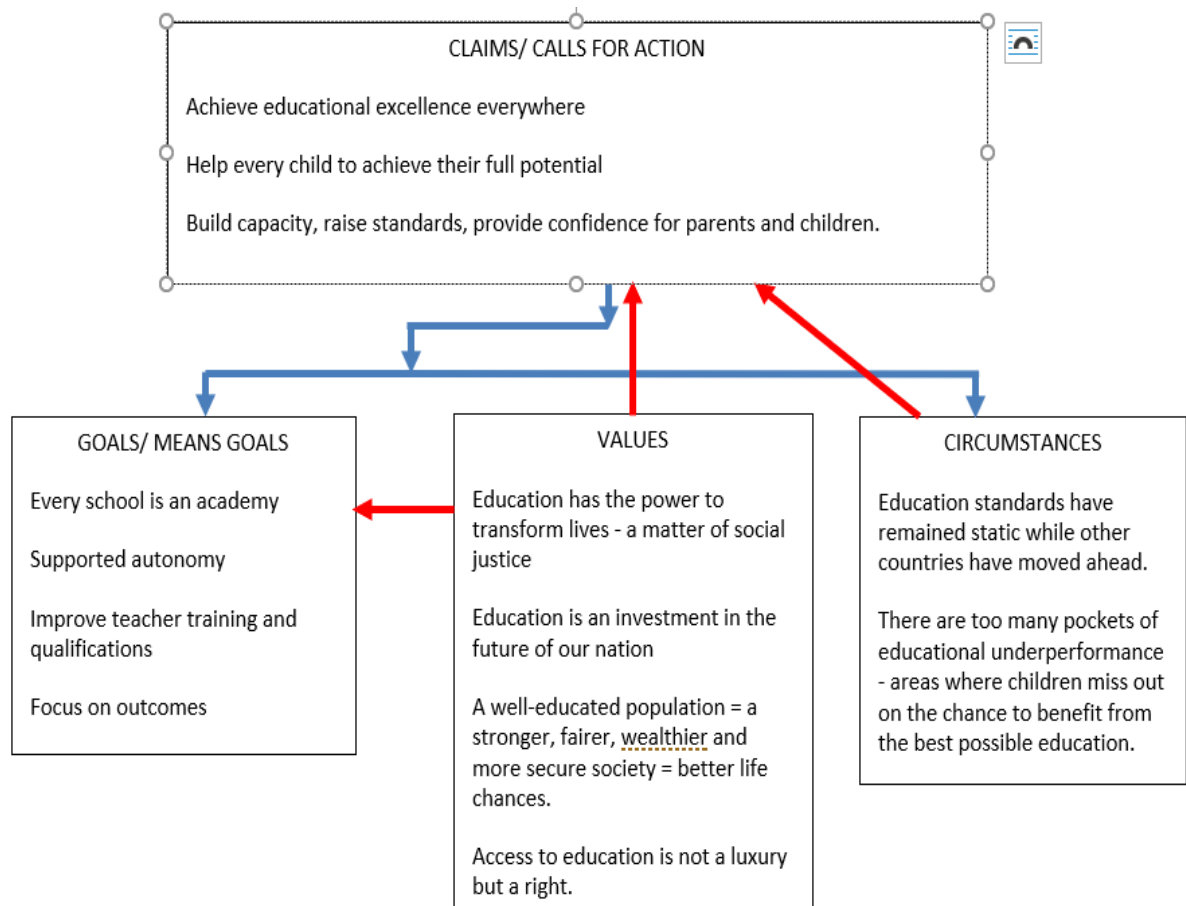


Figure 6: Argumentation Analysis of the 2016 White Paper, ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’.

The ‘master discourse’ (Arnott and Ozga, 2010) of the 2016 White Paper, ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’, is focussed on school improvement and raising standards. This paves the way for the government’s underlying ambition to convert all schools to academies, which is built upon by the goals outlined in the 2016 Green Paper. A fully academised education system is promoted as an opportunity for schools to ‘benefit from greater autonomy, within the context of a more robust accountability framework’ (DfE, 2016a, p.5). This contradictory statement seems to promise the freedom of school autonomy within the parameters of a more tightly controlled system of measure. The promise of autonomy can be viewed as a ‘fantasy of empowerment’ (Wright, 2012, p. 279); yet the fantasy does not conceal the neoliberal agenda of performativity, it is explicitly linked to it.

It can be argued that this dichotomy of controlled freedom serves to legitimise the performative practice of measuring productivity and assists in normalising neoliberal values.

Alongside the paper's drive for academisation, are proposals for a reform in teaching and leadership in order to raise educational standards. The paper identifies the concern that there are 'too many pockets of educational underperformance' (DfE, 2016a, p.5), presenting the issue as one of social injustice where 'children miss out on the chance to benefit from the best possible education' (ibid.). However, akin with the 2016 Green Paper, this social justice narrative is juxtaposed with the neoliberal discourse of competition. A main governmental concern surrounding educational underperformance at the time was that the country 'remained static' while other countries on the global stage 'moved ahead' (ibid.). Therefore, the paper's drive was for educational underperformance to be addressed through school improvement and teaching reform, in order for the country to perform better in comparison with its global competitors. Unlike the 2016 Green Paper, where the rhetoric of social justice seemed to conceal the neoliberal values at its core, the 2016 White Paper presents them side-by-side. This is particularly evident in the paper's foreword by the Secretary of State for Education at the time, Nicky Morgan MP. Her direct address to the audience professes that education is a 'matter of social justice' with 'the power to transform lives (DfE, 2016a, p.3). Similar to the ideological rhetoric of the 2016 Green Paper, this visionary statement evokes a utopian tone where education endures as a public good. However, we are swiftly reminded of the neoliberal vision for education when Morgan defines the investment in the education system as an investment 'in the future of our nation' (ibid.). This is a stark reminder that education has become an industry - a commodified public service mobilised to shape the future generation.

The 2016 Green Paper presented its wider vision for the education system, where the diversification of the schooling system would lead to more 'good' school places. In contrast,

the 2016 White Paper focussed more narrowly upon the mechanisms of school improvement. The link was made between ‘chronic underperformance’ and a ‘lack of capacity to improve’ (DfE, 2016a). The paper pledged that the areas of the country where standards were ‘unacceptably low’ would be transformed by improving teacher training and leadership (ibid.). Furthermore, the paper’s ambition to achieve ‘educational excellence everywhere’ would be accomplished by spreading the best practice of high-performing schools and MATs (Multi Academy Trusts) across the country (ibid.). This drive for educational improvement, and the continued focus on outcomes, illustrates how the policy discourse constructs education as a neoliberal product. The paper’s discourse conveys education as a measurable commodity which must be of an excellent standard in order to provide the consumer with ‘confidence’ in its service and compete on the global stage (ibid.).

Throughout the paper, this strong neoliberal agenda becomes conflated with the discourse of social justice. Education is described as the dual ‘engine of social justice and economic growth’ (DfE, 2016a, p.5). This gives the impression that the government is tackling educational inequality. However, the social wrong presented in the White Paper focusses on the neoliberal-impelled problem of educational underperformance, rather than the deep-rooted issues of social inequality that exist within the country’s diverse schooling system. Therefore, it can be postulated that the ‘problematism’ of educational underperformance pretences as Bhaskar’s ‘empirical’ layer of reality that the policy audience is exposed to. This then diverts attention away from the ‘real’ depth of social inequality that lies beneath the construction of the policy text. This thesis argues that the policy discourse enables the legitimisation of neoliberal values, conceals the non-discursive aspects of social reality and marginalises any alternative views.

The adapted model of argumentation analysis was finally applied to the 2022 White Paper, with the same aims to identify its claims, goals, values and circumstances. The

rhetoric of the paper’s title - ‘Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child’ - immediately evokes the same discursive conflation of social justice and neoliberal values that both the 2016 White and Green papers share. The ensuing discussion compares and contrasts the paper’s discursive and non-discursive features in relation to the other policy texts.

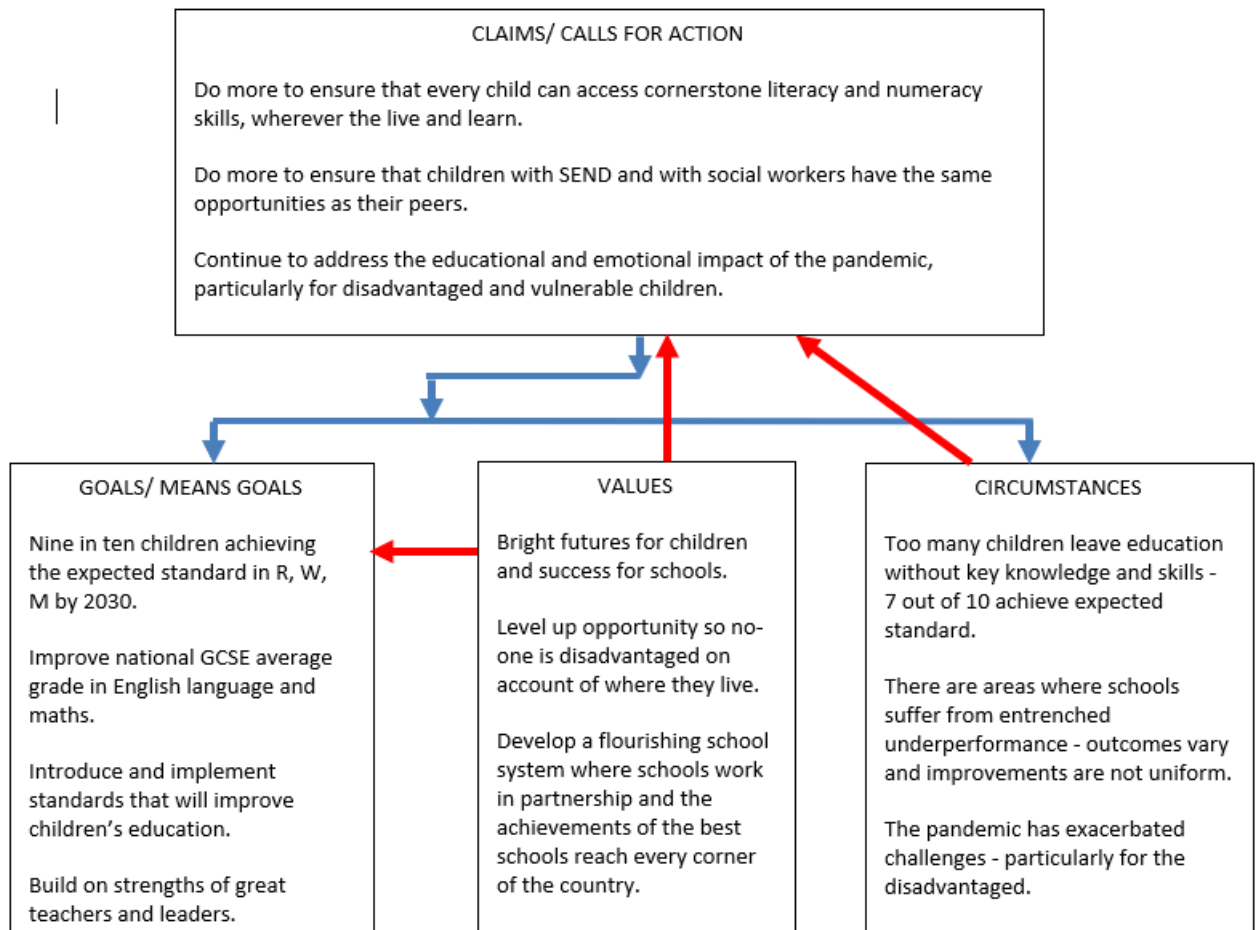


Figure 7: Argumentation Analysis of the 2022 White Paper, ‘Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child’.

The most recent 2022 White Paper makes its focus on opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable children prominent in its main claims. The main calls for action are to enable every child to ‘access cornerstone literacy and numeracy skills, wherever they live and learn’ and to ‘do more to ensure that children with SEND and with social workers have the same

opportunities as their peers' (DfE, 2022, p.4). The paper also recognises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon education - particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Alongside the impact upon educational outcomes, the paper identifies the government's concern for the emotional impact that the pandemic has had upon children's well-being. In the 2016 White Paper, it is acknowledged that 'good mental health and wellbeing' are important to educational success (DfE, 2016a, p.97). However, in the 2022 White Paper, the importance of emotional wellbeing is referred to more frequently in relation to both children and teachers. The heightened concern for the wellbeing of pupils and staff in the discourse cultivates an empathetic tone. It can be construed that relational phrases are purposefully selected in order to create and foster a relationship with the intended audience. For example, the statement 'Now more than ever before, face-to-face education for children's academic, social and emotional wellbeing is of paramount importance' (DfE, 2022, p.32) evokes the sense of the rallying spirit that was promoted during the pandemic and brings the tenor of social justice to the discourse. Yet the acknowledged importance of social and emotional wellbeing is not reflected in the paper's goals, which still sit firmly within a neoliberal agenda.

The policy's target for 2030 is once again driven by a neoliberal mission to raise standards. The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi - the Education Secretary at the time of the paper's publication - professed his vision 'to introduce and implement standards that will improve children's education' (DfE, 2022, p.4). The chief ambition sets out to increase the number of children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage Two from 70% to 90%. In addition, the national GCSE average grade in English language and maths is to be improved. These outcome-oriented goals are reduced to measurable targets which serve as the instruments of neoliberalism. Schools can be held accountable, and the ideology of competitive individualism is legitimised through performativity. This focus on outcomes falls in line with the neoliberal-driven goals of the

2016 White Paper. However, it can be posited that the 2022 paper does more to conceal the government's perpetual focus on competition through an amplified social justice narrative which is peppered throughout the discourse. The regular reminders of the government's concern for social and emotional wellbeing, and the paper's particular focus on opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, seem to soften the government's continued regime for data-driven school improvement.

In a similar vein to the 2016 White Paper, the values that underpin the 2022 White Paper are a collocation of neoliberal and social justice ideology. For example, the phrase 'bright futures for our children and success for our schools' (DfE, 2022, p.3) conflates a holistic vision for 'our' children with the language of competition. Furthermore, the pledge to 'level up opportunity' and create a 'stronger and fairer school system' (ibid.) suggests that the issues of social inequality that are reproduced by the current structure of the schooling system might be addressed. Yet the solution is to continue the neoliberal project of full academisation, where all children will be 'allowed' to 'feel the benefits of the best school trusts' (ibid., p.12). In all three of the selected policy texts, this contradictory vision of social justice existing within a neoliberal education system is reminiscent of Tony Blair's 'Third Way' policy (see chapter 2.4.3) where social equity and 'economic dynamism' were professed to co-exist (Fairclough, 2000, p.10). However, akin with the attempts of New Labour, the discourse of social justice has done 'little to disturb the status quo' (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999, p.19).

Through this study's uniquely developed method of argumentation analysis, the 'master discourse' (Arnott and Ozga, 2010) of each policy paper has been explored and the discursive and non-discursive features have been compared. Critical analysis reveals that there is a clear interdiscursive link between the policy texts; in all three papers, a neoliberal versus social justice discursive dichotomy exists, creating a 'Third Way' paradoxical agenda

that promises equality and economic prosperity. It can be conjectured that this rhetorical style has been developed by successive governments in order to shroud the underpinning reality of neoliberalism at work in the construction of contemporary education policy discourse.

Returning to Bhaskar's three domains of reality, it can be contended that the policy discourse is in fact ideological fantasy - an 'empirical' reality that the policy audience is compelled to believe. This version of reality portrayed within the policy discourse conceals the 'actual' and the 'real' domains of reality that exist underneath the construction of policy text. The non-discursive values and circumstances of the 'actual' and 'real' layers of policy discourse are founded upon dominant beliefs that are designed to preserve the 'old world' status quo (Arendt, 1954, p.3). This thesis claims that in the 'real' reality, true social justice cannot exist within a neoliberal education system, as equality and competition are antonymic in nature. The following section explores the concept of ideological fantasy further in relation to its presentation within the corpus of policy texts. Key themes and common discursive features are investigated, critically analysed and discussed.

4.3.11 SRQ3: How is Ideological Fantasy Constructed in the Policy Discourse?

A common theme identified in the discourse across the three papers is the concept of *collaboration*. Despite its socially-just sounding pretence, this thesis argues that the agenda behind this concept can be interpreted as a neoliberal ruse. It can be contended that the concept of collaboration serves as an 'ideological fantasy of empowerment' (Wright, 2012, p.279) which shrouds the underlying business agenda of England's neoliberal-driven education system and reproduces social inequity. For example, in the 2016 Green Paper, it is proposed that 'all parts of the education system need to collaborate more to widen opportunity and raise standards in existing schools' (DfE, 2016a, p.10). Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and independent schools are encouraged to work in partnership with schools

in order to ‘build capacity’ and ‘assist state schools’ in achieving the same ‘excellence’ that they are professed to hold (ibid.). The paper’s recommendation for MATs and independent schools to ‘spread best practice’ can be construed as a top-down model of dissemination and assimilation, rather than true collaboration. The paper provides examples of partnerships where state schools are ‘buddied up’ with independent schools in order to ‘raise the academic and vocational aspirations of students of less privileged backgrounds’ (ibid., p.13). Although this revelation may appear to address social inequity, it in fact reinforces it by perpetuating the social segregation of students; those from ‘less privileged backgrounds’ in the state schooling system can aspire to be like the ‘privileged few’ that enjoy independent schooling (ibid.). Furthermore, it creates a sense of ‘othering’ (Liasidou, 2008/2011) which legitimises the concept of a social order and normalises social inequity.

In the 2016 White Paper, the mission of *spreading* ‘educational excellence everywhere’ is once again the responsibility of high-performing schools and MATs. However, more emphasis is placed on developing a network of ‘system leaders’ from ‘strong schools’ who ‘spread best practice and high quality professional development’ (DfE, 2016a). The paper proposes to create a ‘strong and sustainable pipeline’ of ‘diverse’, ‘talented’ and ‘motivated’ leaders who will be deployed in ‘challenging schools and areas across the country’ (ibid.). Although this can still be interpreted as a top-down system of school improvement, where MATs are promoted within the discourse as the gold standard of education, there seems to be a greater focus on ‘growing’ excellence through collaboration rather than just aspiring to it (ibid.).

In the 2022 White Paper, the concept of *collaboration* is widened from a narrow focus on high-performing schools and MATs, towards working with all ‘partners across the education system’ (DfE, 2022, p.60). These partners include ‘academics’ and ‘leading experts’ as well as the ‘world-class Education Endowment Foundation’ (ibid., p.3) which

provides (debatingly) ‘the best research and evidence available’ (ibid.). The drive for *collaboration* has been shifted in this policy paper to encompass a broader vision of educational expertise, as opposed to just *spreading* the benefits of independent schools, selective schools and MATs. This discursive strategy removes the negative effect of ‘othering’ (Liasidou, 2008/2011) that is present in the discourse of the 2016 Green Paper. Relational phrases are utilised to foster a greater sense of inclusion, where ‘everyone involved in education plays their part’ (DfE, 2022, p.10). The proposals of the 2022 White Paper are not just to ‘*spread* the benefits’ of MATs, but for Ofsted to spread examples of best practice, and for ‘evidence-based practice’ to be spread, in order for all schools to become part of a MAT or become a SAT (Single Academy Trust) by 2030. The paper’s ambition is clear - to achieve a fully trust-led system which will lead to a rise in educational standards. This objective is presented as an opportunity for true collaboration by all ‘actors in the system’ (DfE, 2022, p.52) and seems to offer a fairer and more socially just approach to school improvement. However, it can be contended that the concept of collaboration presented in the policy discourse creates an ‘ideological fantasy of empowerment’ (Wright, 2012, p. 279) - a desirable fantasy which hides from the policy audience how the education system is being exploited as a business.

4.4 Conclusions from Interdiscursive Analysis

Through critical analysis of the policy texts, this research has shown that the rhetoric juxtaposes the language of competitive market-logic with a narrative of social justice, in an attempt to recognise and address issues of social inequity. However, it can be argued that this ideological rhetoric is an illusory utopia. The ‘fantasy of empowerment’ (Wright, 2012, p.279) and promises of socially just and ‘bright futures for our children’ (DfE, 2022, p.3) woven into the narrative of contemporary education policy discourse, conceal the underlying neoliberal values of global competition, the investment in future human capital and the

measures of performance and accountability which are required to regulate the education 'business'. This Marxian magic trick conceals the reality of the continued neoliberal agenda and suppresses any alternative political views - the social wrong in critical realist terms. To address stage two of Fairclough's analytical framework, it can be contended that the obstacle preventing the identified social wrong from being addressed is the discourse of education policy itself.

In chapter 1.4.1, a theatre performance metaphor was used to relate Bhaskar's three domains of reality to education policy. The empirical, observable reality of education policy can be likened to a show for its audience; the rhetoric and linguistic choices are carefully rehearsed to create a performance which stages an interpretation of reality and presents an ideological vision for the future. This thesis argues that the policy 'performance' is the obstacle in the way of addressing the social wrong. In relation to scientific research, Šimundić points out that any 'deviation from the truth' in 'interpretation and publication' is bias (2013, p.12). Bias can occur 'intentionally or unintentionally' and can be 'potentially misleading' (ibid.). This thesis boldly claims that the 'performance' of education policy discourse wields intentional bias and is potentially misleading as the illusion of social justice woven through the rhetoric is a deviation from the neoliberal truth.

Stage three of Fairclough's analytical framework is to consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong. Addressing this stage, this thesis contends that in order for the current neoliberal agenda for education to continue to be deemed as 'common sense' logic (Harvey, 2005, p.39), the social order does in fact need the social wrong. The neoliberal constructs of free-market consumerism and global competition have to be 'fed to the people by the oppressors' (Freire, 2017, p.137) in a digestible way in order for them to endure. As such, the rhetorical spin of social justice makes the economically-driven reality of neoliberal education more palatable.

The Marxian magic trick technique has evolved over time enabling the neoliberal regime to become normalised through its conflation with social justice. In its latest incarnation, the discourse of the 2022 White Paper presents its mission for education as a shared moral duty. The education secretary at the time of its publication assured us that ‘we can be proud of what we have achieved together in recent decades’ and that we should continue to work ‘together to deliver for children and young people’ (DfE, 2022, p.3). The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi also regaled us with his personal story of how ‘excellent teachers’ in a ‘great school’ transformed him from being the ‘disruptive influence’ at the back of the class to where he is today (ibid.). This discursive technique is reminiscent of Tony Blair’s rhetorical style where his speeches were ‘personalised and informalised’ (Fairclough, 2000, p.7). This thesis critically argues that this is an illusion of solidarity - a ‘normcore plutocrat’ presenting himself as being ‘just like us’ to gain favour from the audience (Littler, p.97).

In an approach interweaving analysis and discussion, this chapter has demonstrated that the discourse of education policy utilises a number of linguistic devices to produce the policy ‘performance’ that is presented to the public. Critical analysis of the textual and interdiscursive layers has shown how education policy discourse is a carefully crafted construct which employs emotive narratives to blur the boundaries between ideological fantasy and neoliberal reality. This study contends that the ideological fantasy of social justice depicted in the policy discourse, normalises and legitimises dominant neoliberal values, suppressing any alternative views. The final chapter in this thesis explores some alternative views and discusses how, as an education professional, resistance to a neoliberal education system is possible.

Chapter Five

Becoming a ‘Neolib-rebel’

Resisting Neoliberal Education by Creating ‘Resources of Hope’

My critical realist stance towards neoliberal education and my positionality within this research have been highlighted throughout this study. This thesis argues that the influence of neoliberal values upon the education system can have an oppressive and detrimental effect upon the teaching profession and serves to reproduce social inequalities. Chapter four identified the discourse of education policy as a social wrong; the language of neoliberalism, enmeshed with an ideological fantasy of social justice, legitimises dominant, oppressive values and marginalises alternative pedagogies. Through engaging in critical analysis, this research has exposed the ways in which the discourse privileges a neoliberal agenda. The discourse of education policy reflects how capitalist realist politics has ‘successfully installed a business ontology’ (Fisher, 2009, p.17) into the core of the education system. Education is promoted through policy discourse as being a social leveller, described as the ‘engines of social justice’ and an ‘opportunity for all’. However, this quasi-propagandistic rhetoric confuses a desire for educational and social equity with the unrelenting focus on competition and economy. This Marxian ‘magic trick’ hides from public awareness how the market economy exploits education as a business (Bainbridge, 2020, p.744). Despite revealing this discursive trick, this study contends that this social wrong is needed in order for dominant neoliberal values to prevail (see chapter 4.4).

The fourth and final stage in Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational critical analysis framework drawn upon for this study, is to identify possible ways past the obstacles that prevent the social wrong from being addressed (Fairclough, 2013, p.235). In applying this stage, the emancipatory aim of this research can be considered. The intention for this CDA-based research is to identify ways to address the ‘oppressive pervasiveness’ of the dominant

neoliberal values entrenched within education policy (Fisher, 2009, p.80). Although this study does not profess ways of rectifying the identified social wrong, it argues that it can be challenged. This chapter suggests ways for educators to subvert and resist the oppressive nature of neoliberal education, identifying how teachers and leaders can navigate ‘within, against and beyond’ (Harvie, 2006, p.1) this inescapable obstacle. To begin this emancipatory recommendation, the chapter returns to the philosophical question which underpins this study: *Can a teacher’s and leader’s moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* This thesis maintains that the answer to this question is yes - but how? The ensuing sections provide a reflective critique of my own navigation through a neoliberal education system as a teacher and leader, offering suggestions for how the education profession can re-establish itself as a public good rather than a marketised commodity.

5.1 Reflections of a Neolib-rebel

This research has built my capacity to view contemporary education policy through a critical realist lens. However, I am aware that the positionality that this critical stance entails may be considered a limitation of the research. My critical interpretation of education policy is based on my individual experience and influenced by my knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, in Bhaskarian terms, the ‘empirical’ reality of the policy that I observe is highly subjective. My existing perceptions of education policy are not neutral as they have been shaped by a developing criticality and a professional ‘struggle’ to exist within the confines of a performative education system. Despite the steering hand of education policy and the secretarial layers of accountability it creates, its impact upon my underlying pedagogical beliefs as a teacher has been minimal. No education policy dictates how to foster nurturing, pastoral relationships responsive to the changeable, daily needs of a class of thirty (plus) individual children. Education policy exists as a separate sphere, disjointed from the

pedagogical reality of teaching. Although I have had to implement various top-down strategies in order to deliver prescribed curriculum content and demonstrate ‘good practice’, I have tried to ‘adapt, respond, subvert and resist’ (Bainbridge, Formenti and West, 2021, p.160) the oppressive nature of neoliberal education policy by viewing education in a more holistic way. This has at times become a schizophrenic struggle. However, it is important for educators to see through the layers of policy rhetoric and resist the pressure that a neoliberal education system exerts upon their practice.

As a school leader, the *neolib-rebellion* becomes more of a struggle. The pressures of accountability are heightened and resistance to the powers of performativity seems increasingly futile. You are no longer shielded by the comfort of your classroom walls and the naïve utopianism of the moral duty of education. Once you step out of your safe haven of subversion, you are exposed to the spectacle of education’s subjugation by the neoliberal regime. It is increasingly difficult for school leaders to subvert education policy agenda. Being a ‘revolutionary leader’ (Biesta, 2017, p.66) puts the school in danger of the perils of non-compliance - a damaging Ofsted inspection. For those schools identified as failing or coasting, forced academisation is the magic wand of school improvement. Although the government professes that academies ‘have more control over how they do things’ (GOV.UK), this thesis argues that forcing assimilation counters this fantasy of empowerment, wielding a greater power over schools and dictating an acceptable mode of school improvement based on measures of performance. Recent changes to the Conservative government leadership and cabinet have meant that a new Education Secretary - Gillian Keegan - has ‘shelved’ plans to legislate the recommendations outlined in the 2022 White Paper and Schools bill. However, it is suggested that the focus on academy plans has been usurped by a parliamentary focus upon the cost-of-living crisis and Russia’s war in Ukraine (Belger, 2022). The ‘need to tackle economic stability’ (ibid.) and address humanitarian

crisis has provided a bittersweet parliamentary respite from the neoliberal agenda for education reform.

Debord writes that ‘in this economically ruled society, ‘goals are nothing, development is everything’ (2021, p.4). Similarly, in this economically ruled education system, goals seem unreachable amidst the continued drive for school improvement. The relentless waves of educational reform will continue to lap at the shores of global competition, with the undercurrent of developing future human capital. Measures of performance and accountability steer this development whilst simultaneously preserving the societal status quo. This thesis argues that the discourse of contemporary education policy legitimises the neoliberal need for continual development, projecting a fantasy goal of social justice onto an agenda of competitive individualism. Despite this critical realist assertion, ‘flexibility’ appears in this ‘neoliberal paradigm’ (Crouch, 2011, p.23). Through education policy, the capacity for neoliberal ideology to merge with socialist concepts is demonstrated. The recognition of societal inequity within its discourse suggests that there are - in Williams’ phrase - ‘resources of hope’ (2016).

5.2 A Neolib-rebellion: Resources of Hope - The Force Awakens

This thesis contends that there are ways to ‘challenge and change neoliberalism’ (Tett and Hamilton, 2021, p.5) in the context of education. Teachers and leaders can ‘resist’ neoliberal education and subvert policy agenda by creating spaces that enable them to work in the ways that they value (ibid., p.6). By employing ‘resources of hope’ (Williams, 2016), teachers and leaders can ‘rediscover’ the purpose of education as a ‘matter of emancipation’ (Biesta, 2017, p.60) rather than as a sausage factory churning out the workforce of tomorrow. Through ‘critical reflexivity’, acts of ‘everyday resistance’ can challenge inequalities in education and weaken the grip of neoliberalism upon the education system (Tett and Hamilton, 2021, p.8). This thesis argues that teachers and leaders should ‘subvert and

challenge narrow curricula and pedagogies that privilege the dominant culture' (ibid., p.4). They should resist the hegemony of the market-led perspective of education that is propagated by policy. Instead, they should foster creativity, 'assert their agency' (ibid., p.6) and have the moral courage to promote education as a common good. Cultivating a culture of critical reflexivity within the profession might reawaken the emancipatory force of education.

In chapter 2.2, Freire's concept of a 'banking' mode of education was compared to the English National Curriculum. Assuming Freire's criticality, this study contends that the national curriculum 'bank' of education 'serves the interests of the oppressors' as it 'preserves a profitable situation' (Freire, 2017, p.46). The 'old world' status quo (Arendt, 1954, p.3) is reproduced through the delivery of a selected set of knowledge and skills which privileges hegemony. Educators and students are 'trapped' in a 'dull' pedagogic regime which serves the neoliberal agenda of competition, capital and accountability (Thomson and Hall, 2021, p.76). This research contends that the traditional pedagogy of 'banking' education must be challenged. Students should not be mechanically tutored 'into submission and acceptance of an oppressed and subordinate status' (Kellner, 2003, p.6). The purpose of education should not be reduced to a mere sausage factory, producing the workforce of tomorrow.

The newly proposed 'arms-length national curriculum body' - as outlined in the 2022 White Paper - promises to 'free teachers to teach... reducing workload so teachers can concentrate on delivering lessons, creating new resources only when there's a reason to do so' (DfE, 2022, p.27). However, this automated knowledge bank creates a fantasy of empowerment. This thesis argues that the envisioned 'adaptable digital curriculum' could reduce teachers to the status of technicians rather than the empowered 'co-creators' the policy portrays (ibid, p.9). 'Empowering' teachers 'to focus on delivering the best possible lessons' (ibid., p.9) is

in fact an act of subjugation. Providing ‘adaptable digital curriculum resources and video lessons’ may ‘reduce teachers’ workload’ (ibid.) but it might also contribute to deskilling the profession. Becoming the ‘deliverers of centrally prescribed educational strategies’ (Biesta, 2004, p.249) may alienate teachers from their profession, signifying a loss of control rather than the sense of empowerment that is professed in the 2022 White Paper. This study proposes that teachers should be the ‘agents of control’ (Biesta, 2017, p.2) rather than ‘homogeneous delivery agents’ (Firth, 2018, p.20) transmitting ‘ready-made resources, guidance and lessons’ (DfE, 2022, p.9).

This research has shown how contemporary education policy uses the concept of ‘evidence-based’ approaches to justify the neoliberal agenda for school improvement. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is hailed by the 2022 White Paper as the ‘guardian of evidence’ (p.41) and the primary solution for schools to target the educational underachievement of the ‘most disadvantaged 20% of the school population’ (Gorard, See and Siddiqui, 2017, p.8). Although the EEF has produced guidance reports on more holistic facets of education such as social and emotional learning, the White Paper focusses on utilising education research solely for raising academic attainment. With its narrow focus on core measurable subjects, the ‘ambitious literacy and numeracy mission’ of the 2022 White Paper (p.41) continues to project the neoliberal purpose of education as a platform for global competition and an investment for the development of the economy. Although the paper alludes to the concern for children’s well-being, the importance of an individual’s holistic development through education is missing. This thesis argues that in order to subvert and resist this neoliberal oppression within the education system, more research should be enabled and implemented, focussing on wider educational values rather than academic outcomes.

This study claims that education policy has jumped on the ‘evidence-based’ bandwagon in a bid to empower the profession, creating a sense of choice and agency in the improvement strategies that schools decide to implement. The ‘evidence-based’ movement has grown in recent years and is now prominent in the discourse of politicians, policy makers, practitioners and researchers alike (Biesta, 2010, p.492). Despite the appeal of an evidence-based approach to professional development and school improvement, this thesis maintains a scepticism that the promotion of ‘what works’ is a re-imagined version of the prescription and central control dictated by preceding education policy. Therefore, in order to better empower the profession, it is important for teachers to engage in their own values-based research, rather than selecting government approved strategies that have a narrow focus on measurable school improvement.

Akin with Biesta’s views, this thesis contends that calling for a value-based - rather than evidence-based - education, will assist in re-establishing education as a public good. This is not to say that the teaching profession should ignore evidence, but to highlight that its measures of school improvement and accountability should be ‘subordinate to the values that constitute practices as educational practices’ (Biesta, 2010, p.493). Although policy discourse has attempted to promote education more holistically through the inclusion of a social justice narrative and a post-pandemic concern for well-being, there is no escaping the underlying neoliberal message that education is a commodified economic tool.

5.3 Final Summary

This study set out to explore how neoliberal values are presented in contemporary education policy. Through a uniquely developed approach to critical discourse analysis, the research has found that the hegemony of competition and accountability is normalised and ‘fed to the people by the oppressors’ through carefully constructed depoliticised rhetoric (Freire, 1970). This neoliberal ‘power behind discourse’ (Fairclough, 2017, p.27) reproduces

dominant values and suppresses alternative views. Therefore, this study argues that the discourse of contemporary education policy in England constitutes a social wrong. However, as Foucault avowed, where there is power there is resistance (1970). In fact, resistance ‘is the inevitable corollary of power’ (Belsey, 2002, p.56). Resistance entails recognising and challenging the ‘socialised norms and constraints’ that are presented in discourse (Tett and Hamilton, 2021, p.2). This research has aimed to demonstrate that although discourse reinforces power, it also exposes it (ibid.).

The implications of this research are to continue my resistance as a critical, neoliberal rebel by subverting education policy agenda and questioning the underlying principles of the ‘evidence-based’ recommendations it brandishes. Yet I am acutely aware that this is much easier said than done. As a teacher and leader at an Ofsted-judged ‘outstanding’ school, with the perpetual pressure of performance and accountability, I continually question my own underlying principles. This thesis argues that the solution to this moral dilemma can be found in awareness. Conducting this research has developed my own critical awareness and created a platform for further enquiry surrounding the discourse of English education policy. It is hoped that the study will also awaken a critical force within its audience, enabling greater awareness of policy agenda and inspiring more values-based, teacher-led resistant research.

Teachers’ engagement in research ‘has an intrinsic link’ to the development of ‘teacher agency’ (Biesta, 2017, p.22). This study recommends that practitioner-led research should be utilised as a ‘resource for hope and making change’ (Tett and Hamilton, 2020, p.6). Furthermore, through a values-based approach, where the focus is on fostering the development of ‘positive, ethical, pro-social inclinations and competencies in youth’ (Berkowitz, 2011, p.153), the neoliberal narrative for school improvement can be subverted and the education profession reclaimed. The emancipatory purpose of this thesis is for it to become a manifesto for teachers and leaders to reignite their sense of professional agency.

Therefore, with a continuing focus upon the development of professional pedagogy, we can surely reawaken our moral and ethical educational values rather than being subjugated by measurable school improvement. The neoliberal values of marketisation, performativity and competition have pervaded the education system in England, reducing it to a commodified business. This study calls for all teachers and leaders to look beyond this and engage in a *neolib-rebellion*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Reflections on the Impact of COVID-19 - Adaptations to the Research in Response to the Pandemic

As a practising Year Six teacher and school leader, I was interested in the topic of transition to secondary school. Exercising a critical realist perspective, I was especially interested in the topic of selective education and schooling - particularly how neoliberal-shaped education policy has maintained and even championed this controversial practice. I was keen to explore how selective education - specifically the eleven-plus grammar school entry test - affected the practice of secondary school transition within my school setting. My initial research design was a small-scale piece of action research, with the intention to implement change in the practice of secondary transition at my school. I was determined to marry my criticality with change for the good, in terms of staff and pupils' experiences of transition to secondary school. I knew the focus and direction of the research; I had gained consent from the school, and I was awaiting an approval from the ethics panel. It was at this point that my planned research took an unexpected turn.

The initial stages of my research study coincided with the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic during March 2020. Understandably, this had a significant impact upon my potential research plans. All employee and student researchers at Canterbury Christ Church University were advised to review their research-related activities in light of the pandemic. Face-to-face interactions were suspended with recommendations that research should be adapted to remote methods where possible. More significantly, the university's COVID-19 pandemic guidance stated that,

‘the continuation or commencement of any primary research or research-related activity involving interaction with schools and/or the wider compulsory education

system (including teachers or students) must be subject to very careful consideration of the impact on a system under considerable pressure.’ (30th March 2020, p.6)

As a primary school practitioner and Assistant Head Teacher of a three-form entry primary school, I was certainly feeling the impact of this considerable pressure. Covid-19 had an enormous bearing upon the education system and the operation of schools during this time. In my opinion, the university’s advice to avoid research in schools unless it would ‘yield meaningful benefits’ (ibid) was well-considered and ethically right. From personal experience, teachers - and schools - were operating in survival mode, responding to daily changing scenarios in terms of school closures, provision for ‘key worker’ children and delivering learning remotely.

Despite facing challenges at the chalkface, my research had to continue. A small extension to my doctoral timeline was welcomed but nonetheless, an end date still loomed on the horizon. However, any research undertaken in schools during this time would have been unavoidably tainted by the situation. Covid-19 permeated the lived-experience of all staff and pupils during this time. Qualitative research surrounding perceptions of usual school practice would have been distorted by the impact of the pandemic. Therefore, my research design had to inevitably be revised.

After a number of research reinventions, (and a significant period of angst) I moved away from my transition themed action research plans and adapted them to become completely desktop based. Owing to the impact of Coronavirus upon the UK education system, the study would involve no live participants. At first, the focus for my desktop study was the topic of selective education as it related to my initial enquiry surrounding transition to secondary school. The intention was to investigate my hypotheses that systems of selection have a negative impact upon pupils and teachers by examining the findings from relevant literature from the UK and other countries which operate a selective education

system. This plan was then revised as a study to investigate the literature surrounding the social, political, economic and cultural issues concerned in the practice of transfer to secondary school in the United Kingdom.

Throughout several stages of thesis 're-imagining', Covid-19 was still having a significant impact upon the education system - and upon my personal outlook. During this time, I developed a greater sense of reflexivity - in terms of my personal and professional role - and began to document my thoughts in a reflective journal. Through reflexive writing, I continually returned to the philosophical question inspired by my policy-pedagogy teaching dichotomy: *Can a teacher's and leader's moral and ethical pedagogy exist within a neoliberal education system?* Although the pandemic had forced me to change my research design, it had also compelled me to look towards a more personal research journey. The research restrictions following Covid-19 presented an opportunity to explore the impact of neoliberal education policy upon my personal and professional experience. I began to investigate the links between education policy and neoliberal governmentality in the related literature. It became evident that a wealth of studies employing methods of critical analysis recognise the intrinsic link between education and economics, and the growing assignment of neoliberal values to education policy. These themes resonated with my growing sense of criticality and became the cornerstone of my research re-imagining.

Moving away from literature on transition and selective education systems enabled me to unearth key articles and research studies that I had utilised for previous modules on the Education Doctorate programme. For one module - 'Policy, Research and Truth' I conducted an analysis of the political speech 'Britain: The great meritocracy' and explored the relevant literature. This was an interesting and thought-provoking process that struck parity with my new trail of enquiry. Drawing upon this small-scale study facilitated the design of a new research thesis. Although the pandemic created a barrier to proceeding with the planned

research and caused a delay to the thesis timeline, the outcome was in fact positive. The changes made to the research design and methodology has enabled the study to offer a more unique and original contribution to the field of research.

Appendix 2: Account of the Literature Search Process

A range of databases were accessed to conduct the search. The University's online Library Search facility provides access to databases such as: ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, SAGE Research Methods, Taylor and Francis and Wiley Online Library. These databases specialise in periodicals concerned with education, research and the social sciences. The search engine Google Scholar was also utilised as a tool for the search – particularly for cross-referencing and citation searches. The initial search terms I used were *Critical Discourse Analysis and education policy. I entered this into the online Library Search facility, Taylor and Francis online and Google Scholar databases. The results were 4188; 38,148 and 3,100,000 respectively. Clearly, some refinement was needed using inclusion or exclusion criteria. Filters applied to the searches included selecting only articles which were peer reviewed; selection by the subjects of 'education', 'education policy' and 'CDA'; geographical location (e.g. United Kingdom); language of publication; and date range (2000 – 2020). Although this refinement of search criteria assisted in narrowing the results for more relevance to the research focus, articles outside these parameters were not discounted if they proved to be appropriate for the purposes of review.

After this initial search, further search terms were deployed in order to 'thoroughly mine' the literature and make purposeful selections for the review (Boote and Biele, 2005, p.7). These were: *education policy, *Critical Discourse Analysis, *Critical Realist discourse analysis, *policy analysis, *policy rhetoric, *policy language, *education policy and inequality, *policy and ideology, *education policy and social mobility.

The last three listed search terms arose from the initial analysis of the articles from the preliminary search. An additional layer to the search focussed on locating literature surrounding key English education policy texts from 2000 to present. Relevant policy documents were sourced from the current gov.uk website, as well as the National Archives.

Following this, the titles of the policy documents were used as search terms to unearth analysis and articles specifically linked to them. A final layer to the search was the scrutiny and cross-referencing of citations from the journal articles and publications already selected. This method sought to achieve a comprehensive ‘mining’ of the available literature.

Further narrowing of the studies was needed to determine the final selection for the purposes of the literature review. The first criterion applied was whether the research study utilised methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine education policy text from 2000 onwards. This resulted in just eleven research studies – six of which were based on English education policy and five on non-English policy. Out of these eleven studies, ten were selected for further evaluation for their relevance and shared themes. The second criteria considered were different approaches to the critical analysis of education policy. Studies which employ alternative methods of analysis for the critical examination of policy text are still valuable in terms of the comparison of key themes, research outcomes and future implications. These criteria resulted in an additional twenty research studies/ critical accounts for further review. Seventeen of these studies critically examined English education policy whereas four focussed on non-English. It was decided to include the non-English studies as they focussed on policy from the United States, Australia and Canada, where education policy has experienced similar neoliberal-driven reforms. An additional study based on education policy in Cyprus was also selected as it demonstrates the practice of policy-borrowing which is integral to GERM (the Global Education Reform Movement discussed in section 2.4.5). The various methods employed in the non-CDA research studies ranged from versions of discourse analysis (to include the examination of content and narrative), Critical Policy Analysis (CPA), rhetorical analysis and thematic analysis. Two of the research studies did not make explicit the type of analysis methods they employed. However, they can be classified as being critical in nature. In total, the literature selected for further review amounted to thirty-one publications.

Appendix 3: Literature Review Article Matrix

Research Studies and Journal Articles concerned with the analysis of education policy

| No. | Author/ date/ title | Title | Methods/ methodology | Argument | Key themes | Core citations |
|-----|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| 1 | Margaret Arnott and Jenny Ozga, 2010 | Education and nationalism: the discourse of education policy in Scotland | CDA of selected policy texts - Fairclough's tripartite model. | The discourse is based on comparison with more successful nations in order to create an 'imagery' of the future of Scotland. Master discourses of economics and a 'flourishing' Scotland are identified. The analysis gives considerable weight to discourse or 'narrative' as a governing strategy. | Crafting a narrative Key factor of the discourse comparison. The concept of nationalism is mobilised in the discourse. Master discourses - economy-driven and 'flourishing' Scotland. Bridging discourse joins the two. | Fairclough Ball Janks |
| 2 | Linda A. Barkas, Jonathan M. Scott, Nicola J. Poppitt and Paul J. Smith, 2019 | Tinker, tailor, policy-maker: can the UK government's teaching excellence framework deliver its objectives? | A critical account of the TEF – originally proposed in the 2016 White Paper 'Higher Education and Research Bill'. | The rhetoric of the TEF seems positive but its implementation is conceptually flawed. The TEF demands an additional layer of bureaucracy in an already micro-managed system of HE. Claims made by the WP must be supported by evidence-based research. | Competing ideologies Rationale 'cloaked' in rhetoric Discourse of marketisation - commodification 'Normalisation of language' | Bernstein Ainley |
| 3/4 | Matthew Clarke, 2014 | The sublime objects of education policy: quality, equity and ideology Also: | Lacanian psychoanalytic theory used to argue that 'quality' and 'equity' are constructs of education policy. Use of global examples – US, Australia. | The 'transient stabilizations' of the way that policy is articulated and rearticulated provide the conditions within which 'quality and | Policy, quality, equity. Fantasy ideology. Education as a facet of neoliberal globalization of education policy. | Ball Biesta Giroux Ranciere Rizvi and Lingard Stronach Zizek |

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|---|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| | | 'Knowledge is power'? A Lacanian entanglement with political ideology in education | | equity' function. The values of quality and equity are complex and contested and they are 'elevated and elusive' – 'untouchable' 'sublime' objects constructed by policy. | Equity and excellence as Fantasmatic desires. | |
| 5 | Matthew Clarke, 2020 | Eyes wide shut: the fantasies and disavowals of education policy | Analysis of UK 2016 White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'. Notion of fantasy using Kubrick's 'Eyes wide shut'. Freudian notion of disavowal. Discourse analysis based on five 'fantasies' or themes; control, knowledge and reason; inclusion; productivity; and victimhood. | While fantasy is an inescapable element that structures 'reality', education policy strives to inhabit fantasy differently. The commitment to enact educational excellence everywhere is governed by the logics of neoliberal competition. We must challenge this with our eyes wide open. | Tension between fantasmatic utopian vision of 'excellence' and 'inclusion' and managerial tropes of competition, continuous quality improvement, standards and accountability. Education as an 'empty signifier' Neoliberal performativity 'Fantasmatic egalitarian meritocracy' 'Engines of social justice'. Evidence-based policy Knowledge economy Character and resilience | Rizvi and Langard Ball Sahlberg Berlant Zizek |
| 6 | Carl Emery, 2016 | A Critical Analysis of the New Labour Discourse of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Across Schools in England and Wales: Conversation | Critical realist perspective (Bhaskar) CDA of interview transcripts with English and Welsh 'policy actors'. Positionality clear – self-enlightening research Fairclough's 3D model Text level analysis: | Policy discourse privileges certain ideas, topics and speakers. Researchers should challenge the hegemonic 'common sense' discourse. | SEL (social and emotional learning) New Labour Policy Neoliberalism Interdiscursivity Discourse exerting power Reproduction of dominant | Bhaskar Fairclough Apple Ball Antaki Gunter |

| | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | s with Policy Makers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominalisation • Collocation • Representation • Identification | Dominance of performative version of neoliberal thinking shaping policy and practice. | discursive practice Discourse of 'moral panic' where children are 'at risk' or 'damaged'. | |
| 7 | Becky Francis, 2015 | Impacting policy discourse? An analysis of discourses and rhetorical devices deployed in the case of the Academies Commission | Poststructuralist discourse analytic lens. Analysis of 63 submissions to the Academies Commission Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis Analysis of rhetoric – identification of particular phrases and tropes | Discourses presenting the British education system as 'in crisis' provide the rationale and legitimisation for radical policy intervention such as the academies programme. Subjective agency in the promotion of particular narratives. | Social justice Autonomy vs accountability School collaboration Education 'crisis' UK 'falling behind' Academies as liberated from bureaucracy/ constraint Education as the object of a battle | Nicholls & Edwards Ball Fairclough Mahony & Hextall Foucault |
| 8 | Donald Gillies, 2007 | Excellence and education: rhetoric and reality | Investigation of the definitions of 'excellence' in New Labour rhetoric. Focus on the prevalence of the term 'excellence' in government rhetoric of primary and secondary schooling. | Emphasis on excellence is a response to 'crisis narratives'. The ambiguity of meaning and strong connotative power mark 'excellence' as a keyword and condensation symbol in public discourse rather than a genuine political goal. 'Excellence' establishes discursive hegemony and appropriates positive associations. | Crisis narratives Quality assurance Total Quality Management (TQM) 'Educational apartheid' Impossibility of 'Excellence for all' Socio-economic disadvantage to be tackled by improving school performance. | Whitty Ball Fairclough Gewirtz |
| 9 | Donald Gillies, 2008 | Quality and equality: the mask of discursive conflation in | Study of 13 key UK policy texts published between 1997 and 2006 (10 White and Green | Quality management discourse and egalitarian discourse have | Neoliberal policy Government rhetoric | Ball Foucault van Dijk Habermas Fairclough |

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|----|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| | | education policy texts | papers, 2 speeches, 1 Ofsted report). Focus on the ways that the discourse of quality management is allied to egalitarian discourse in the ministerial forewords. 'Critical' analysis but not CDA? | become conflated, serving to mask key issues of inequality – seen most in the attainment gap. The focus on school provision equality paradoxically risks entrenching social inequalities. | Clashing discourses – social democracy vs neoliberalism Equality vs quality – discursive conflation – the goals of equality are narrowed to those of quality Masking inequality/ socio-economic disadvantage Lacking research evidence to substantiate claims | Wodak Taylor Whitty |
| 10 | David Godfrey, 2017 | Research informed practices in English Schools: Educational Excellence Everywhere? | Analysis of the policy direction of the 2010 White Paper EEE Content analysis? (methodology not made clear) Focus on what EEE says about the role of research. Quantitative data – frequency of terms. Comparison to 2010 WP | Policy language in EEE emphasises an evidence-based practice model. Contradiction – government rhetoric supports professional autonomy whilst simultaneously supporting a top-down prescription of practice. Distrust of the educational research community. Tension between public good and free-market capitalism. | Selective/ biased research evidence Contradictory messages Conformity to 'what works' Evidence-based practice Autonomy vs prescription 'What works' | Allen and Burgess Ball Biesta |
| 11 | Louise Kay , Elizabeth Wood , Joce Nuttall & Linda Henderso n, 2021 | Problematising policies for workforce reform in early childhood education: a rhetorical analysis of | Rhetorical analysis of how EYTF is understood within workforce reform. Critical analysis of two key texts: 'Foundations for Quality' and 'More Great Childcare'. | Rhetorical analysis identifies how policy texts construct problems and preferred solutions. Paradoxical nature of early | Workforce reform. Rhetorical analysis. Policy levers. Surveillance and responsabilisation. | Apple Ball Leach Muijs Winton |

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|----|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| | | England's Early Years Teacher Status | | childhood policy in England. Two documents reflect widely differing views – contradictions in research. | 'Canons' of rhetoric. Policy ideology. Discourse of new managerialism and marketisation vs. child-centred relational values. | |
| 12 | Brianna L. Kennedy-Lewis, 2014 | Using critical policy analysis to examine competing discourses in zero tolerance legislation: do we really want to leave no child behind? | Critical policy analysis examines how 'state-level zero tolerance legislation' reflects neoliberal influence. The analysis used takes a broad approach to examining language patterns and emphasises the structural over the agentive. | Education as an institution serves the contradictory ends of stratification and equitable access. Discourse of safety v.s equity reinforces power asymmetries and portrays students as inherently bad. Groups of students are marginalized by exclusionary discipline. | Competing discourses of safety and equity. Social stratification demanded by capitalist production. Policy language shapes social practices, perpetuates particular ideologies and establishes power relationships. Neoliberalism shapes policy language. | Apple Ball Fairclough |
| 13 | Peter Kraftl, 2012 | Utopian Promise or Burdensome Responsibility? A Critical Analysis of the UK Government's Building Schools for the Future Policy | Critical analysis of BSF policy guidance. | BSF constituted an allegorical 'utopia'. Whilst suggesting a 'radical' vision for schooling and society, its effect was to preserve a neo-liberal model of schooling. The language of BSF had a 'utopian tone' which was different to previous neoliberal political discourse. Cancellation of BSF in 2010 signalled new affective regime | 'Promise-laden' policy. Neoliberal values. 'Fantastical' utopian vision. Changing ideological positions of governments. Capital investment in education. Social exclusion policies. Responsibility. Managerialism. | Harvey Gardiner Anderson Connolly Evans Levitas Mannheim Pike |

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| | | | | of governance focussed on austerity and efficiency. | | |
| 14/15 | Anastasia Liasidou, 2008 2011 | Critical discourse analysis and inclusive educational policies: the power to exclude/ Unequal Power relations and Inclusive Education Policy Making: A Discursive Analytic Approach | CDA based on policy in Cyprus Research Qs: In what ways does the legislative document construct asymmetrical power relations? In what ways are children with SEN constructed and positioned? In what ways are children's human rights silenced? | CDA is an emancipatory research tool with the potential to destabilize the authoritarian discourses entrenched in education policy. Policy suggests change but impossible when technologies of power remain. CDA researchers should take an explicit political stance – must recognise own positionality. Professional reflexivity is encumbered by neo-liberal policy agenda which undermines pedagogy. | Oppression and marginalization – dominant discourse of 'normalcy' and 'social order' 'Othering' – power abuse and injustice/ inequality Policies reflect underlying discourse of society. Agentive 'marshalling' of discourse. Discursive absences also control the discourse. Performativity Contradictions within policy Triptych of language, power and discourse Problematisations | van Dijk Ball Bacchi Fairclough Foucault Luke Tomlinson Gramsci |
| 16 | Jacky Lumby and Daniel Mujs, 2014 | Corrupt language, corrupt thought: the White Paper <i>The importance of teaching</i> | CDA and content analysis Quantitative data on content Qualitative data on literacy strategies Grounded in Aristotle and Cicero Aristotle – persuasion and the art of rhetoric Cicero – rhetorical framework (author's good character, adversary's bad character, audience's goodness, cause or matter itself) Choi's typology of verbs (imperative and affective) | Analysis reveals that the White Paper has crude 'heroic' rhetoric, weak logic and poorly supported arguments. Language is used to construct roles which are the expected fabrications – sustaining the deceit that change in education is the aim. Corrupt language reflects corrupt | Rhetoric and persuasion Socio-economic class and outcome Meritocracy Metaphor and cliché Ideology Neoliberalism Legitimising and accepting inequality Sustaining 'national historic tradition' and ideology of 'how education should be'. | *Orwell Aristotle Cicero Choi Fairclough Bacchi Mulderigg Morris Arendt Saarinen |

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| | | | | thought – it deadens thought and encourages collusion in sustaining inequality. | | |
| 17 | Joseph Maslen, 2019 | <i>Cracking the Code</i> : the social mobility commission and education policy discourse | CDA of 2014 policy report 'Cracking the Code: How schools can improve social mobility' Bacchian analysis. Use of academic literatures from ed policy and literary, cultural and management studies. | Emphasis on competition through the discourse of social mobility in policy. 'Problematisation' – language of policy 'encourages the poor to become ruthless and competitive'. Competition is 'normalised' through metaphor. | Social mobility Ideology of accountability Authoritarianism Legacy of Thatcherism Metaphors 'involving' and influencing the audience. Meritocracy | Carol Bacchi Spohrer Bourdieu Bourdieu & Passeron Reay Ball Gramsci Giroux Fairclough Riddell *Orwell |
| 18 | Adam Matthews & Ben Kotzee, 2019 | The rhetoric of the UK higher education Teaching Excellence Framework: a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of TEF2 provider statements | Corpus assisted discourse analysis of provider statements which play a crucial role in universities' TEF rating. Qualitative and quantitative methods. Corpus linguistics – keyword analysis. Collocation analysis – positioning of words and phrases. Concordance analysis | The themes driving success in the TEF are – employment, employability, student outcomes and research. In future, it is anticipated that discourse around teaching quality will continue to be dominated by employability discourse rather than social goods, personal development or equity. Discourse of quality teaching can be heavily influenced by policy and regulatory exercises. | Higher education as a commodity – marketisation. Neoliberalism. Purpose of education for employment/employability. Policy influence and regulation. | Bainbridge, Gaitanidis and Hoults Barkas et al. Mulderrig |
| 19 | Paul Morris, 2012 | Pick n' mix, select and project; policy | Analysis of the 2010 White Paper's sources and nature of evidence for | The evidence is flawed, characterised by a selective | Policy history and ideology Comparative evidence/ | Goodson Levin Alexander |

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| | | borrowing and the quest for 'world class' schooling: an analysis of the 2010 schools White Paper | reform and congruence. | use of data, mixing and matching of sources, comparisons with high-performing systems as a façade to legitimate preferred policy options. | policy borrowing Problem and solution structure Teacher quality/performativity/school improvement School autonomy Underlying inequalities Ignoring evidence (PISA) | |
| 20 | Jane Mulderrig, 2003 | Consuming education: a critical discourse analysis of social actors in New Labour's education policy | CDA of 2001 White Paper 'Schools achieving success' and 2002 Green Paper '14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards' Corpus-based analysis using 'Wordsmith Tools' Analysis looks at how different 'social actors' are constructed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Teachers • Students Compares to 1958 policy | Instrumental rationality underlies policy discourse manifested in persuasive rhetoric. Discourse plays a significant role in constructing and legitimising post-welfare policy in the ongoing project of globalization. Critical analysis of policy must be enriched by focussing on the role of discourse in enacting and legitimising it. | Commodification Consumerism Globalization Reproduction and legitimization of capitalism Hegemonic control Hidden power asymmetries - Pronoun use - 'we' Discourse of social justice = widening opportunities for competition (Meritocracy) Deflection of criticism Need for/promise of change. | Gramsci Ball Apple Tomlinson Habermas Fairclough Dale Bourdieu |
| 21 | Jane Mulderrig, 2008 | Using keywords analysis in CDA: evolving discourses of the knowledge economy in education | CDA and corpus linguistic 'keyword' analysis of 17 White Papers from 1972 – 2005. Systematic interdisciplinary investigation of public discourse. Historical analysis of the variation, selection and retention of keywords. Historical analysis of the variation, selection and | Keywords of Thatcherism became entrenched over subsequent years in the narration of a crisis in education. Managerial discourse emphasising what's wrong. Shift towards future-orientated | Changes in educational discourse over three decades Discourses of performance, competitiveness, skills as commodities The education 'crisis' – fears of falling standards. Globalisation Neoliberal vision of | Ainley Apple Ball Tomlinson Trowler Van Leeuwen Weiss Wodak |

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| | | | retention of keywords. | economic discourse (Major) and competitiveness. Blair – skills-based, future-orientated active labour market – workfarist regime where skills are essential to economic growth and social inclusion. | economic success. | |
| 22 | Jane Mulderrig, 2012 | The hegemony of inclusion: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of deixis in education policy | Critical historical analysis of UK education policy White Papers from 1972 onwards. Corpus-aided approach to CDA combining political economic theory. | The pronoun 'we' was introduced as an important rhetorical tool by New Labour in order to legitimate its policy decisions through the idea of a neoliberal consensus of education whilst articulating a politics of inclusion. Flexible semantics of person deixis are exploited in a highly systematic way to claim consensus over politically contestable claims. | Social inclusion 'Inside-outside' / 'us and them' duality. Strategic vagueness 'Shared' neo-liberal values Commodification of learning Logic of competitiveness Reproduction of a globally competitive knowledge-based economy. | Fairclough Wodak and Meyer Halliday Chilton Van Dijk |
| 23 | Katherine Nicoll and Richard Edwards, 2004 | Lifelong learning and the sultans of spin: policy as persuasion? | Rhetorical analysis of 1998 Green Paper – 'The Learning Age' and 1999 White Paper – 'Learning to succeed'. | Argues against the notion that policy can be dismissed as 'spin'. Rhetoric fabricates and mobilizes the future. Policy works as persuasion, framing and | Metaphor Crisis narrative Reality vs rhetoric Lifelong learning – the new age 'Offensive and defensive rhetoric' Global economy | Fairclough Ball |

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| | | | | fabricating problems and possibilities. | Human capital Reification | |
| 24 | John Owens and Tania de St Croix, 2020 | Engines of social mobility? Navigating meritocratic education discourse in an unequal society | Qualitative study – how meritocratic discourse plays out at the level of practice in a London school. Participant views collected through interview and photovoice. Analysis of academic and policy literature. Thematic coding Narrative analysis | Meritocratic discourse imposes significant burdens on students, teachers and schools by holding them responsible while obscuring the role that social inequalities play in shaping students' educational opportunities. Need for a more social orientated alternative narrative. Value of more research in this area. | Social mobility Meritocratic discourse dominating the English education system. Internalisation/ acceptance of meritocratic expectations. Legitimation of social inequalities. Pervasive use of discourse of social inclusion in policy | Gillies Maslen Littler Reay |
| 25 | Richard Riddell, 2013 | Changing policy levers under the neoliberal state: realising coalition policy on education and social mobility | Analysis of the mechanisms for realising policy on education and social mobility either side of the 2010 General Election. Critical analysis of policy documentation, semi-structured interviews of senior central government officials from the Cabinet Office, DWP, BIS and No.10. | Changing nature of policy levers since 2010 Coalition Government. Move from a rationalist, directing state to a hybrid neoliberal model – a more developed market system with little supervision. | Social mobility Neoliberalism Performance 'transparency' National expectation of social change Evidence of 'what works' | Ball Olssen McKinsey Ozga Rizvi and Lingard |
| 26 | J. Smith, ???? | "The best that has been thought and written": an analysis of the representation of high expectations in the White Paper | Analysis of chapter 6 of the 2016 White Paper 'High expectations and a world leading curriculum for all Blended approach of content and discourse analysis Quantitative data on content – word | Assumption that putting in place higher standards will solve deep-seated educational and social problems. In a market-driven school-led system, the | Policy lever of structural reform of WP – MATS Neoliberal and neoconservative ideology Social mobility and inequality Teacher autonomy | Lumby and Muijs Fairclough Taylor Weber Apple Freire Ball Hirsch Wright |

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| | | Educational Excellence Everywhere | cloud/ frequency (Nvivo) Qualitative data on literary strategies – pronouns and imperatives | privileged will be protected. Proposals outlined in the WP are undemocratic – the reassertion of neoliberal ideology is intended to dismantle the welfare state. This reproduces rather than challenges inequalities. | International competition Problem/ solution structure Evidence-informed policy Cultural capital Reproduction of a hierarchical society Knowledge and character education Metaphor | |
| 27 | Konstanze Spohrer and Patrick L.J Bailey, 2020 | Character and resilience in English education policy: social mobility, self-governance and biopolitics | Analysis of 2014 'Character and Resilience Manifesto' Based on Foucault's 'problematization' Examination of how 'problems' and 'solutions' are constructed and legitimised. Draw's on Deans' four overlapping dimensions or axes of government. | Social mobility is framed in biological and psychological terms following a logic of human capital enhancement. The call for character education is part of a wider intensification of the demand for self-government and self-investment – a demand particularly pronounced for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Problems and solutions are couched in a biological language (e.g. infestation, treat, cure) | Social mobility – poverty, disadvantage 'gap' Human capital – economic productivity Meritocracy Problematization 'Character education' Neo-liberal policy Governmentality – technologies of government 'Biopolitics' - intervention and 'cure' 'Poor parenting' – shifts the blame from material to attitudinal deficits Self-entrepreneurialism | Foucault Ball Bacchi Webb Spohrer |
| 28 | Konstanze Spohrer, Garth Stahl and Tamsin Bowers-Brown, 2018 | Constituting neoliberal subjects? Aspiration as technology of government in UK policy discourse. | Analysis of 'aspiration discourses based on 10 policy documents published between 2003 and 2011. Foucault's problematization Combines Foucault's 'four dimensions of ethics' and Mitchell | Raising aspiration strategies portray disadvantaged youth both in terms of 'deficit' and 'potential' resulting in a requirement for | 'Poverty of aspiration' associated with disadvantaged groups Social mobility and economic success Neo-liberal governmentality | Foucault Bacchi Dean Allen Reay Berlant Eccleston Gillies Riddell |

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| | | | Dean's notion of 'formation of identities' Provides a new lens to examine how policy seeks to govern individuals. Seeks to advance previous scholarship | inner transformation and mobility through attitudinal change. The focus on raising the aspirations of disadvantaged youth suggests class division – those who can be trusted and those who must be governed. Raising aspiration can be seen as a 'technology of agency'. | Shift towards self-governance Productivity, competitiveness, increasing human capital Policy problematisati on Dominant 'logic' – ideology of aspiration linked to education success, leading to social mobility, meaning a more economically competitive, prosperous and fair society | |
| 29 | Sandra Taylor, 2004 | Researching educational policy and change in 'new times': using critical discourse analysis | Draws on larger research project investigating the equity implications of Education Queensland's reform agenda. Faircloughian CDA. | CDA is of particular value in documenting multiple competing discourses in policy texts – highlighting marginalized and hybrid discourses. CDA research might be of further value to social democratic goals. | Social justice – marginalization in policy language. Neoliberalism – globalization, social exclusion. Discursive multiplicity. Semiotics. Interdiscursive analysis. Linguistic analysis. Policy activism. | Ball Fairclough Janks Kress Luke Van Dijk |
| 30 | Sue Winton, 2013 | Rhetorical analysis in critical policy research | Rhetorical analysis – an approach to CDA – of 'Character Matters!' (an education policy of Ontario, Canada) Identifies the rhetoric that aims to persuade the policy's audience. | The policy text rhetoric persuades the audience to support a traditional view of character education. It offers a limited view of citizenship and claims that certain views are superior to others – promoting | Policy plays a role in perpetuating inequality. Rhetoric and persuasion to comply with dominant ideology. Use of metaphor. Highlighting the 'problem' with education then | Apple Bacchi Ball Beck Taylor |

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| | | | | compliance and endorsing the 'status quo'. | suggesting solutions. Character education. Policy often perpetuates the issues they claim to address. Rhetorical analysis challenges the notion of policy as objective. | |
| 31 | Elizabeth Wood, 2019 | Unbalanced and unbalancing acts in the Early Years Foundation Stage: a critical discourse analysis of policy-led evidence on teaching and play from the office for standards in education in England (Ofsted) | CDA and CPA of 2015 Ofsted report 'Teaching and Play in the early years'. Use of interrelated texts. Use of the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to conceptualise policy making and early childhood education. | The remit of Ofsted has extended to provide policy-led 'evidence' based on 'problematizing' practice and proposing solutions. Policy-led evidence is based on flawed and biased 'research'. This exerts power imbalances for children, families and practitioners. | Discourse and power Policy devolving professional agency Reproduction of institutional narratives Conformity to standards Persuasive/emotive discourse Policy agenda contradicts research Policy discourse as fantasy | Fairclough Wodak Meyer Souto-Manning |
| 3 | Adam Wright, 2012 | Fantasies of empowerment: mapping neoliberal discourse in the coalition government's schools' policy | Post-structuralist discourse analysis of schools' policy Critical analysis | Reararticulation of education around market logic, shift in responsibility for social problems from the state to the individual. Ideological fantasy of 'empowerment' conceals the subordination of actors to neoliberal logics (e.g. parental choice, teachers 'freed' from bureaucratic constraints) | Neoliberal market discourse Hegemony – the 'empowerment agenda' Incompatible goals of social justice and fairness subsumed by market logic Thatcherism Social problems reduced to the will of the individual | Gewirtz Ball Foucault Lemke Codd Olssen Fairclough Laclau Whitty |

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| | | | | forced upon them from central government). The empowerment agenda is the exact opposite of the fantasy it projects. | | |
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Methods/ methodology key:

| Research studies that specifically reference CDA methods in the analysis of English policy text. | Research studies that specifically reference CDA methods in the analysis of non-English or non-policy text. | Research studies/ articles that employ alternative critical analysis methods to examine English education policy (e.g. discourse, CPA, rhetorical, thematic, content, narrative). | Research studies/ articles that employ alternative critical analysis methods to examine non-English education policy (e.g. discourse, CPA, rhetorical, thematic, content, narrative). |
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| 6/32 19% | 5/32 16% | 17/32 (3 rhetorical) 53% | 4/32 13% |

Appendix 4: Ethics Application Statement - CCCU Research Space

Based on the answers submitted within your application, according to University policy and procedures, your project does not require ethical review.

You are reminded that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the [Research Governance Framework](#) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines.

Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course may require an amendment application, or a new application for ethics approval. For further guidance please see the University web pages, contact your Supervisor or Faculty Ethics Chair.